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Universal Burdens:

Stories of (Un)Freedom from the Unitarian Universalist Association,
The MOVE Organization, and Taqwacore

ANTHONY T. FISCELLA

CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY 2015



Universal Burdens

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Stories of (Un)Freedom from the Unitarian Universalist Association, The MOVE Organization, and Taqwacore

Anthony T. Fiscella



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KLIMATKOMPENSERAT
PAPPER



To the River and the Earth

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And to all of those unmentioned they are cherished beyond these pages...

The Burdens of All

*We may sigh o'er the heavy burdens
Of the black, the brown and white;
But if we all clasped hands together
The burdens would be more light.
How to solve life's saddest problems,
Its weariness, want and woe,
Was answered by One who suffered
In Palestine long ago.*

*He gave from his heart this precept,
To ease the burdens of men,
"As ye would that others do to you
Do ye even so to them."
Life's heavy, wearisome burdens
Will change to a gracious trust
When men shall learn in the light of God
To be merciful and just.*

*Where war has sharpened his weapons,
And slavery masterful had,
Let white and black and brown unite
To build the kingdom of God.
And never attempt in madness
To build a kingdom or state,
Through greed of gold or lust of power,
On the crumbling stones of hate*

*The burdens will always be heavy,
The sunshine fade into night,
Till mercy and justice shall cement
The black, the brown and the white.
And earth shall answer with gladness,
The herald angel's refrain,
When "Peace on earth, good will to men"
Was the burden of their strain.*

-Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1854

Prologue: Where This Story Begins

Before even reading more than this first paragraph, it could be helpful to simply hold the page in your hand for a minute. Just touch it. In touching it, just know that this page with its dark splotches of ink on a white background consists of molecules that once resided elsewhere... in another universe. Somewhere —probably pretty far from where you are right now— those molecules were part of a living being with roots stretching into the earth, an earth with smells, with colors, with worms, with bugs, with unseen lives too small for your eyeballs to register (but if you think for a moment, you can probably picture the color of the soil, remember the smell of a forest, or imagine a root system seething with tiny lives). Those roots had a relationship with that earth as they gradually grew over the span of many snowfalls. The branches above danced in many winds as they slowly stretched from sprouthood to full-grown. Those branches saw many sunny days that coaxed the leaves on the branches forth every spring. The trunk that connected the branches to the roots was neither “branch” nor “root” but somehow both. Now they are all dead to that world. Their new life is in your hands. It may seem a strange start but this is how stories begin. They begin with death. Stories quietly kill the parts left out when the first word is spoken. And now... now when we remember that, we can begin our story.

Note: This thesis contains very long prologues and epilogues. They are also written in common, accessible language with an emphasis on stories and feelings rather than theories and documentation. The reason for this is that a reader who does not want to wade through the academic language of the dissertation can grasp the entire point of the thesis by reading only the prologue and the epilogue. At the same time, the material in the prologue and epilogue is designed to complement the dissertation so that readers who do wade through the entire book will hopefully find that the stories and thoughts in the prologue and epilogue enrich the rest of the text.

“Free as a Bird”

When have you felt “free” in your life? How would you describe that feeling? Under what conditions does the feeling arise? Was it alone, with another person or animal, or in a crowd? Is it a rare moment, a recurring sensation, or part of your daily routine? If one asks a large group of people how they experienced “freedom,” a guarantee is that

there will not be a single shared answer. This plurality of perspectives on the idea of “freedom” has fascinated researchers such as Malcolm Westcott who set out to perform a number of studies by asking people the above question.

One of his findings was that the idea of “freedom” was convoluted and many people had ambivalent or contradictory feelings about it. One of his interviewees, David from Scotland, described his experience in the military. London was being bombed by Nazi Germany. Military life was very tough and highly controlled. The war made thoughts of the future meaningless. And yet, this lack of autonomy and choice was not wholly negative:

There was nothing I could do, at least for that moment of time. I remember saying to this girl, “Life is absolutely simple, isn’t it?” She agreed. “We do what we are told, and there is no power to change it.” *I felt free* and it felt good because it destroyed time *and achieved the feeling of living utterly in the moment*, without any forecasting leap of mind that, for me, is the result of knowing that tomorrow offers choices. I suppose the requisites for that experience of freedom were rather negative ones, but that’s what they were. Where all obligation is gone or suspended.¹

This was, according to David, the moment in life when he felt most “free,” in the midst of bombs falling and a bleak future. In his daily life, prior to and after the war, David felt constrained by his conscience. His normal social obligations usually left him feeling drained and overwhelmed. By transporting him into another situation in which he had no choice, he could feel a sense of tremendous relief. He felt completely *controlled* but he in that moment also felt “free” and not just an ordinary sense of “free” but the most “free” that he had ever felt.

Westcott described another interviewee, Fred, as an “aging hippie.” Fred expressed his cherished experience of “freedom” as a drop-out lifestyle with very little money. In contrast to the soldier who spent his daily life buried in social obligations, Fred mostly spent his time doing whatever he felt like, gardening, scavenging, fixing cars, and “always felt really free when I had very little money.” What he really disliked was having to deal with clocks and being somewhere on time. In regard to these latter two examples, Westcott concluded that, despite their seemingly opposite personalities, “they both appear to understand freedom in the same way: as a minimization of obligations and civilized burdens.”² That is, “freedom” appeared for them when normal “civilization” was minimized. They did not express their cherished “freedom” in terms of voting, rights of assembly, national self-determination, access to services, or “freedom

¹ Westcott 1994: 161.

² Ibid 165.

of speech.” Yet these seem to be some of the main points of reference when politicians rally people around the idea of “freedom.”³

Such things caused me to raise a related question: if there exists such an incredible plurality of perspectives on “freedom,” then how is it that when I read the newspaper or pick up an academic text on “freedom,” the fact of plurality remains but the range is notably less? It would seem that some conceptions are prioritized and emphasized while others are either marginalized or excluded. If so, then who is excluded, why are they excluded, and what are the various voices saying?

One partial answer to this question came to me in 2013 when I was a visiting scholar at University of Virginia (UVa). Established by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, UVa is one of the top state schools in the country. It seemed a great place to engage in my study of “freedom,” especially given Virginia’s history.⁴ One of the courses I sat in on was about philosophical perspectives on “freedom” and the main book in the course literature was entitled *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology*.⁵ Published on a prominent academic press it contained 86 selections spanning nearly five centuries (1531-2004). As I skimmed the list of contributing authors, it became quickly apparent that the content was skewed. Less than five percent of the selections were written by an author with a recognizably female name. The first one, by Christine Swanton, did not appear until page 298.

People of color accounted for less than five percent of the selections. The first one, by Amartya Sen (who authored three of those four articles) did not appear until page 376. Prominent African American voices on “freedom” such as Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Frantz Fanon, Huey P. Newton, C. L. R. James, Angela Davis, Cornel West, Patricia Hill Collins, or Martin Luther King, Jr. were not included. One out of 86 selections focused explicitly on women’s issues (“Women’s Work and Sex Roles” by Janice Moulton and Francine Rainone, both white women). None of the selections focused explicitly on colonialism or race. Yet, race was by no means absent. More than 90 percent of the selections were authored by white men. Of those, at least 10 percent would today be described as “white supremacists” (one example was Immanuel Kant who had once stated “Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites”).⁶

Regarding class, communist thinkers, such as the two 1-2 page excerpts Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were barely present. Anarcho-capitalists such as Murray Rothbard

³ I would, at least, have difficulties imagining any politician running a campaign based on the advocacy of conscription, war for its own sake, or annihilation of the money system in order to maximize “freedom” but those would be plausible translations of David and Fred into political arenas.

⁴ Historian Edmund Morgan, for example, wrote that “If it is possible to understand the American paradox, the marriage of slavery and freedom, Virginia is surely the place to begin” (Morgan 1995: 6).

⁵ Ian Carter, Matthew Kramer, and Hillel Steiner (eds.). *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology*, 2007.

⁶ Eze 1997: 58.

(one selection) and Robert Nozick (three selections) were included but there was not one single classic anarchist author such as Emma Goldman, Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, or Voltairine De Cleyre.⁷

Regarding indigenous peoples, the volume contained not a single voice rooted in any indigenous perspective from North America, Central America, South America, European indigenous minorities (such as the Sami or Basque), Africa, Asia, Polynesia, Australia, or New Zealand. To top it off, the course literature contained supplementary readings from the white ultra-capitalist author of *The Fountainhead* and *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Ayn Rand. The reason for Rand's addition to the course was because BB&T bank had made a \$1,000,000 donation to the University of Virginia a number of years prior and had stipulated her inclusion in political philosophy courses as a condition for the donation. The very idea of a bank coercing a university to coerce students to read "free market" literature in a course devoted to "freedom" felt more than a little ironic.⁸

Yet there was more to be drawn from this example than irony. When course literature is overwhelmingly dominated by white male scholars (including white supremacists) and none of them are challenging patriarchy and white supremacy then the effect is one of the "elephant in the living room." The authors ignore the glaring problem and instruct readers how to do the same. *Silence concerning the problem contributes to the violence of excluding voices of those most affected by the problem.*

Ultimately, the reader is not supposed to notice it or, if so, at least accept it as the way that things are and must be. In this way, the explicit racism of a few becomes the implicit racism of the many.

⁷ It could be added that some of the selections were responses to other selections (for example, Christopher Megone responded to Charles Taylor who had responded to Isaiah Berlin). While Philippe Van Parijs responded to Hayek and Rothbard's ultra-capitalist stances and G. A. Cohen responded to Nozick, there were no socialist responses to Bruno Leoni's statement that customers who do not frequent a grocer's market "do not appear to constrain the grocer ... to die by starvation" and therefore, Leoni concluded, "All socialist theories of the so-called 'exploitation' of workers by employers—and, in general, of the 'have-nots' by the 'haves'—are, in the last analysis, based on this semantic confusion" (Leoni 2007: 359-360). So it is, he insisted, with workers who agree to work at a workplace: they "freely" consent to employment and are therefore no less "free." Complaints about worker exploitation, he asserted, are no more justified than Hitler and Mussolini's accusations that their countries were being constrained by the United States and Canada. That the anthology was skewed not only toward whites and males but toward the perspectives of white, male *property-owners* seemed to well match the similarly narrow constituency of the Founding Fathers of the United States. This is one example of how little has changed in 200 years in regard to conversations about "freedom."

⁸ I explicitly asked the professor if he would have included Ayn Rand in his course had BB&T not made the stipulation and he said that he would not. I tried to imagine what sort of public reaction by white people might have ensued if Spike Lee had made a similar donation to UVa with the stipulation that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* be taught in all political science courses. I never heard anybody in the nearly all-white class complain about the lack of voices of people of color in the course literature (but there was some mild grumbling about Ayn Rand's inclusion).

In the very first selection, Thomas Hobbes declared that there is no security “without a sword in the hands of a man,” and therefore, “The liberty of a subject, lieth therefore only in those things.”⁹ This is very instructive because of the message and its context. The message is that technological violence (symbolized here by the sword) is a direct necessity for “liberty” to exist. The context of the message was imperial England less than 50 years after the first British colony was established in Virginia. Hobbes declared that “amongst masterless men, there is perpetual war, of every man against his neighbour.”¹⁰ He warned that obedience to a sovereign ruler was required for any meaningful peace, security, and liberty. The worst-case scenario was the “state of nature,” that is, anarchy. In case the reader did not take the hints, Hobbes made it very clear that Native Americans were whom he had in mind. In equating indigenous peoples with anarchy and the state of nature, Hobbes signed a death warrant, a license for all manners of brutality to be committed upon them without scruples. To wipe out those sorts of societies would, according to Hobbes, be in the best interests of all. It’s a fantastically easy set-up. By writing off certain people *as* people, one can delude oneself into imagining that genocide is in the best interests of all.¹¹ Yet Hobbes probably had very little hatred for Native Americans having never met any of them. It’s more likely is that he just felt zero responsibility for the act of writing them into his story as people who ought to be written out.¹² Yet speculating about the intentions or personal character traits of Hobbes (or anyone else) is not what this thesis is about. It’s about “freedom” and the way that it functions as a tool for exclusion. It’s also about how it may be able to be transformed or, at least, how conversations about it may be transformed.

What I have wanted to do with this thesis is to help initiate discussion and critical inquiry about exclusion and “freedom” and suggest some steps that might be taken toward a practice of inclusion. To these ends, I have chosen to draw on voices and experiences of “freedom” from three different contexts (the Unitarian Universalist Association, the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore), all of which are somehow connected to my personal life. All three contexts also contain members or participants who have, to varying degrees, had their voices stifled or excluded. With that in mind, I plan to share some of their stories by first locating the position of the storyteller and beginning this thesis with some stories from my own life, my relationship to these contexts, and my relationship to the broader societal context that I share with them: The United States.

⁹ Hobbes 2007: 7.

¹⁰ Ibid, 90.

¹¹ Genocide, by the way, according to the Geneva Convention includes the assault upon a people’s culture. Article 2 states that even causing “mental harm to members of the group” with the intent to destroy *part* of a “national, ethnical, racial or religious group” would suffice to warrant the label “genocide.”

¹² That’s one reason I started this story with bugs. Maybe in caring a bit more about what happens to bugs, we can be even more concerned about how our words affect other people. Crazy thought, I know.

Collage Education: A Dead Brother, Punk Rock, and a Communist Dad

I was born in Newport News, Virginia in 1968. Nine brothers and sisters were already on location. Less than two years later one of my older brothers drowned in the James River along with four other teens. I grew up in the shadow of their deaths. *Lesson 1: Life is precarious and limited.*

Our dead brother, Tom, also instructed and inspired me long after he had died through the artwork he had left behind. Although the drawings tended to express certain themes, they were a varied lot that seemed to mix together images taken from biker culture, comic books, television, MAD Magazine, and other cultural sources. I spent countless hours imitating his drawing style and eventually expanding upon it. *Lesson 2: Think weird (just because).*

The irony is that I ended up feeling that I learned far more from him and my other siblings than I ever did in school. I can remember, for example, one of my brothers, George, rubbing his arm and informing me that he just removed a few thousand cells from his body. I was between 8 and 10 years old and I was struck by the idea that our entire bodies were composed of these tiny little things called “cells” — whatever that meant. *Lesson 3: “I” am a “We.”*

In contrast, I cannot remember a single moment in my entire elementary school education in which I had a similar experience of having learned something impactful. Perhaps it happened but I don’t remember it. But my memory of my lesson from George is etched into my mind alongside all of the other millions of neurons in my brain that are associated with him. *Lesson 4: Learning lessons comes easier through participatory demonstrations by someone I know.*

I remember basic lessons from my parents too such as when our mother would instruct me in the basics of logical language (If all bees are bugs and a bee is in my room, it follows that at least one bug is in my room) contrasted by playful pseudo-logic (“All the world loves a lover. I love you. Therefore I am a lover. As you are all the world to me, therefore you love me too!”). *Lesson 5: Try to make sense of the world but don’t take it too seriously.*

Our mother also expressed a strong devotion to the Catholic tradition that she grew up with. I stopped relating to the theology around age 13 when I turned atheist. But Mom gave support to anarchists such as the Catholic Workers and the Ploughshare Movement and I could relate to that. If anything they seemed notably more well-organized than any other anarchists I had met. *Lesson 6: Fervent Catholics can make good anarchists.*

One of my strongest learning experiences came when my father, a successful entrepreneur who became a communist in his later years, took me to the USSR at age 14 with my cousin and godparents. That experience opened up my mind to the possibility of organizing society differently than it was. *Lesson 7: A fish can’t see the ocean that it swims in but hopping out of it now and then can add some perspective.*

What I saw more clearly upon my return was that I had grown up in one of the most militarized sections of the country with Fort Monroe, Langley Air Force Base, Fort Eustis, Newport News shipyard (manufacturer of nuclear aircraft-carriers), NASA, and Norfolk Naval Base all within a 25-mile radius. Further up in Virginia, lay CIA headquarters and then the Pentagon in northern Virginia. Shortly after returning from the USSR, I engaged in my first protest action against the shipyard where nuclear aircraft carriers were manufactured. *Lesson 8: Protests can feel ineffective but necessary.*

It was perhaps those basic starting points that made me so receptive to the punk scene which, for me, has been a key source in grassroots education. It was here that I was exposed to and critically engaged topics that related to my daily life such as patriarchy, vegetarianism, anarchism, and straight-edge (abstinence from cigarettes, drugs and alcohol). It was 1984, Reagan was re-elected president and I dove into punk wholeheartedly. It provided a sense of meaning through a (somewhat) violent resistance to the apparently meaningless (but far greater) violence of the world I grew up in. The tiny “scene” developed by my small circle friends in Newport News was hardly normative by punk standards. Straight edge, goth, indie, Oi!, hardcore, ‘77-style punk, pop-punk, experimental, and rap music all figured in our group as preppie drug-dealers in Dead Kennedys t-shirts hung out with straight-edgers who listened to the Beastie Boys even after the band had switched from hardcore to hip hop. Nerdy Violent Femmes fans hung out with crazy-ass drunk punks decked out in chains and with a foreboding future. Rocky Horror queers hung out with fans of apocalyptic folk and Christian Death, a death rock band from Los Angeles. The whole spirit of the underground hardcore/punk scene was DIY (Do it yourself). So we did. We formed our own band and went on tour, sharing the stage with bands such as Spaceheads, Royal Trux, and Avail. Often what has been learned through DIY cannot be learned (or taught) any other way.

One of the my friends, Scott Hudgins, who had turned me on to the amazing record “Burning from the Inside” by Bauhaus (which he had described as a “punk Pink Floyd”), once told me “History is a series of re-writes.” The thought stuck with me, and it percolates to this day. It has meant to me that not only are histories re-written but so are the meanings in the words that are used in the stories. Punk was changing across the country all around us but also within us. We were all surrounded by a lot of rednecks (or “grits” as was the colloquial term). Growing up there made some of us part redneck too.¹³ We were a tiny, forgotten, and unwritten chapter amid the grandiose histories of punk rock. *Lesson 9: Punk can also mean not being punk.*

¹³ This placed my upbringing in contrast to many Irish and Italian Americans who stayed in the Northeast or moved West. Living in the South helped me appreciate the resentment that many Southerners have toward Northerners depiction of the South as racist and the North as anti-racist. Yet Pennsylvania disenfranchised blacks in 1838, Malcolm X’s father was killed by the KKK in Omaha, Nebraska, and the entire North was complicit in the business of human enslavement (for example through their commerce with the cotton and tobacco industries). The gap between the image of the South and the

This too was part of my “collage” education: it was all about cutting and pasting whether it was clothes, music, pictures, or identity. That simple exercise could create amazing new creations. I have heard something similar said about research: “Copy one person’s work—that’s plagiarism. Copy many people’s work—that’s research.” It’s not entirely accurate, but it’s not entirely false either. Even so, one of the aspects about collage that I’ve appreciated is that the voice or image of the original source is still there (re-configured by being placed in a new surrounding but nonetheless present).¹⁴

When I was in my mid-teens, (yet) another brother gave me a copy of a book by Jiddu Krishnamurti. At the surface level, it was intriguing because this man who had been raised by the Theosophy Society to believe that he was the expected Messiah now taught that “truth was a pathless land.” Each person had to walk that path alone. No leader or tradition could help that process. At a deeper level was a fundamental critique (although he wouldn’t use that word) not only of the idea of a “person” as something separate from the world or the rest of existence but a dismantling of thought itself as something that does violence to life as it is. “You are the world,” he said. He meant it literally. *Lesson 10: Opposite of the first lesson. Life is neither precarious nor limited. Thought just makes it seem that way.*

One summer in the late 80s I spent living and working at my cousin’s dairy farm. The family life they had there was so different from anything I grew up with that it became a reference point for the rest of my life: not just the constant smell of cow dung or the daily labor whose schedule was determined by the needs of the animals and the weather rather than by a clock, but also the pace of life. Talking to my cousin-in-law, Dan, I became schooled in the differences in lifestyle and perspective between country folk and city folk. It was for him, *the* determining distinction between people. The thought had never struck me. Country folk existed but they were a footnote. They were something you drove past in a car but would not stop to talk to any more than a person would stop walking to say “hello” to a bug. Because I had grown up with food mysteriously appearing on supermarket shelves, I had never experienced the source of every food item I’d ever consumed —the land. I had been indoctrinated with assumptions about country folk being less intelligent and more prejudiced than city folk. A country person might actually stop and say “hello” to a bug. Or to someone like me. My assumption about their prejudice was a form of prejudice. Living on a farm rearranged my head. *Lesson 11: If there is a God, she works on a farm.*

In regard to formal education, I hated it. I wanted to drop out of school when I was eleven. If I were to have an “anti-free” memory —periods in my life where I felt most constrained and restricted, unhappy, and controlled, it would have been my years

actuality has led Northern liberals to be wary of (or mock) well-known Southern rock bands such as Lynyrd Skynyrd whose actual lyrics and stances were closer to anarcho-primitivism than racist aristocracy (See Fiscella 2014).

¹⁴ This is a primary reason that I make heavy use of citations in my work. I appreciate hearing other people’s voice directly when I am reading and I enjoy presenting that service when I am writing. The original words often capture so much more than a paraphrase can do and sometimes signal key nuances.

in public school where each day was filled with an odd mixture of boredom and angst. The principal, who would occasionally spank us with a special paddle, was the ruler of that dark land. If Hobbes feared anarchy, I feared tyrants. I was also socialized in that system so the vocabulary of violence and coercion became quickly instilled in me. My challenge, as I went deeper into the punk scene and related subcultures, was to learn how to recognize violence and how it operated through me in various forms. *Lesson 12: "Society" was a violent and oppressive place but remember the words of Mark Twain and don't let school interfere with your education.*

Attempting to develop my own education outside of school, I began to collect a range of materials that interested me. Ultimately my atheism waned. Reading Krishnamurti (who rarely ever even mentions "God") had convinced me that "atheism" was a flipside of "theism." An atheist still "believed" in something that they then rejected. That is, they had assembled sufficient confidence about a particular concept ("God") in order to feel that rejection of that concept as valid made sense. I had, by then, heard so many different definitions of "God" that I lost the ability to know what anyone meant by the term. I had little interest in hearing every single definition in order to figure out if I agreed with it or not. Krishnamurti had said that if you find a stick on the ground and take it home, put it on a mantle, give it offerings, and pray to it every day, then that stick will eventually have a great meaning on one's life. That made sense and I had seen things like that happen in my life. Behavior rather than belief, therefore, was what interested me. Specifically, how do I behave towards others and myself? What sort of social arrangements facilitate certain behaviors over others? What effect do ritualistic behaviors involving work, cars, money, electronics, and so forth have on people and the way they think/worship the items in their daily life? One of my favorite books during this period was the *Dao de Jing* purportedly written by Lao Tzu approximately 500 BC. It effused a gentleness toward the world as well as an appreciation for the underside of life. Like many Chinese philosophies, it was conceptually associated with *yin* and *yang* (also the names of two pugs that I grew up with). I appreciated the concept of *yin* and *yang* in part because the two opposites were considered complementary rather as adversarial. This was important because the concept of some eternal "good" versus "evil" made no sense to me. I saw neglect and sickness, anger and hurt, impulsivity and callousness, but not "evil." Yin and yang were part of a healing process for an ex-Catholic. I also liked the idea that each of the two contained its counterpart within itself. Not only was each a complement to the other, to some degree, there *were* the other. This seemed to me to better describe the world I lived in rather than the idea of "pure" categories. Humans could just as well be described as cooperative ventures between billions of microorganisms operating through the medium of semi-isolated ecological systems (that is, our bodies). Talking about pure *anything*, especially concepts seemed more like wishful thinking, a longing for easy answers in a complex world full of uncertainties. I preferred to remember the complexities and uncertainties for what they were: things I did not fully (or remotely) understand. *Lesson 13: Admitting confusion is a less confused state than feigning certainty.*

In light of that, I could not buy into any narrative I was told about how the world “really” was, whether the answers were supposed to be in the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Book of Mormon*, *Das Kapital*, or the *Dao de Jing*. Yet I still felt that I needed some sort of guidance so, in order to help orient myself, I compiled a little booklet entitled *Declaration of Interdependence*. It consisted of thoughts, quotes, and principles that seemed to make sense to me regardless of whatever mood I was in or whatever period in my life I was happened to be transitioning through. One of those thoughts was that the idea of dividing the world up into a tremendous series of binary divisions of “good/bad,” “black/white,” “left-wing/right-wing,” “insider/outsider,” and even “yin/yang” was hugely problematic. To treat language in that way was to behave as if our minds—indeed life itself—were a binary construct such as a computer based on zero and one. Even if that were true, which I did not believe, I could not understand how, in such an incredibly complex world, our generalized perceptions could sufficiently help me assess things with precise and accurate reliability. My own experience told me that I was wrong quite often. Things that seemed either/or were not. Even if the world *could* be divided into yin and yang, those two categories were not, for me, a sufficient means to conceptualize the way my mind actually produced categories. There were things I placed in one category and thing I placed in another. But then there was a huge category where I placed things entitled: “Both/And,” “Unknown,” “Neither/Nor,” “Miscellaneous,” “The Relationship Between Two or More,” and so on. So, I drew a picture of a three-part interaction between Yin, Yang, and Other in order to help myself remember it (see fig. 1). *Lesson 13: If you only see two doors, make a third one.*

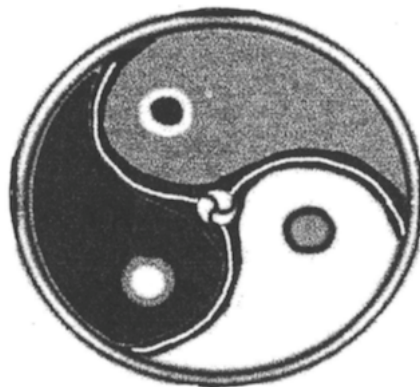


Fig. 1
Yin, Yang Other.

Racial Histories: From Dick Gregory to MOVE

Race was an important part of that vocabulary of violence that I learned and which informed my socialization through existing disparities in society.¹⁵ Through my school education, I was fed books imbued with a subtle but strong flavor of white supremacy. One example of that type of book is *Our America: Little Stories for Young Patriots* (Holland 1941) which told a very white American history—one in which enslaved African Americans do not enter the narrative at all *until they are freed*. The first mention of African Americans came with the chapter on Abraham Lincoln: “If you should ask your mother ‘Who was Abraham Lincoln?’ She would probably tell you that he was President of the United States, and the man who set free the negro slaves. And she would be right.” Accompanied by a drawing of three African Americans picking cotton, the issue that had been avoided ever since the story began with the Mayflower in the 1600s was presented:

At that time there was a great deal of trouble in the United States on the question of slavery. In many states, negroes could be bought and sold like cattle or horses. Abraham Lincoln did not like this. He believed that all men, black or white, were created equal,¹⁶ and his great speeches against slavery made him so famous that he was nominated for the Presidency, and elected. The Southern states, where negro slaves were used in the great cotton fields, were afraid the new President would abolish slavery, so one by one they left the United States to form a union of their own, which they called the Confederacy. This was the start of the great Civil War, which lasted four years. They were hard and terrible years for the country and for the President. He hated war, but he knew that above all else the United States must be saved as a united nation, and that the war must be fought and won. The Union was saved, and slavery was ended in the United States.¹⁷

With that also ended any mention of African Americans or slavery. Aside from the above passages, African Americans were not mentioned in the story at all. Native Americans fared only slightly better in narrative terms. Already on the sixth page the reader was introduced to a “friendly Indian, named Squanto” who taught pilgrims how to hunt and harvest corn. However, four pages later came “unfriendly Indians” and no

¹⁵ When I refer to “black,” “white,” or “brown” people, I mean people who have been categorized as such by themselves and/or others. When I use “race,” I am not imagining it to be a biological category or fixed. I am referring to the social construction of race that has been used to divide people into categories for the purposes of unequal distribution of rights and resources.

¹⁶ Actually, Lincoln’s campaign speeches sent mixed signals at best. While he is recorded as having said that “all men are equal upon principles” and that included blacks. However, he is also recorded as having said during his debate with Stephen Douglas in Charleston, Illinois, 1858: “I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race” (Ogletree 2009: 14).

¹⁷ Holland 1941; the pages are not numbered.

more signs of friendly Indians returned. Later, the white “pioneers” encountered Indians as violent threats and horse thieves. Thereafter, indigenous people disappeared. Native Americans were narratively exterminated. The following 17 pages covered the subsequent 76 years of U.S. history but it remained a white history with exclusively white people in the pictures (seven pages were devoted exclusively to Robert Fulton, inventor of the steamboat). Alongside a picture of an all-white classroom, the text asserted, “in America every boy and girl has an equal chance.” Then the book’s final page and paragraph concluded:

In our America we are free. Boys and girls and men and women can go to the Sunday Schools or churches they like best. All over the world boys and girls would like to be as free as we are in America. We must remember that freedom is a very wonderful thing. And we must do our best to protect our country, and the happiness we enjoy as good Americans.

This is the type of narrative violence that I grew up with. How can one formulate a sane response as a child? “Thank goodness for white people who freed all those slaves who did not exist until it was time to free them?” Then, once they were freed, they conveniently disappeared from the narrative again. “Oh my gosh! There’s a Negro on the street! I thought they disappeared when Abraham Lincoln let them out of their cage!” The city I grew up in was 50% African American. African American women helped raise me. One of them in particular, Enomie Tibbs, I particularly cherished as a parental figure. These women took care of me as a child and were an intimate part of my life yet —mysteriously— their people were not in the America of my children’s history book. Such exclusive narratives cultivate a quiet insanity.

As soon as I possibly could, I enrolled in an alternative high school where teachers were called by their first names, and they treated the students more or less as equals. I noticed that one of my teachers, Barbara, was reading a book by Dick Gregory called *No More Lies*. She kindly lent it to me and a whole new history of the United States opened before my eyes. Dick Gregory was not a historian but a professional comedian (which made him a great writer). Professional historians could easily poke holes in some of the details of what he wrote but the bulk of it could be substantiated. What was critical for me was the realization that there *was* a history of African Americans in the United States. It did exist and it could be told. The problem was that white people had been lying about it and covering it up. It was then that I came to understand history as simply *one* story (*his* story) and, in the context of the United States, it was something in desperate need of the “competition” that everywhere else seemed to be lauded so loudly.

I grew up in a well-to-do almost all-WASP neighborhood.¹⁸ It was so white that the local “country club” would not let our family join. Like Jews and blacks, Catholics were not welcome. My uncle, also named Anthony, changed his name to André when

¹⁸ WASP = White Anglo Saxon Protestant.

he was older to relieve himself of the stigma associated with Italians that he had experienced. These types of stigma and stratification produced among some “ethnic” whites a sense of shame according to a study by Sennett and Cobb (1972). After becoming white, many Poles, Slavs, Portuguese, Irish, Greeks, Jews, and Italians had internalized racism against themselves and did not feel that they deserved to be respected. That was not the type of household I grew up in but I inevitably felt excluded as a child from the “perfect” whites. My ethnicity was not completely white — it was Catholic.¹⁹ Not only Catholic but with Sicilian and Portuguese features, I stood out. The white-black color line was not so self-evident until third grade when our school became fully integrated through school busing.²⁰

Though I stopped believing in Catholic doctrines about “God,” Jesus, and the afterlife when I was 13 years old, I never stopped feeling a strong affinity for Catholics as people —especially Catholic Workers. At the same time, my ethnicity *was* white because the white-black social boundary was as real for me as the segregation of Newport News: an almost all-black downtown and a checkerboard of white-black sections everywhere else. As a kid, I played with the one black boy in our neighborhood but that was not the race boundary. The race boundary was, as with global segregation, something that one had to travel considerable distance to transgress. In other words, while my personal household had anti-racist premises, it was nested within a larger context, a “white habitus” as Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick (2006) have labeled it.²¹ Even when schools became integrated (they were still segregated when I started school), the distance between social groups was as great as the physical distance of our residences.

¹⁹ This point was made clear to me years later and my own reaction surprised me. I had signed up for counseling sessions in Sweden around the year 2000 or so. He was an American priest so it seemed like a good idea. Yet when he told me that he was WASP who had converted to Catholicism, I felt cheated. He was not a *real* Catholic. He didn’t grow up with the sense of exclusion that ethnic Catholics in the U.S. had faced. I lost all interest in talking to him. Only many years after that was I able to parse it out. It is not that Catholicism was an ethnicity to me per se, it was about being able to relate to feelings of being excluded. British Americans can’t be expected to relate to that because they created that system. Catholics would get it. Whether they were from El Salvador or Sicily, Irish or Polish —they would know the feeling of not being fully welcomed in the United States.

²⁰ I even remember being teased by the one of the Chinese American girls in my first-grade class. Six years later, one of my close friends (half-Lebanese) and I would tease one another. It was all in good fun but some of the jests inevitably dug in deeper as they had parallels with a degree of actual exclusion.

²¹ In describing “white habitus” they began with the idea of “a group that lives in a residential and social milieu that maximizes in-group interaction and minimizes interaction with members of out-groups tends to develop similar views about out-groups and strengthens the in-group sense of ‘solidarity-groupness,’ and they continued “...once ethnic groups gain admittance into the white community the ideology of whiteness and its privilege become normalized to the point of imperceptibility. Whiteness quietly becomes second nature or habitual. Simply put, whiteness constitutes normality and acceptance without stipulating that to be white is to be normal and right” (Bonilla Silva et al, 2006: 230-231).

When I eventually moved a great distance, it was to Sweden —not downtown Newport News.

When my Sicilian ancestors left their island in the early 1900s, king Victor Emmanuel III (the king who would later support Mussolini) was head of a constitutional monarchy. They chose to come to the United States even though they were not white. The lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891 shortly before their arrival was a reminder of that fact. But they probably understood that they could someday be white or could at least reap the benefits of white power even though they certainly would not have used those terms. For them, this probably meant in practical terms that some people could prosper economically at the cost of others and they gave it no more thought.

My Irish ancestors had already become nominally white in the eyes of the ruling class and mainstream media.²² They became “human” sometime in the 1800s. Prior to that, they were commonly depicted as something less than (See Fig. 4). Southern Europeans such as Italians were the next target along with Asians (Fig. 2 and 3). Yet by the mid-century, Italians had generally become welcomed as white. Note in the fourth cartoon from 1941 how Asian Americans, African Americans, Jewish Americans, Middle-Eastern Americans, and Native Americans are not part of the Lady Liberty’s children (Fig. 5). In fact, one does not see Portuguese there either and one of my great grandfathers was a Portuguese orphan who stole away on a boat to the U.S. as a child (subsequently we know little about his history).



Fig. 2
Cartoon in *Judge* from 1903 depicting Italian immigrants carrying the diseases of anarchism, socialism and the mafia.

²² See, for example, Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (1995).

Despite having non-white grandparents, I grew up in a time and place where I was classified as white. Yet the ethnic whiteness of the family I grew up with was of a qualified sort— it bore some of the ethnic shame described by Sennett and Cobb but it was not debilitating. At least outwardly, my parents expressed no shame for not being white enough. My father and his father preferred to spend their time with Sicilian Americans or other people with Mediterranean or Catholic background: Jewish, Lebanese, Greek, and Polish Americans. With the exception of my great-grandfather who came to the country from Madeira as an orphan, my mother’s side was Irish working class. The prejudice that I was fed as a child was against the British (for the occupation of Ireland and racism toward Irish people), Germans (for the racist extermination of Jews, Romani, and others during the middle of century), and French (depicted as snobs). It was an anti-racist prejudice that ironically targeted ethnicities because of the ways that racist elements among those ethnicities targeted others. So it was a qualified whiteness. I grew up with the social advantages of being *not* black, that is the social advantages of not being routinely assaulted either socially, psychologically, or physically but, at the same time, unlike many people whom I attended school with, my ancestors had not enslaved other people and I did not feel a part of their private club or personal anxiety. Perhaps the fact that Swedes had not been prominent in the business of enslaving people made it an attractive place to move to. Swedes were also as white as one can get according to contemporary standards (although Benjamin Franklin saw them as nearly black and had once labeled them “swarthy”). In Sweden I realized that I had the best of both worlds. I was usually seen as white (though I have had both an African American and a Swede tell me to go back to the Middle East) but I was not cursed with the internal conflict of joining a racist club and had therefore no fear of being kicked out.



Fig. 3 and 4.

Italian and Chinese being caught by a “WASP” in a San Francisco cartoon 1888; Undated cartoon of an Irish shanty (approx. mid-1800s).

As I never felt fully a part of the white club, did not ask to join it, and looked at its history with repulsion, my relationship to being “white” was mixed. Whether or not one wants to join a club, nobody likes being forcibly excluded. On a personal and more unconscious level, I felt too “ethnic” to fit in and join mainstream society. It was only through the loving acceptance of a very “white” person in Sweden (whom I eventually had two children with) that I was able to learn to fully accept myself as I am. On a more public and conscious level, the idea of being called “white” felt like an insult to me. I rejected the exclusive character, stale lives, and elitism of “white society.” Only after taking courses on challenging white supremacy did I come to own it as a term. I realized that denying “whiteness” was also a way of denying the skin privileges that I was being afforded whether or not I asked for them.²³ To deny *being* white, would be dishonest because I was clearly *seen* as white or, at least, *non-black* (which is really what skin privilege in twentieth-century Virginia largely amounted to before Hispanics began to arrive in the 1990s).

In response to Thandeka’s quiz (described in Chapter One), my first memory of being white is not clear (perhaps “not black” was clearer) yet the point at which I first recall feeling “white” was when I was a young teen and, together with an older brother, I worked for my father’s business during the summer. My father’s business was responsible for low-income housing in Newport News and one of the tasks that needed to be done was eviction. My brother and I, backed up by a sheriff, went into poor people’s homes (all black) and we physically removed all of their furniture. The memory was so strong because what I was doing felt unethical and yet it was being supported both by my father and the police. And I was being paid. At the time, it just felt awkward and awful. Only much later did I recognize it as a part of long history of inculcating and institutionalizing race and racism. The emotional bribery and legal support for the racism made it impossible to recognize as what was traditionally considered racist (e.g., the KKK, Nazis, etc.). Nonetheless, it was part of a larger process of getting white people to become complicit in oppressing black people. It thereby helped solidify white identity and create a façade of justifications at the same time (“they should have paid their rent,” “it’s the law,” etc.). This larger process that takes place at the personal level is something that I have come to think of as a collective form of cognitive dissonance²⁴

²³ At one point in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I wandered around the South on foot and had people literally throwing money at me because I looked like a *white* hobo. I could never know for certain but I suspected that white solidarity would not have been extended so generously to me if my skin had been several shades darker. I didn’t try to look white but I was afforded its privileges anyway (yet, as will be explored later, “privilege” too is a complex word).

²⁴ Cognitive dissonance refers to the contradiction between stated values and beliefs and actual practices and behavior (Festinger 1957). The famous example is of a group of believers who had awaited the day when aliens would arrive in spaceships and decimate earth. When the day came and went, many members of the group, as Festinger had predicted, *increased* rather than decreased their faith. Instead of being interpreted as a failure, the group believed as their leader had instructed them: thanks to their

that I call “colonial dissonance” —that is, collective feelings and ideas that justify social inequalities that one would otherwise find unreasonable or even abhorrent except for the fact that these particular social inequalities are inherited through imbalanced social relationships established during colonialism.²⁵ It was as if an entire society had to “go insane” in order to remain functional. For American English-speakers like me, it began in Jamestown. People had to be dehumanized. Children had to be slaughtered.



Detroit Free Press, 1941.

Fig. 5

Detroit Free Press, 1941. Depiction of a mythic “Liberty” welcoming her white children.

faith, the aliens canceled the destruction of earth. The fact that nothing happened was interpreted as proof that they had saved the planet.

²⁵ Although I use the term “colonial dissonance” for this purpose outlined here, the basic premise is hardly original. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, alluded to this dynamic when he asserted that people were so easily enslaved to their passions that it would be impossible to parse out whether the “fears of the privileged classes, of anarchy and revolution” were honest and genuine or merely constructed in order to undermine the “disadvantaged classes” in their quest for justice and equality (1960: 136). The idea of colonial dissonance at the structural level, as with cognitive dissonance at the individual level, bypasses questions of intention and honesty and focuses instead on how inconsistency is experienced in a life story or national history and how consonance is pursued. Stanley Cohen’s work *States of Denial* (2001) can be seen as theoretical work addressing the pursuit of narrative consonance among whites who feel committed to maintaining the asymmetries of power that were initially established during colonialism.

Growing up in a racist, classist, and sexist culture that consistently insisted to its citizenship that it was, on the contrary, the best of all possible societies, produced a lot of tension (even if I was a “beneficiary”). For people who wanted to change it but did not know even where to begin, a constant challenge was to simply channel the tension. So we learned ways to regulate and channel anger and violence in relatively useful, or least less harmful, manners (hence, punk rock).

One particular influence toward developing more proactive responses was one of my brothers who happened to be somewhat of a race traitor (the same one who gave me the Krishnamurti book). He strongly identified with black culture and social justice issues at a practical level and that left a huge impact on me: ideas don’t change our lives as much as *changing our lives* changes lives. After becoming a bike mechanic, he lived in Nicaragua for a number of years and worked with a group called Bikes Not Bombs/Si Bicletas, No Bombas. This was during the original Sandinista period and I went down twice with plans to move there too. I probably learned more about life and the world in a single week by working on a farm and living with a (very hospitable) family in a tiny Nicaraguan village than I did in a year of compulsory public education.

Lacking skills however I felt useless and moved back to the U.S. A few years after returning I met MOVE members in Philadelphia in 1992 and gradually began doing sporadic support work for Mumia Abu-Jamal as well as MOVE. I subscribed to *The Final Call* (the newspaper of the Nation of Islam) as well as *Race Traitor* (whose motto was “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity”). When I lived in the Bay Area for a couple years (1994-96) I engaged somewhat in anti-racist activism (but mostly focused on Abu-Jamal’s case), met some former Black Panthers (Kiilu Nyasha, in particular, had an impact on me), attended workshops on challenging white supremacy, and began to see racial injustice as a key pillar to national and global orders.

Also, during the 1990s I began corresponding sporadically with various prisoners. That tapered off as I began academic studies. With this doctoral research project and interviews with MOVE members in prison, I again found myself writing to people in prison. I can understand the feelings of researcher Dan Berger when he wrote about his own work with prisoners:

I found myself in a growing but little-discussed category: those with incarcerated loved ones. I realized that far from being a static institution, the prison connects histories, ideas, and relationships that have been largely forced on certain communities even as its impacts have been more widely felt.²⁶

While I was still working on this thesis, one of the imprisoned members of MOVE who had written to me, Phil Africa, died suddenly in the care of the prison infirmary.²⁷ In a

²⁶ Berger 2014: xiii.

²⁷ Considering that Phil Africa was, by all accounts, a robust person with plenty of energy and in good health, his sudden death both came as a surprise and brought a chilling reminder of the (lack of adequate)

reasonable world, his death would have drawn attention to their case and sparked international outrage demanding the immediate release of the remaining incarcerated members (all of whom are up for parole). While the *New York Times* covered his death, there was, aside from those already engaged, a deafening silence. Writing to prisoners is something that fits in with the spirit of this project in that communication is a link, a tie. To connect oneself, even through mere words, to a prisoner is to bring to the fore the imprisonment that prisons as such bear upon our lives.

The emphasis on racism throughout this thesis is therefore a reflection of both a long-term concern as well as the forced racialization of my life and the social circumstances into which I was born.

Like many people, I first read about MOVE after their home and headquarters had been bombed by Philadelphia police in 1985. Seven years later when Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor of the bombing, was released from prison I met her at a demonstration for then-prisoner on death row Mumia Abu-Jamal in Philadelphia. Hearing her talk and seeing the scars on her body had a combined effect on me that stayed with me for a long time. Perhaps one of the most impactful things she said to me that day was that each person ought to simply do what they can. It was expressed in such a way that did not imply any pressure to become a die-hard activist or “true believer” but, as I heard it then, it meant that I could simply act as I saw fit from where I was —just like anybody else. Regardless of what one may feel about her chosen strategies or group identification, she had been nearly killed while taking a stand against the state, so her words stuck with me and helped keep me calm whenever I felt under pressure to do more than felt sustainable. It struck a chord because that’s been a real dilemma for me: how to pursue social justice work that feels meaningful without destroying oneself in the process? In my mind, her words teamed up with a lesson culled from the Bhagavad Gita: Do what you have to do but don’t be attached to the fruits of your labor. Whenever I’d feel like I was teetering on the edge, I’d take a deep breath and remind myself that I don’t need to do more —only whatever I can. It was an early lesson in accepting limits.

One of my limits has been the act of engaging in scholarship involving a group who has been both the subject of controversy and on the receiving end of more police brutality and violence than I can imagine. I had been involved as a MOVE sympathizer for a number of years but I could never say that I agreed with 100% of what they taught or did and, in the end, I felt my interests were more scholarly than activist in relation

health care for incarcerated persons whom the state has little to no interest in attending to. Furthermore, there is less accountability and oversight than for non-incarcerated patients. It is therefore also a reminder of the various degrees of constraint that exist within the prison industrial complex from solitary confinement to general population, from death row to prison infirmaries, one state of incarceration can be a far-cry from another. When Phil Africa was denied visitations by his wife shortly before he died (because the state did not recognize their marriage), the cruel conditions of incarcerated life are brought to the fore —even for someone as upbeat and exuberant as Phil was.

to MOVE so I backed away. Backing away is often an awkward step but, in relation to MOVE, they have never pressured me or spoken a harsh word to me.

I have tried to make it clear to MOVE members and supporters that I am now a researcher and not a sympathizer. In fact, I absolutely do not support certain parts of their beliefs and history (such as their rejection of homosexuality and their aggressive campaign against John Gilbride during the child custody dispute that preceded his death). Subsequently, I restrict my “activism” to offering scholarly support for recognition of MOVE as a religion for the purposes of the First Amendment or occasionally writing a letter of recommendation for a MOVE member’s parole board. These issues are simple matters of equal justice that I think any reasonable scholar who looked at the material would agree with. Still, I make no claims to being “objective.” I cannot deny that reading and re-reading the thoughts of John Africa for the last 23 years has left an impact on how I view the world. As will be apparent in this dissertation, the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, with whom I had been intrigued before I had ever read of John Africa, seemed to me to be —more or less— a different way of stating the same message. Both were critiquing dominant systems of categorization at their core and calling for people to abandon hierarchical systems of thought and organization. Both were fundamentally rejecting the idea that the individual was somehow separate from the whole of existence. While my current thinking may depart from both of them in a number of ways, these core vantage points have continued to inform my thought, my work, and my daily life.

On Kecoughtan Land: Joining the Unitarian Universalists

In another time, Newport News had another name. I don’t know what it was but the people who lived there, the Kecoughtan, have been long since wiped out. Newport News supposedly got its name from Captain Christopher Newport who, in 1607, was the first English commander to discover the Chesapeake Bay and the James River. Yet he was hardly a solitary adventurer. The entire project was sponsored by a corporation: the Virginia Company of London. Newport’s mission was to negotiate territory with indigenous peoples mostly under the domain of Chief Powatan and set up camp. In the first mission, he and his crew were chased away by the indigenous Chesapeake who sent the British running as soon as they saw them. Then, in assuming the Chesapeakes were not part of Powatan’s domain (he was wrong), he tried to make an alliance with a chief whom he presumed was Powatan (wrong again) by planting a cross in the ground. Powatan answered by sending 200 hundred warriors to fight them off. Yet, despite failing miserably in the first mission, the second mission, securing land —a fort that came to be called Jamestown— was more successful. It was in Jamestown that 500 British settlers began to starve around 1609-1610. They had, by then, developed “good enough” relations to receive corn from the Natives and supplies from England. They

also had firearms to hunt with and the area was full of animals all year around.²⁸ Yet they were going hungry. So they turned to cannibalism. One man chopped up his wife. Other dug up graves and ate the corpses. By the spring 1610 only 60 of them were still alive. The governor's name was Lord De la Warr. With cannibalism rampant and a leader whose name meant Lord of War, one can only wonder what the people of Powatan thought of the early English. If they began to think of the English in racist terms, their descriptions of savage cannibals descending upon them from Europe would at least have had some substance. Whatever their views, they had, if nothing else, time to develop them. So too did the early English settlers.

In fact, one of the biggest problems for the early English was not racism against the Natives but the very opposite: the English liked the Natives *too* much. They were so prone to abandoning camp and moving in with Native peoples that the English commanders had to make laws against it with considerable punishments. Governor Thomas Dale, successor to De la Warr and stationed near modern-day Richmond, had to deal with this matter in 1612. In a move that would have impressed any Stalinist general, he managed to not only re-capture those English who had escaped "to live idle among the savages" but also to demonstrate the severity of the crime by ordering some to be hanged, some to be burned, some to "broken upon wheels," some to be staked, and some to be shot.²⁹ George Percy, brother to the Earl of Northumberland and second in command at Jamestown, wrote about Dale's act: "all these extreme and cruel tortures he used and inflicted upon them to terrify the rest for attempting to do the same."³⁰ Yet the first European laws in Virginia were hardly much milder. They were

²⁸ Aside from all of the raccoons, opossums, ducks, geese, and sea gulls, I still see deer and the occasional fox walking the streets of Newport News (which is now more a sign of their natural forest habitat being rapidly destroyed by "development").

²⁹ Morgan 1995: 78, 74. Original Old English: "to live Idle among the Salvages."

³⁰ Morgan 1995: 74. The quote is my own translation from Old English. The original as Morgan cited it was "all theis extreme and crewel tortures he used and inflicted upon them to terrify the reste for Attempting the Lyke." Clearly, the early English were simply not racist enough. Yet before the idea of racial distinctions—much less superiority (especially not while they were starving)—could be usefully hammered into their heads they had to be terrorized into submission and allegiance. Morgan noted that it was remarkable that the early English both "unable or unwilling to feed themselves" took "pains to destroy to both the Indians and their corn." While Morgan chalked this up to "poor organization and direction," I question this (based on Morgan's own account pp. 74-78). First, Captain John Smith was bullying the Indians for corn and bullying his own crew into working way harder than the Natives were working. Second, Smith, who had wanted to adopt the Spanish model of domination through slavery and assimilation, left the area in the fall of 1609. Without Smith to bully corn from the natives or work from the English there was more incentive to live with the Natives. Yet Smith Third, if a primary task of the commanders was to keep people from fleeing to live with the locals, then the natural logic for consistently attacking the locals is to fuel both a sense of nationality and animosity in classic "we" versus "them" fashion. Perhaps it was a gamble: by burning their corn and attacking Natives, the English

drafted under the authority of the Virginia Company of London to whom the king had relinquished command of the colony. The so-called *Laws Divine, Morall, and Martiall* would make even an Islamophobe's conception of Shariah law seem like a children's fairy tale in comparison.³¹ Work was to be organized literally by drumbeat without any tolerance for idleness and "no pretense of gentle government."³² Death was the prescribed punishment a wide range of crimes from rape to adultery, from private commerce to sacrilege, from lying to doing anything that might "tend to the derision" of the Bible.³³ No prizes are doled out for guessing the punishment for lampooning Jesus in a cartoon format. Death was even prescribed for eating an ear of corn or grapes when weeding a garden. One man stole a few pints of oatmeal. He was punished by stabbing his tongue with a needle, chaining him to a tree, and leaving him there to starve to death.³⁴

This was how the English (elites) treated English (workers). Perhaps the reader can imagine how they treated indigenous peoples? It began with top-down directives *enforcing hostility*. The *Divine Laws* stipulated that no friendly contact could be made with neighboring Natives. So the first step was to make peace illegal. All nearby peoples were to be subjugated and forced to pay tribute. Resistance was to be crushed. If commanders desired friendly contact with Natives, those Natives had to be located far away. In other words, racism was not only legal, it was enforced by law at the beginning of the English history in America because decent human relations and respect for Native peoples were posing a threat to the ability of British elites to maintain control.

Governor De la Warr did not fail to live up to his name when he suspected Powatan of harboring English refugees. After Powatan neglected to give him a proper response regarding the whereabouts of British refugees, De la Warr sent second-in-command George Percy and Captain James Davis to take revenge on those Indians who happened to be living closest to them: the Paspahighs and the Chickahomines. While Davis burned down the homes and cornfields of the Chickahomines, Percy and English soldiers went up the James River a few miles and marched into the town of the Paspahigh burning homes and killing at least 15 people. The "queen" and her children were captured and brought onto the boat. When the soldiers reportedly murmured about Percy being too gentle by sparing their lives, the children were thrown into the

workers could perhaps be persuaded that there was, in Margaret Thatcher's words nearly four centuries later, "no alternative."

³¹ These laws were drafted by two deputies of De la Warr, Sir Thomas Gates and Sir Thomas Dale, in 1610 and the laws remained in place for the formative years of the English colony until 1618. By that time full-scale animosities with Natives had created a snowball effect and atrocities on both sides made both peace and peaceful defection all the more difficult.

³² Morgan 1995: 79.

³³ Morgan 1995: 80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

James and he shot “out their brains in the water.”³⁵ All of this terror was simply because some of the English desperately wanted to live with the people of Powatan and Powatan let them rather than their leaders make that choice. This was the dawn of “freedom” in the United States, this was the dawn of Corporate America.

In order to sustain order and keep workers content, it was necessary to sustain two powerful ideas: 1) Our society is far superior to theirs and 2) They can be killed with impunity because they are inferior. The dissonance experienced by early British settlers between what they saw with their own eyes and the words they were told is what I imagine to be the early stirrings of colonial dissonance.

I am an English-speaking Virginian. This is my ancestry and the founding of my home: cannibalism and terrorism. It is also the historical kernel of what would later grow to become the United States. This is not to say, of course, that English settlement or the early dawn of the United States consisted of no more than cannibalism and terrorism —only that they were both there and they were hardly recalled in school history books or on the Fourth of July.

As a child I swam in the same water where those children’s brains were shot out by English soldiers. Should not some history book have told me the stories of who had been drowned in the water that I drank as I swam, the molecules now in my body, the land that I had learned to call home?

Instead, I was fed the same types of images about Native Americans that were apparently fed to Winston Churchill. When writing for the London *Daily Telegraph* in 1897, a young Churchill reported on the Imperial Army’s war against the Mohmand people in Northwest Canada:

These tribesmen are among the most miserable and brutal creatures of the earth. Their intelligence only enables them to be more cruel, more dangerous, more destructive than the wild beasts. Their religion—fanatic though they are, is only respected when it incites to bloodshed and murder. Their habits are filthy; their morals cannot be alluded to. With every feeling of respect for that wide sentiment of human sympathy which characterizes a Christian civilisation, I find it impossible to come to any other conclusion than that, in proportion as these alleys are purged from the pernicious vermin that infest

³⁵ Morgan 1995: 74. The original Old English: “and shoteinge owtt their Braynes in the water.” The so-called “queen” (Morgan’s term —not an indigenous term) was spared briefly but De la Warr wanted her dead. Davis wanted her burned but Percy, having had his full share of bloodshed for the day, decided to have her merely stabbed instead. As if suspicion of harboring British refugees was not a mild enough “crime” to inflict terror, Sir Thomas Gates took it a step farther. When indigenous peoples came to Jamestown with food, they were treated as spies. Gates ordered their apparent generosity to be returned with death. They were killed “for a terror to the rest to cause them to desist from their subtle practices” [“for a Terrour to the Reste to cause them to desiste from their subtell practyses”] (1995: 81).

them, so will the happiness of mankind be increased, and the progress of mankind accelerated.³⁶

Had Churchill swam in the same river as I, and had he known that the blood of children's brains mixed with British gunpowder swam in his mouth as he swam in the river, he might have reconsidered his advocacy of genocide. Perhaps the blood on his tongue would have had him lose his appetite for spilling as much blood as he did. Would he have still supported the occupation of Kenya and the development of what has been called "Britain's gulag" where as many as 240,000 people were put into internment camps in the 1950s and "a murderous campaign to eliminate Kikuyu people... left tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, dead"?³⁷ I don't know. But, and this may be naïve, I do think that stories matter and that the stories that Churchill grew up with might well have shaped his choices in later life.

By 1629 there were about 2,600 settlers in Virginia. Based largely on tobacco sales the idea of the American Dream of quick riches was born. Sir William Berkeley became governor of Virginia in 1641 and, except for an 8-year hiatus in the middle, ruled until he died in 1677. In his words, "freedom" was hardly desirable:

I thank God there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have [either] these hundred years ...for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both.³⁸

Berkeley was the longest sitting governor in U.S. history. Across the seas in England, Thomas Hobbes wrote out his vision for the state during the early part of Berkeley's reign. Hobbes depicted Native Americans and their anarchic ways as the antithesis to social order. The land I grew up on was to become a nation that de facto excluded the people who were there first. I was raised to believe that was normal. From Tomahawk missiles and Apache helicopters to the Cleveland Indians and the Washington Redskins, I was raised to cheer militarism, mass killings, and the commodification of a genocidal onslaught without seeing any contradiction between that and the idea that "all men are created equal."

In regard to the Unitarian Universalist Association, I probably had my first encounter sometime in the mid-1990s when a UU minister married two of my friends as their families and friends all held hands in an outdoor circle. Yet when I visited the local fellowship in that city (not my hometown), it seemed all too lifeless. Having long since abandoned the Catholic Church that I was raised in, I moved on. In the early 2000s however, my brother had begun attending a UU fellowship in our hometown.

³⁶ Spurr 2007: 82.

³⁷ Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 2005: xvi.

³⁸ Noll and Harlow 2007: 24.

When I heard that, in the middle of the highly militarized and somewhat redneck town where we grew up, there was a pagan woman as minister, I knew that I had to join him.

Having begun to engage in pagan rituals in Sweden, I felt more at home in the local fellowship of Newport News (where I have sometimes joined the pagans in celebrating midwinter). Pretty soon I realized that each UU fellowship is autonomous and therefore free to create its own unique flavor. I learned to stop judging the entire UUA by a visit to a single fellowship. So I joined the UUA (formerly as part of the Church of Larger Fellowship). I also began to research UUs as part of my studies in Sweden.

Paxcore: Catholic Workers, Islamic Anarchists, and Taqwacore

I think one of the reasons that I always held respect for Catholic Workers and Ploughshare activists was that their peaceful commitment to do what they felt was right compelled them to confront a legal system that they knew would throw them in jail for their activities (e.g., breaking into military bases and causing symbolic damage, hammering on missile silos, pouring blood on jet fighters and so on). In part this impressed me because I had once been arrested for overstaying my visa and spent a few days in a Swedish jail when I was 21 years old. I found it a very difficult experience. The violence of incarceration was definitely educational. It did not teach me about “freedom,” but it did instruct me on the meaning of commitment. Many Catholic Worker communities, like the local Norfolk Catholic Worker combined peace and justice activism with simple living and service toward those most marginalized (organizing housing and free food for example). The irony of authorities putting people in jail who were about as exemplary citizens as a society could hope for seemed to illustrate for the distinction between a “Christianity” interpreted by Caesar and those people who took teachings of that hobo communist in the New Testament seriously. At one point I’d become pen pals with a couple Ploughshare activists in prison. I discovered, as did Dan Berger (mentioned earlier), that connecting with someone in prison put at least a small part of myself in there with them. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt has talked about a feeling that we English speakers lack a vocabulary to describe. It’s the feeling that people get when they see somebody living out the values of the type of world that they would like to live in. He calls that feeling “elevation.”³⁹ Catholic Workers elevated me.

Many years later my scholarly interests drew me toward something that reminded me of the Catholic Workers: “religious anarchists.” As I began to do preliminary research about where to focus my study, I ended up looking into Islamic anarchism. I

³⁹ See Haidt 2003 and 2005.

started to write a book on the topic. In 2007 I found out about a novel based on a Muslim punk rock collective, I knew I had to read it. Shortly thereafter I contacted the author, Michael Muhammad Knight, for an e-mail interview. The novel was *The Taqwacores* (2004) and, although neither the novel nor Mike advocated “Islamic anarchism,” I could see a definite affinity and sets of common interests. In January 2010 (prior to beginning my dissertation project), I helped organize Mike’s visit to Sweden in tandem with the release of the documentary film *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam*. Although our personal contact has been sparse and sporadic over the years, his writings have definitely resonated with me at a personal level. And when I say “Inshallah” as I often do, I know he would get it: that I am not necessarily referring to some mystery god—and that I don’t have to believe in a mystery god—to feel that it’s good to remind myself that my future is out of my hands.

I still attend punk concerts every now and then. When Barack Hussein Obama was elected president, my daughter and I attended the inauguration and afterwards we went to a show where the band Anti-Flag said roughly: “This does not change everything. America is still run by corporations. And we cannot vote away the state. But this is still a tremendous victory thanks to the work and dedication of thousands and thousands of people who made this happen. So tonight we celebrate. Tomorrow it’s back to work.” She and I both jumped in the mosh pit. Yet, even if I still felt connected to the punk scene, the taqwacore scene was different and I did not feel close to it because it seemed to be insulated by three factors: 1) participants seemed to share some sort of connection to (or interest in) Islam, Middle-eastern background, or Desi⁴⁰ identity; 2) participants all seemed to be very young (only one had children) and very much online (which, for an aspiring luddite like me, was problematic), and 3) the “scene,” if one could even call it that, seemed to center around a close-knit group of friends who, by then, all knew each other. Of the three contexts, this was the one I had the least personal access to and felt the least connected to. It’s hard (for me at least) to develop online friendships even if I’ve enjoyed the encounters I’ve had. Yet, at the philosophical level, to the extent that I have a relationship to the Quran and something called “Islam” at all, if I had to describe it, I’d call it “taqwacore.”

⁴⁰ “Desi” is term of identification associated with people from the general Indian subcontinental region, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, etc.

The Problem for this Thesis: Fjord of the Lies

If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things.

If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, human affairs will not prosper.

If human affairs do not prosper, culture will not flourish.

If culture does not flourish, there will be no justice.

If there is no justice, the nation falls into war.

—Kong Fu-Tse

Are we savages or what?

—Ralph, 13 years old

The spring of 2015 was when I was supposed to be wrapping up my thesis. It also turned out to be the time when our mother was wrapping up her life. My ambition had been to finish before she died but that was not meant to be. As I spent more time Newport News, I talked with a lot of old friends whom I normally did not get a chance to see. One old friend and anti-racist activist shared stories about his childhood. He described an occasion of repeated bullying and said “It was like *Lord of the Flies*.” I knew what that meant even though I had never read the book. The basic plot was pretty common knowledge: a group of boys were marooned on an island and without the presence of any adult, they degenerated into extreme bullying and tyranny. Another friend told me how her female African American cousin had read the book and concluded that humanity was in fact depraved. A major online book distribution company described it as a “startling, brutal portrait of human nature.” By the time the summer came around and Mom had breathed her last breath, I stumbled upon the book at our parents’ home and I felt compelled to read it.

What struck me the strongest upon reading *Lord of the Flies* (1954) was how intensely colonialist and racist the story was and yet how this was packaged in such a subtle manner that even my anti-racist friend and my other friend’s African American cousin had not seemed to pick up on it (or, if so, I remain unaware of that).

In Golding’s own words, “The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature” and this message seems to have been a common interpretation that I have heard. Yet how is it that a group of white British, mostly upper class males could be expected to ever say anything at all about “human nature”? Even if one were to take Golding’s message at face-value, then why would readers not walk away from the novel with a serious concern about British society, upper class parenting, or white people’s ethics? I’ve never heard anyone conclude from that novel that “boys are mean,” “British people are depraved,” or “rich kids are inherently cruel.” Why not? How is it that readers equate young, male, British elites with “humanity”?

Imagine that the story of *Lord of the Flies* were to be replicated exactly except that the characters were all African American females from downtown Detroit. How many people would read that book and walk away speaking about “human nature” and how many would suppose that it was talking about a specific cultural group who were raised in very specific circumstances that clearly influenced them to behave the way that they did? How many non-black readers might adopt an explicitly racist perspective and blame it on their ethnicity?

What is it that allows the reader to imagine that these nearly teenage boys were not highly influenced by their socialization? How is it that one could regard them as a template for “human nature” as if their behavior was not incredibly influenced by their upbringing?

Yet it was clear that these boys did have an upbringing. Ralph’s suggestion that they might all be taken by “the reds” indicated that his parents were not British communists or socialists. He’d already learned to fear the “Other.” Their universal agreement to kill animals and eat meat suggested that they did not grow up in vegetarian households trained in the concept of *ahimsa* (often translated as “non-violence”). It seemed safe to say that they had not been conditioned to frequently ask the question of how one cares for the smallest creatures that one sees: e.g., “If you were to nearly step on an anthill, would you make the effort to move your foot so that you do not land on it or would you not bother?” A culture where parents raise their children to make that extra effort to cause less harm would likely have led to a different set of questions and concerns for those boys on the island. It might have plausibly produced a different novel in which the children cooperated and took care of one another. Would people then read the story and conclude that “human nature” has an amazing inherent potential?⁴¹

Now just because all of the characters in the book were British whites it does not mean that race was absent. Far from it. Indigenous peoples appeared in the novel in two metaphorical senses: a paternalistic one (à la Jean-Jacques Rousseau) and a more Hobbesian one. Through the smaller boys who were “very brown, and filthily dirty” and “were known now by the generic title of ‘littluns’” came the Rousseauian image. These little ones were cute and less brutal than the older ones but they could not fend for themselves. No society could be built on their backs. Although they were sometimes the target of abuse, most of them —like indigenous peoples and their own stories— were not even warranted with a name. Their lack of history made the older ones’ story

⁴¹ It also interesting to note that Golding’s nightmare scenario was actually a fragile one. Had a few central characters (especially Ralph and Jack but possibly Roger) not been present, the cycle of bullying might never have developed. There is no indication that if Boy-with-glasses or Simon were the oldest or most authoritative figure that bullying would have been the norm if it occurred at all. So any conclusions about “human nature” are even more narrow than white, British, upper class males: a small subset of those are the ones in question —not *all* white, British, upper class males, not all British people, and certainly not “human nature” as such.

all the more dramatic. Yet indigenous peoples also appeared metaphorically in the Hobbesian form. When the group degenerated under the tyrannical leadership of Jack, they became known as “savages” and they painted their bodies like “Indians.”

My reaction to *Lord of the Flies* became more nuanced however when I realized that it seemed to be an attempt toward an anti-racist response to *The Coral Island* (1858) by R. M. Ballantyne. *The Coral Island* depicted three British boys, Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin who were marooned on an island in the South Pacific where they learned to forage and fend for themselves. They performed such “noble” acts as convert some of the locals into “Christians” and prevent acts of cannibalism. William Golding seemed to have inverted *The Coral Island* completely. Like the former novel, *Lord of the Flies* included young British males marooned on an island in the South Pacific. The two main contenders for leadership were similarly named Ralph and Jack. Yet, while Jack was the main leader in *The Coral Island*, Jack in *Lord of the Flies* was a cruel tyrant.

By showing that British children, without any influence of local peoples, could quickly devolve into “savages,” Golding seemed to be trying to explain to his presumably white audience that white people, despite their so-called Christian upbringing, were no better than any other people. The Lord of the Flies (from the Hebrew *Ba'alzevuv* —*Beelzebub* in Greek) spoke to Simon in his dying vision. This apparently “evil” presence was not somewhere else on the island but within each of them. “‘Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!’ said the head. ... ‘You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?’ The Lord of the Flies was expanding like a balloon. ... The Lord of the Flies spoke in the voice of a schoolmaster.”⁴²

Yet, perhaps inadvertently, Golding was regurgitating the exact myth of the “state of nature” as depicted by Hobbes. As his story was described in the epilogue: “The Devil is not present in any traditional religious sense; Golding’s Beelzebub is the modern equivalent, the anarchic, amoral, driving force...”⁴³ The “Devil” is the “savage,” that is, associated closely with indigenous peoples. So in attempting to say that British people were no better than savages, Golding essentially invoked the racist image of “savage” which was the image used by the British to describe their superiority to begin with. Golding did not allow “savages” to tell their story or in any way allow real indigenous people into the picture. It was enough to invoke the specter of Native Americans and anarchy.

The irony here is that it would seem that Golding had intended to challenge the racist, colonialist imagery supplied by *The Coral Island* yet ended up doing so by providing another set of racist images. So when I think of *Lord of the Flies*, I see colonial dissonance. I see a type of “colorblind racism” that remains so pernicious in white-dominant cultures today. As Naomi Murakawa wrote:

⁴² Golding 1954: 143.

⁴³ Ibid 205.

If the problem of the twentieth century was, in W. E. B. Du Bois's famous words, "the problem of the color line," then the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the causes and consequences of enduring racial stratification.⁴⁴

Despite any possible claims of colorblindness, explicit racial signifiers can even be seen in the portrayal of the characters. Roger, the sadist, and Simon, the misfit, were both identified as having black hair. Jack, the tyrant, had red hair. The main protagonist, on the other hand, Ralph was blond. This fits the racist images of blond Aryan male as the prototype for human. Black hair can signal somebody less "pure" such as the Irish or Southern Europeans and red hair has been a cue for a (spurious) Jewish character in British literature and theater.⁴⁵

Nonetheless what one can see is a scale of prototypes issued before the reader: Blond Ralph, a leading bully, is the character whom the reader was apparently expected to identify the most with. He was contrasted with red-haired and freckled (blemished) Jack who represented pure tyranny with no redeeming features. The reader was not expected to identify with Jack but the two of them constituted the core of the story because they were the only two leaders imaginable. This dynamic is comparable to the range of forms of governance that Golding implied: "democracy" or "authoritarianism." Stateless societies of indigenous peoples were not included and the possibility that their "human nature" might be any better without British imperial culture is not even considered.⁴⁶ That Ralph was less of a bully than Jack and became the hunted one when the tables turned did not erase the fact that he too had been a bully. The range of choices that Golding provided was that of the "lesser of two evils." Yet there were other options *implicit* even in his text.

However, instead of presenting other options as realistic possibilities, Golding brought the reader into the cycle of violence: The third main character was designated "Piggy" (I'll call him "Boy-with-glasses"). Boy-with-glasses made the mistake of asking Ralph not to call him that terrible nickname before he ever told Ralph his real name. The reader never knows him by any other name than "Piggy" (a derogatory term in reference to his weight). In this way, Golding brought the reader into the act of bullying alongside Ralph because the reader was presented with no alternative. As readers, we

⁴⁴ Murakawa, 2014: 7.

⁴⁵ See Kahan 2002; MacDonald 2005.

⁴⁶ In line with Hobbes' arguments against anarchy, (spoiler alert) Golding brought the adult world into the story at the end in the book. In the form of a British warship in the middle of a war with Japan and Germany, Golding signaled that adults were faring no better in their own world than the young white boys did in theirs. This was exactly what Hobbes had said: anarchy between individuals and anarchy between states all produced the same result: war. All people and states needed a single sovereign ruler to maintain peace. Golding did not go so far as to state that much but his dystopian depictions of anarchy, "human nature," and indigenous peoples were in full agreement with Hobbes.

knew that “Piggy” was “not in accordance with the truth of things” but we had no choice but to identify Boy-with-glasses in a violent way.

Subsequently, the very act of speaking about this character to another person in real life can become an act of participation with Golding’s own act of bullying. Think not? Okay, then imagine if Golding had only one black child on the island and instead of “Piggy,” the boy was nicknamed was “Nigger” much to his chagrin. Or if there were only one Jewish female character in the book and she was dubbed “Jewbitch” against her will? How would it feel to discuss either of those characters at a Thursday evening reading circle with a mixed group of friends and strangers? The violence is already there in the act of naming Boy-with-glasses as “Piggy” and offering the reader no other alternative.⁴⁷

Thus, the act of bullying Boy-with-glasses by labeling him “Piggy” is the beginning of the cycle of violence. This violence is normalized to the degree that it is not even recognized as violence: “Piggy was once more the center of social derision so that everyone felt cheerful and normal.”⁴⁸ The brutal violence toward animals foreshadowed the violence toward one another that was to follow.

In other words, we speak of “freedom” but is the not the question quite often really one of “violence” or “power”? Does not “freedom of speech” actually (and more precisely) translate into the act of self-expression without fear of judgment or harm? By designating “freedom of speech” a “right,” does it not merely transfer the question of “violence” onto the state as the one who uses greater violence to regulate relationships between those with access to (or who are vulnerable to) lesser violence? By speaking about the “freedom to act,” is not one often referring to the *ability* or *power* to act?

Intersectionality scholar A. Breeze Harper told a story of how, when she was thirteen years old, she had been teased by the class bully for trying to rescue a hornet. The bully was the same boy who had used racial slurs against her twin brother. This behavior was a sharp contrast to her father who consoled her when she had trouble releasing a dragonfly trapped in a car: “...my father lovingly noted: ‘There’s nothing more you can do. You tried your best to help. It doesn’t understand glass.’” She added that “...I was raised by this man, who always told me, ‘Don’t kill bugs just because you’re scared of them. What’d they ever do to you?’ Levi’s father probably never said this to his son. Compassion for insects would have clashed with the racist rhetoric that he most likely grew up with.”⁴⁹

I imagine that if Harper and people like her had been on that island, the results may have been quite different. This thesis is, to a large degree, about challenging a myth that underlies ideological and racialized justifications of nation-states. It is a myth made

⁴⁷ In my own reading of the story, Boy-with-glasses is actually a metaphor for the feminine. He is the non-violent character who is sensitive and tries to get the others listen to reason. His designation “Piggy” recalls the only other mammals on the island: pigs. Pigs are hunted by the boys. In the first act of killing a pig, the pig is identified as female, and they rape her with a spear.

⁴⁸ Ibid 149.

⁴⁹ Harper, 2011: 73.

by and for bullies that has its roots in Hobbes, the myth that technological violence is necessary to have a secure social order. The place that this thesis aims its challenge is the role that the concept of “freedom” has played in that myth and what alternatives we might have available to work with in order to facilitate more inclusive dialogues.

We’re All in This Together

One final story before beginning the dissertation involves another Harper—one from Pennsylvania (see Fig. 6). One who died more than one hundred years ago in Philadelphia. I am no longer immediately part of the story now. Yet, to the extent that I am tied to Philadelphia as I am and have sat in the pews of the same church that she sat in more than 100 years ago, our histories are interconnected. This point, at which we leave “my” story and enter *her*story is a transitional phase for this thesis, from Prologue to Beginning...

Pennsylvania received its name from its founder William Penn, a prominent Quaker. Philadelphia (see Fig. 7), its capital, was meant to mean “City of Brotherly Love” yet the stories it birthed often revealed a lack of “phil” between the “adelpi.” In addition to the removal of indigenous peoples, the European American inhabitants of Pennsylvania struggled with issues of enslavement and bigotry.

In the 1830s, white abolitionists and visionaries drew up plans for a public meeting hall to discuss important issues of the day. This center, Pennsylvania Hall, was a Quaker-supported initiative in downtown Philadelphia. It would be a convention hall promoting dialogue “wherein the principles of Liberty, and Equality of Civil Rights, could be freely discussed, and the evils of slavery fearlessly portrayed.”⁵⁰ On May 14th 1838, the majestic two-story Pennsylvania Hall opened its doors to the public. Three days later, on May 17th, the white public responded by forming a mob that burned the entire building down to the ground while police stood by and watched. Nobody was arrested because police said they could not identify anybody. For nearly two years the ruins of the building remained as a reminder of mob rule and white racism. Pennsylvania Hall was never re-built. Yet more fire was to come in 1844 when rioting between Catholics and Protestants killed dozens of people and entire city blocks were set aflame.⁵¹

Ten years later Philadelphia became the home of Frances Ellen Watkins. She had been born in Baltimore on September 24, 1825 in the state of Maryland where it was legal for white people to enslave non-whites. Although Watkins was not born into captivity, she was orphaned at the age of three when her mother died. As an only child,

⁵⁰ Brown 1976: 128.

⁵¹ See Lannie and Diethorn 1968.

she was taken in by her aunt and uncle. Her uncle was active in the abolitionist movement and she would follow his example for all of her adult days.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had been signed into law by U.S. President (and Unitarian) Millard Fillmore so Frances Watkins moved the same year to Ohio and met people involved with the Underground Railroad. After witnessing the suffering of these people who had risked death and endured hunger to escape a universe of misery, alongside the dedication of those who risked their own lives and welfare to aid these refugees, Watkins decided to use her “time, talent, and energy in the cause of freedom.”⁵²

In the shadow of the Fugitive Slave Act, helping other humans flee from their kidnappers was criminal behavior. “Freedom” (meaning the opposite of enslavement) was literally illegal: escapees legally had to be returned to captivity. The very same year a refugee from the South was captured in Pennsylvania by the name of William Taylor. An African American Unitarian minister, William Jackson, said that he “felt morally and religiously impelled to strike for his freedom” so he organized with others to de-arrest Taylor. They dressed him up as a woman and safely secured him to Canada. After the successful de-arresting, Jackson himself was arrested but soon released due to public pressure. Jackson told his audience “if they would be free themselves they must strike the first blow.”⁵³

Watkins herself moved to Philadelphia in 1854 and continued to work with the Underground Railroad. The same year she published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. The title itself was an echo of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773) by the first African American to publish poetry, Phillis Wheatley.⁵⁴ Wheatley had spoken of “the Race of injur’d Freedom,”⁵⁵ and wrote how her father must have felt, after she had been kidnapped as a child and torn from his arms: “What pangs excruciating must molest, What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?”⁵⁶ Yet she began her career in captivity and, unlike Harper’s outspoken clarity, Wheatley’s dissent was muffled and rare. Like Wheatley, however, Watkins received renown in her time. Her *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* sold 10,000 copies by 1858 which means that her work had sold about five times as much as *Walden* by her contemporary Henry David Thoreau.⁵⁷ The next year, in 1859, Watkins became the first black person in the U.S. to publish a short story (“The Two Offers”). That same year, white abolitionist John Brown attempted

⁵² Hubbard 2012: 72.

⁵³ Harper 2011: 8-9.

⁵⁴ Gates 2010. Wheatley was renowned at an early age. She raised the ire of Thomas Jefferson while George Washington admired her work and invited her to his home. Upon Wheatley’s release from captivity in 1778 in the midst of the white American war against British rule. She immediately married and gave birth to three children. Her first two children died however and her husband was jailed for debt in 1784. She and her remaining child died the same year.

⁵⁵ Waldstreicher 2011: 526.

⁵⁶ Bilbro 2012: 564.

⁵⁷ Yacovone 1995: 91.

to instigate an insurrection against enslavers at Harpers Ferry (now West Virginia). Along with Henry David Thoreau, she expressed her support for John Brown and his insurrectionary efforts.



Fig. 6
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1824-1911).

After Brown was captured, he was sentenced to death. Frances Watkins wrote to him while he was incarcerated: “We may earnestly hope that . . . your martyr grave will be a sacred altar upon which men will record their vows of undying hatred to that system which tramples on man and bids defiance to God.”⁵⁸ A recurring theme for Frances Watkins was that there was no sense in trying to separate the interests of some people at the cost of others. Our lives and our fate are entwined: “Justice is not fulfilled so long as woman is unequal before the law. We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul.”⁵⁹ This theme of interdependence wove itself throughout her work. The three major “sins” (or, one might say “unfreedom”) of enslavement, addiction, and greed were entangled together and to be undone with virtues of love, earnestness, and kindness. Her faith was very much a part of her social struggle and hers was a precursor to liberation theology. In a speech from 1859 she spoke of the example set by Moses:

The magnificence of the Pharaoh’s throne loomed up before his vision, its oriental splendors glittered before his eyes; but he turned from them all and chose rather to suffer with the enslaved, than rejoice with the free. He would have no union with the slave power of Egypt. When we have a race of men whom this blood stained government cannot tempt or flatter, who would sternly refuse every office in the nation’s gift, from a president down to a tide-waiter, until she shook her hands from complicity in the guilt of cradle plundering and man stealing, then for us the foundations of an historic

⁵⁸ Kenny Wiley, “We Are All Bound Up Together.” 2 July 2015. <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/we-are-all-bound-together> Accessed 27 July 2015.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

character will have been laid. ...Earnest, self-sacrificing souls that will stamp themselves not only on the present but on the future.⁶⁰

As Patricia Schulster observed, Watkins' use of "race" here was a manipulation of term used to divide toward a term used to unite across racial boundaries. This turn, as in her style in general, was akin to beating rhetorical swords into persuasive plowshares. Harper herself characterized her use of persuasion through storytelling in reference to one of her characters as a practice of "living argument."⁶¹

She married Fenton Harper, a widower, in 1860 and had a daughter, Mary E. Harper. The Civil War broke out in 1861 and in the middle of the war, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation (1863). Before the war was over, Harper's husband died in 1864. Taking her daughter with her, she toured the country, North and South, East and West, lecturing on the moral bankruptcy of enslavement, the need for economic self-determination, and the demand for black and women's suffrage. She also lectured vociferously about the dangers of alcohol.⁶² Harper spoke on the same stages and wrote on the same pages as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, William Still, Harriet Tubman, William Lloyd Garrison, and Susan B. Anthony (who happened to be a fellow Unitarian as well as Quaker). With periods of nearly non-stop lecturing, she was one of the major abolitionists of the time.

In 1870 she joined the predominantly white First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia and shared her words from the pulpit. She had also described herself as a "traditional universalist" which would have made her, along with Adin Ballou, one of the earliest universalist Unitarians in the U.S.⁶³ She retained her membership in the local African Methodist Episcopal Church and taught Sunday school there as she straddled the racial divide that still manifests in the United States every Sunday. Her groundbreaking book *Iola Leroy*, dedicated to her daughter, was published in 1892. It became perhaps the most popular novel by a black author of the 1800s. The main character, Iola Leroy, was a woman of ambiguous racial status. She grew up in a privileged household and was raised to believe that she was white. She even defended the practice of enslavement, stating that, "Slavery can't be wrong ...for my father is a slaveholder, and my mother is as good to our servants as she can be." When Leroy herself became tricked into a life of servitude and bondage, she also discovered her black heritage. As Karin Schmidli described the plot: "At the centre of Harper's only novel we find, on one hand, Iola Leroy's growing awareness of her roots, her people and her

⁶⁰ Schulster 2010: 1138.

⁶¹ Stancliff: 2011: xv.

⁶² In those days, it was called "temperance," today, in some contexts, it's called "straight edge."

⁶³ Parmley 1992.

own responsibility towards them and, on the other hand, the importance of restructuring a strong and supportive black community.”⁶⁴

With a critique of male and white domination, Harper’s novel also challenged simplistic categories and presaged intersectionality theory. She levied particular critique toward those who used Christian gospel to justify enslavement. Iola Leroy said to her mother, “Are these people Christians who made these laws which are ...reducing us to slavery? If this is Christianity I hate and despise it.” To this, Iola’s mother responded, “I have not learned Christianity from them. I have learned it at the foot of the cross...”⁶⁵ Harper’s cross was clearly not the same cross as that of the white supremacists who had crafted a white Jesus who nodded in approval of enslavement and terror. Instead, her Jesus, her cross was a challenge to that very “system which tramples on man and bids defiance to God.” She shared a God with people such as John Brown whom enslavers could not know.

In 1893, Harper and her colleagues, Fannie Barrier Williams,⁶⁶ Anna Julia Cooper,⁶⁷ Fannie Jackson Coppin,⁶⁸ Sarah Jane Woodson Early,⁶⁹ and Hallie Quinn Brown,⁷⁰ spoke at the World’s Fair and accused the World’s Congress of Representative Women in Chicago of excluding African-American women. When racism reared its head in the white suffragist movement, she raised her voice and came into conflict with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who had made disparaging comments about black men and “tried to deny African American women the right to vote.”⁷¹ After these events, Harper realized that black women needed to pool their resources and

⁶⁴ Schmidli 1995: 109.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Williams was a lawyer, organizer, and later a co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

⁶⁷ Born in captivity, Cooper was a prominent scholar who had just published her book, *A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South*, the year before.

⁶⁸ Born in captivity in Washington DC, Coppin remained so until the age of 12. Eleven years later she entered Oberlin College in Ohio. After working as a teacher in Greek, Latin, and math, Coppin became the first African American woman school principal in 1869.

⁶⁹ Like Coppin, Early attended Oberlin and later taught English and Latin at the first African American owned and operated college in the U.S. (Wilberforce University in Ohio), also becoming the first African American woman to be a member of a college faculty. Prior to the World’s Fair, she had worked with Harper at the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

⁷⁰ Brown was Dean of Women at Tuskegee Institute and became professor at Wilberforce in Ohio the same year as the World’s Fair. An active abolitionist and temperance movement spokeswoman, she later co-founded the NACW and published a book of biographies, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, in 1926.

⁷¹ Suzette Parmley, “Recalling A Fighter For Justice A Four-day Conference Revives Memories Of A Human Rights Pioneer.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 27 September 1992. http://articles.philly.com/1992-09-27/news/26025112_1_congregation-iola-leroy-frances-ellen-watkins-harper Accessed 28 October 2014.

organize separately. Together with Harriet Tubman, and others, she co-founded in 1896 the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).⁷² With the slogan “Lifting as we Climb,” they committed to not only improve their own situation but also to aid those even worse off than they. The NACW “built schools, ran orphanages, founded homes for the aged, set up kindergarten programs, and formed agencies in New York and Philadelphia to help female migrants from the South find jobs and affordable housing.”⁷³ By 1924, they had 100,000 members.

Harper’s daughter Mary had remained single and died in 1909 less than 50 years old. Frances E. W. Harper herself died two years later on February 20, 1911 and her funeral was held at First Unitarian.⁷⁴ Reminiscent of Wheatley before her, she lived through a country at war, she lived every day in a society dominated by men and dominated by whites, she spoke her mind, she struggled with tremendous loss (in the beginning, middle, and end of life), and she left us her written legacy. Yet, again reminiscent of Wheatley, she saw no children survive. In her poetry, Harper shared her dying wish:

I ask no monument, proud and high,

To arrest the gaze of the passersby;

All that my yearning spirit craves

Is - Bury me not in a land of slaves!⁷⁵

Historian LaRese Hubbard stated that Harper is “one of the most important figures in African American intellectual history.”⁷⁶ English professor Shirley Wilson Logan said that she is “perhaps the most prominent, active and productive black woman speaker of the nineteenth century.”⁷⁷ Journalist Suzette Parmley described Harper as “a prophet in her own right—gauging and predicting the issues that would envelope the 20th century.” Yet, her legacy has been long overlooked and forgotten.⁷⁸ Her legacy has

⁷² Today named the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC).

⁷³ Rubiner, Joanna. “Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins 1825–1911.” *Contemporary Black Biography*. 1996. http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Frances_Ellen_Watkins_Harper.aspx Accessed 13 Oct. 2015.

⁷⁴ At 2125 Chestnut Street, First Unitarian in Philadelphia was (and still is) about one and a half miles away from MOVE’s home and headquarters at 309 33rd Street which was placed under siege and demolished by police on August 8, 1978. First Unitarian is less than five miles away from where police dropped a bomb on the subsequent MOVE home and headquarters at 6221 Osage Avenue in 1985.

⁷⁵ Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, “A Brighter Coming Day.”

⁷⁶ Hubbard 2012: 68.

⁷⁷ Ibid. (Logan cited by Hubbard).

⁷⁸ In addition to numerous articles, there are two full-length scholarly works on Harper and both have decried her exclusion from dominant historical accounts: Boyd 1994; Stancliff 2010.

however been carried on by Unitarian Universalists who gathered together in 1992 in Philadelphia with Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to celebrate the centennial of the publication of *Iola Leroy* and later again on the centennial of her death. Dr. Qiyamah Rahman placed Harper’s work within the “black liberation tradition,” *UU World* editor Kenny Wiley called Harper’s a “religion of justice,” while Patricia Schulster referred to hers as a “religion of responsibility.”⁷⁹ Hubbard also characterized Harper as a “proto-womanist,” paving the way for influential thinkers a century later such as Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins. More specifically, Hubbard described Harper as a “womanist *sani-baat*, a Wolof word and Senegalese concept of ‘voice throwing.’ By this is meant a disruptive and self-affirming insertion of women’s voice in spaces and discourses which would exclude or silence them.”⁸⁰ With all of these remarkable credentials, how is it then, one might wonder, that this person could have been so soon forgotten? How is that her liberation theology and her vision of interdependent responsibilities remained so lost in the halls of history? We’ll keep these questions in mind as we journey through this dissertation and return to them in the epilogue. It should not be difficult however to notice the parallels as we now begin to examine experiences of exclusion, fables of “freedom,” and struggles for sanity.



Fig. 7
Mural in Philadelphia at 3032 Girard Avenue. The quote is from long-time activist and co-founder of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Ella Baker: “We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest.” To her right is Malcolm X. To her left is Martin Luther King, Jr. and Frederick Douglass. Painting by Parris Stancell. Photo by Tony Fischer.

⁷⁹ Wiley 2015; Schulster 2010.

⁸⁰ Hubbard 2012: 74.

1. Introduction

Freedom means choosing your burden.

-Hephzibah Menuhin

All you need to know is you were born of water. And you are made of water.

-Cloud Cult

In *The Story of American Freedom*, white historian and Pulitzer Prize winner Eric Foner began his account by stating:

No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom. The central term in our political vocabulary, "freedom" —or "liberty," with which it is almost always used interchangeably —is deeply embedded in the documentary record of our history and the language of everyday life.⁸¹

He has not been alone in testifying to the unique stature of "freedom" as an organizational concept. "Freedom" has been called, "the primary emotionally positive word of our language,"⁸² "the soil required for the full growth of other values,"⁸³ the "worthiest and most sacred possession of man,"⁸⁴ "the most important political concept in modern and Enlightenment political theory,"⁸⁵ and "unchallenged as the supreme value of the Western world" as well as "the one value that many people seem prepared to die for."⁸⁶ Yet "freedom" has not always been so central to political philosophy. "Freedom" may represent the largest statue in the United States today (the Statue of Liberty), but in ancient Rome only one small statue has ever been found representing

⁸¹ Foner 1998: xiii.

⁸² Podoksik 2010: 237.

⁸³ Bay 1965: 19.

⁸⁴ Hegel, in Patten 2002: 4.

⁸⁵ Hirschmann 2003: 209.

⁸⁶ Patterson 1991: ix.

libertas. While it has boomed in significance, it has hardly thrived in clarity. As legal scholar J. L. Hill wrote, “Freedom is arguably the central animating value of the American political order, yet American statesmen and political thinkers have done little better than philosophers in arriving at a uniform understanding of the idea.”⁸⁷ This is hardly a problem unique to “freedom.” To the contrary, it seems to plague most of the central terms upon which academic conversations in the social sciences are built. As Joan Cocks has written:

The terms of political discourse are the words we use to talk about problems and possibilities in the political world, but they also are problems and possibilities in themselves. “Power,” “justice,” “equality,” “tyranny,” and so on are, first of all, intellectual puzzles without definitive solutions, in that any conceptualization of any of these terms will spark its own revision, refinement, extension, or counter-conceptualization when it inevitably is found to be inadequate to its object in some way. In turn, those contrasting concepts will spark new chains of revisions, refinements, and counter-concepts. Magnifying the undecidability of each political keyword is the fact that its conceptualization involves the use of other keywords (sometimes political, but sometimes philosophical, aesthetic, religious, or economic) that are intellectual puzzles without definitive solutions, too.

Take, for example, the classical liberal definition of freedom proposed by J. S. Mill in *On Liberty*. The individual is free to the extent that he can form his own thought and feeling, opinions and sentiments, tastes, associations, goals for action, and style of life. ...the free individual can pursue his self-regarding interests without interference by others but is obligated to contribute to their collective security and refrain from injuring them. While at first glance Mill’s proposition seems straightforward, ...a host of new questions about freedom and the other key terms on which Mill relies. What constitutes injury to another? Are any interests purely self-regarding? What is a self? Are sovereignty and freedom synonyms? Every term of political discourse is not just an intellectual but also a political Pandora’s box. People with clashing ideological commitments in the world also will clash over the meaning of the keywords they use to talk about the world and even may go to war because, to stay with our example, they value freedom but disagree in part about what freedom means and who is its proper subject.⁸⁸

It may be curious then that, despite a lack of clarity about what it means, there seems to be a certainty among many scholars (indeed, it tends to be the normative backdrop) that Europeans invented it. Indeed, this is often taken for granted as the anthology *Freedom* exemplified. Occasionally this is made explicit. White sociologist and religious studies author Rodney Stark said:

⁸⁷ Hill 2003: 502.

⁸⁸ Cocks 2014: 11-12.

Thus, when Plato was writing the Republic, his focus was on the polis, on the city, not on its citizens—indeed, he even denounced private property. In contrast, it is the individual citizen who was the focus of Christian political thought, and this in turn explicitly shaped the views of later European political philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke. This was, quite literally, revolutionary stuff, for the Christian stress on individualism is “an eccentricity among cultures.” Freedom is another concept that simply doesn’t exist in many, perhaps most, human cultures—there isn’t even a word for freedom in most non-European languages.⁸⁹

This lack of clarity combined with cultural particularism has hardly hindered the term from being laden throughout popular culture in film, music, art, and political campaigns as a universal value. From the little book of matches that I found blazoned with an American flag and the slogan “Freedom lights the way” to the full-page advertisement from a country music singer in *Parade* magazine that says “FREE” in bold letters, from every single U.S. coin with the word “liberty” imprinted on it to the plastic Liberty Bell that I found in the street in 2013 that stated on the back “Made in China,” the presentation of “freedom” is everywhere in the United States. Former House Majority leader Richard Arme y once stated: “No matter what cause you advocate, you must sell it in the language of freedom”; and the *Washington Post* wrote about then-President George W. Bush, Jr. “Freedom is the president’s favorite foreign policy term these days.”⁹⁰

Yet, while the term may be virtually omnipresent in the United States, the experience of “freedom” may be notably scarce. In *Rethinking Freedom* (2005), political scientist and psychologist C. Fred Alford, set out to find out how Americans related their *experiences* of “freedom” to their *definitions* of “freedom.” In the largely middle class sample of his qualitative study he concluded that the two seemed to have little in common. One of the things that struck him most was hearing them describe their feelings of imprisonment in a supposedly free society. *Less than half of the Americans he interviewed regarded the U.S. to be a free country.*⁹¹ The pursuit of the American Dream left many of them feeling caged by their lack of money, time, and control over their own lives. This led them to define “freedom” as “power” (something they did not

⁸⁹ Stark 2005: 23-24.

⁹⁰ Alford 2005: 3, 1; The Arme y quote was taken by Alford from Foner 1998: 324-325.

⁹¹ Alford, *Rethinking Freedom*, 2005: 12. Alford study consisted of interviews with 52 people (35 of them 18-30 years old and 17 of them 31-74 years old).⁹¹ His respondents (or “informants” as he called them) were “men and women” (presumably no “other”) and he gives no percentage of the breakdown. Many of them attended the state university where he taught. About 70% self-identified as “white” while others self-identified as black, Indian, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed. Alford wrote that “All but two are American U.S. citizens. Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian: this list does not exhaust the religious diversity of the people I talked with” (2005: 5). Though he stated that “race and ethnicity seemed to influence people’s responses,” the sample was too small to draw conclusions in that respect.

have).⁹² In contrast, their *experiences* of “freedom” were not equated with power so much as they were with feelings of escape, bonding with friends, and so on. This confused Alford because it did not seem as if the values upon which the United States was based had much meaning to them:

“Doesn’t freedom of speech mean anything,” I asked?

“Not really. It’s just a symbol.”

It is in this context that the comment by Anita, another of my informants should be understood. “I’ve got all the freedom I need,” she said. “I don’t need any more freedom. “What I need is some control over my own life.”

“What do you mean ‘all the freedom you need,’” I asked in genuine puzzlement.

“I mean that I can say what I want and nobody is going to put me in jail. But what I really need is a job that pays enough so I can work part-time and still go to school. Now that would be real freedom.”⁹³

This constant sense of economic tension and deprivation of control over things that really mattered led many of his interviewees to express a sense of Hobbesian competition (“war of all against all,” *bellum omnium contra omnes*). Rampant individualism was exacting social and psychological costs. Alford wrote: “Why young people, especially, see civilized society in the terms, if not the extremes, of Hobbes’s state of nature is a puzzle worth solving.”⁹⁴ This is interesting because according to Hobbes, such feelings ought to arise *without* the state.⁹⁵ So the contrast between being

⁹² Alford found this both surprising and disturbing. However, this was not a new connection however. “Freedom” as far back as Athens was associated with power (Raaflaub 2004). Even in the United States, this was evident both in the American Revolution (“freedom” as power to be a sovereign nation, power of property, and power over enslaved Africans). Even in light of that, “freedom” as the power of wealth could be seen by the 1830s, according to McDougall who wrote that, “the goddess of liberty, defiant eagles, classical allusions, and symbols of the Enlightenment (like the pyramid and all-seeing eye on the dollar bill) gave way in magazines and posters to pictures of rich fields of grain, factories, and merchant ships—the fruits of liberty rather than liberty itself” (1997: 79-80).

⁹³ Alford 2005: 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid 7; There is an irony here in that even among Alford’s interviewees (whom he states that “none are poor”), described a reasoning about life that recalled Hobbes depiction of life *prior* to the state as nasty, brutish, and short (2005: 4). One of them even stated, “The ancient Greeks were freer than we are.” When Alford asked if this was because the men participated in politics, he was met with a blank stare: “No, because they didn’t have passports. They could just go where they wanted when they wanted. If they didn’t like something, they could just leave.”

⁹⁵ Two interviewees were anarchists and were the only ones who talked about “freedom” in “political” terms. In both cases, they had come to Washington DC to protest meetings of the World Trade

told that one was “free” while experiencing the opposite riled some of his interviewees. A representative quote from an informant, Dave, follows:

Freedom makes me angry. Everyone says I’m free, only I don’t feel free. I have loans to pay back, and a boss who thinks I don’t work hard enough. My wife’s sick and can’t work, and our HMO won’t let her see a specialist. I can’t even take a vacation. On a good day it takes me an hour to drive to work. If I were free, I’d have more choices, I wouldn’t feel so boxed in.⁹⁶

In Dave’s words, we find a starting point for this thesis: “If I were free, I’d have more choices, I wouldn’t feel so boxed in.” That is, one hand, he is being told that he already *is* “free.” His feelings tell him otherwise. A socialist analysis would say that he’s right. He’s not “free” precisely because he has no control over his work and public resources. He’s become alienated from his labor and his life. If he organized with others, they could hope to take over their jobsites, rid the country of capitalist bosses and the state that protects them, and *then* experience “freedom.” That may or may not be an advisable strategy but such an analysis is far too advanced for the purposes here. Instead, of saying what “freedom” really *is* or *isn’t*, I want to explore first: what is it *doing*? That is, before I even think about defining “freedom,” I want to know if it is possible to ask what is going on with the use of the term regardless of who it is defined. At a very basic level, Dave’s statement is saying something like this: “I hear that *x* is good. I am told that *x* characterizes my life. My life feels like crap. Therefore it is not *x*. It bothers me more to hear people talk about *x*.” So, at the personal level, “freedom” functioned for Dave more like an irritant, something akin to the smell of a delicious meal from a stranger’s home that calls forth more hunger without satisfying it. But what is the story of *x*? Why is *x* used at all if it makes people hungry but doesn’t fill their belly? Not only that but how did *x* become such a central value in society if it so many people find it useless? Recalling that most of Alford’s interviewees did not describe the U.S. as a “free country,” it may be appropriate to wonder if “freedom” is more like an advertisement than the actual product. If so, one might be tempted to ask what is it advertising (this question is asked by most philosophers of “freedom”) or who is paying for the advertisement (this question is answered by socialists). Yet, the questions here are instead: Is the ad harmful in any way? If so, how so? Are different people affected differently by the ad? Is the ad necessary? If not, what might replace it? What *are* all those products that it’s telling us about anyway?

Organization: “We didn’t march,” said one. “We ran through the streets, a thousand black-masked anarchists. It was my greatest experience of freedom. For a little while we owned the city.” “I was part of a group without losing any of my individuality. I never felt like that before,” said the other anarchist. “It was awesome.” (Ibid: 15).

⁹⁶ Ibid: 13; Remember, Alford noted that none of his respondents were “poor.” This miserable life is that of the so-called “middle class.” Words like “freedom” and “middle class” seem to have sounded to Dave like code-words for “you have no right to complain because other people have it worse.”

Metaphors, while occasionally helpful, can only get us so far. This is not literally a dissertation about advertisements. This dissertation is an exercise in critical inquiry about conversations of “freedom.” Re-formulating the questions above in a more straight-forward fashion we get the following two-part question:

(a) How might the concept of “freedom” have contributed to the exclusion of certain people and hindered them from participating in decision-making processes that affect them?

(b) What might be done to contribute to the dismantling of that hindrance and thereby increase inclusion and connection between decision-making and the people who are affected by those decisions?

To these ends, I have first tried to identify what the hindrances might be. As the central question suggests, however, there is an underlying assumption here, namely that “freedom” *does* somehow hinder. Briefly, the hindrances that I have found were several interwoven historical processes and ideas: enslavement, colonialism, racism, conceptual paradox, and European exceptionalism. This last idea is based on the proposition that Europeans invented “freedom” and this is followed by two logical consequences: First, Europeans do not need to study non-European languages or schools of thought and practice in order to better understand “freedom.” Second, all people wishing to study the idea of “freedom” must begin and base their study within a European history of ideas. So a fundamental question here is if the central components in conversations about “freedom” actually *are* foreign to languages and cultures that do not seem to have a word for “freedom.” In other words, to what extent is the idea of European exceptionalism in regard to “freedom” justified and to what extent does this claim function as an arbitrary boundary?

The point here is to first recognize that there is an ideology of “freedom” before there is a clear conception of it. In other words, I am not interested at all in asking what “freedom” *really* means. Instead, I have looked at conversations of “freedom” and looked for signs of conversational content or dynamics that would justify exclusion of non-Europeans from the conversation. So the assumption of European exceptionalism is being addressed first before the conversation can be fruitfully engaged because that exceptionalism is *part* of the conception itself by determining which voices and which perspectives are able to speak from which vantage points to which degree and with what sort of respectability. Changing the rules of inclusion changes the content of the conversation. In fact, one of the first comments one might expect in the context of “freedom” from a newcomer might be: “Thank you. It’s very nice of you to let me into a conversation about ‘freedom’ that you have been hindering me from participating in for 400 years. We’ve got lots of catching up to do!” In regard to the United States, the first voices to be excluded were of those people whose land was to be occupied. In order for the land to be occupied, the inhabitants had to be removed. Exclusion from the earth preceded exclusion from conversations.

It has been written that “Critical to the decolonial process is creating, developing, and implementing a new epistemic frame.”⁹⁷ If this is true, then exposing the violent and exclusive dynamics within the ideological construct of “freedom” ought to be one part of this process of epistemic decolonization.⁹⁸

Once this series of smoke-and-mirrors is dismantled, it becomes clear that the basic ingredients in conversations about “freedom” are easily translatable into non-European languages and their long traditions of negotiating terms such as “violence,” “power,” “ability,” “equality,” “rules,” or “obligations” as well as concepts such as “access to decision-making processes” and “social justice.” Whereas Orlando Patterson had written that most languages did not have a word for “freedom” and therefore did not need to be studied, Kelly and Reid responded in *Asian Freedoms* that this was simply not true: “Servitude and oppression are resented everywhere; Asian peoples do not inhabit a separate planet. When they themselves appeal to freedom as a universal standard of political and other values, this can hardly be dismissed as a bourgeois Western, hegemonic invention.”⁹⁹

How then can conceptions of “freedom” that are not rooted primarily in dominant European thinkers (from Thomas Hobbes to Immanuel Kant to Karl Marx to Jean-Paul Sartre) be approached so as to connect the two separate conversations bound by a common word? The suggestion offered in this dissertation is the use of the concept of *(un)freedom* in order to help transcend the either/or binary of “freedom versus unfreedom” and include discussions of “freedom’s opposites” within studies of “freedom.”

This concept of *(un)freedom* is then used to examine the appearance of “freedom” in three social contexts that all, to varying degrees, bear non-European conceptions of

⁹⁷ Martinez 2014: 80.

⁹⁸ With “epistemic” referring to forms of knowledge and “decolonization” referring both to the dismantling of formal colonialism as well as cultural and cognitive colonialism, “epistemic decolonization” essentially entails deprogramming thought processes and mental habits that have been conditioned to think in ways that benefit(ed) colonialist interests. As Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird wrote in their “Decolonization Handbook”: “Decolonization is the meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands. Its ultimate purpose is to overturn the colonial structure and realize Indigenous liberation. First and foremost, decolonization must occur in our own minds” (2012: 3).

⁹⁹ Kelly and Reid 1998: 9. Kelly and Reid’s anthology was an explicit response to Patterson’s claim. If anything, this dissertation ought to stake a parallel claim to Kelly and Reid that does not necessarily challenge Patterson’s assertion but, in challenging the very concept of “freedom,” it does argue that more work such as Kelly and Reid’s could be undertaken without the sense of constraint to European-based conceptions that I sensed in their anthology. Yet, until one has unpacked the ideology of “freedom,” it will be difficult to recognize that one need not assume that “freedom,” even in European philosophy, is *ever* independent from “unfreedom” of some sort.

“freedom” along with their use of the term.¹⁰⁰ In addition to critiquing the ideology and concept of “freedom” and exploring alternatives, this dissertation contributes to the historical assessment of ideas within three distinct contexts: the Unitarian Universalist Association, the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore.¹⁰¹

Aims, Locations, Materials, and Methods

In accordance with the old saying “dig where you stand,” I have chosen to examine voices of people from three separate contexts who are relatively close to me but who nonetheless reflect different degrees or types of tension with the boundaries of dominant conversations about “freedom.” I wanted to see what could be found within those voices that could be relevant to conversations about “freedom” but which, for one reason or another, might be excluded from the very types of conversations that have impact on them (textbooks, films, journals, etc.).

Beginning with overviews of conversations about “freedom,” racism, and violence, this project stakes no claim to a “God’s-eye view.” These are brief subjective selections from material available to me. Nor is there any aspiration here to repeat conventional histories about racism, the United States, UUs, MOVE, taqwacore, or theories of “freedom.” It ought to be emphasized that this the aim here is decidedly not to state anything about what any particular group *is*. It will be noted at times what some of them are *not* when addressing stereotypes that have been created about them. The distinction is that speaking about what something is, tends toward the essentialist (unless one is stating that a person or group “is” complex, multi-faceted, and changing over time). Rejecting essentialist labels, however, is merely to assert the fallacy of oversimplification.

Undoubtedly many notable thinkers or doers, events or ideas, will be left out of this project. Checking off a list of presumably essential names was not a large concern here so material was gathered according to subjectively assessed relevance to the central themes. These shortcomings may make this project less valuable for specialists in any

¹⁰⁰ This is not to imply that there is a clear boundary between what is or is not European but, as we move along, it shall be clear that the idea of exclusive European conversations about “freedom” has been formed historically by depicting indigenous peoples as the ultimate “Other” and by situating certain Northern European thinkers (Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Locke, Mill, Marx, etc.) as the center for conversations about “freedom.” Thus, the line for what is labeled “European” here is drawn not by me but by various authors and textbooks discussed in this thesis such as the aforementioned anthology *Freedom* by Carter, Kramer, and Steiner.

¹⁰¹ I label them “distinct” here because, if nothing else, their central texts are three distinct documents and the people who tend to identify with each context tend to be distinct from one another. That said, there turned out to be considerably more overlap and connections between all three of them than I had expected.

field yet the basic premises ought to still sustain enough critique to provide *some* relevance to a variety of fields. In tandem with an enthusiasm for a generalist approach, this dissertation continues from the overviews to a more specialized glance at the UUA, MOVE, and taqwacore and, in each case, documenting material and/or providing insights that have hitherto not been brought forth by previous research.

By examining their texts and performing interviews and participatory observations, I hoped to be able to cull an understanding of ideas that might be relevant when thinking about “freedom” but which had been excluded from dominant conversations. Such an understanding might provide insights about how to include the excluded. It was far from a linear process and I have been forced to repeatedly re-visit my material, re-visit my method, and re-visit my aims. Ultimately, I found myself wanting to say less rather than more. The more fundamental the problems were in addressing the question of “freedom,” the less possible it would be to prove, demonstrate, explain, describe, analyze, or argue much of anything. I found that my broad aim was two-fold.

The first part was to try to create a research process for myself that fit in accordance with my conscience and thereby slowly engaged the people in the study as co-workers in dialogue rather than objects of study. This means that this thesis is a window to an ongoing project. It is one snapshot of where I am at so far in a process. This process, in some way, is expected to continue onward because I am in dialogue with all three of these contexts at a personal as well as research level. The aim here is not to demonstrate conclusions about the contexts from which material was drawn nor is the purpose to compare them with one another. The purpose is to bring to light certain conversations and ideas and locate their relevance in relation to larger conversations about “freedom/unfreedom.” Subsequently, I have not seen a purpose in being particularly detailed on providing the dates and location for every interview or participatory observation that I performed. If they are cited later on in the text then all of the necessary details are provided then. Yet the focus is “freedom” and how we speak about it—not the people I had originally set out to “study.” If I were to provide “conclusions” about the people in this study as an “expert scholar,” it would feel as if I were stealing (or trying to steal) their voices when they are fully capable of speaking for themselves. Many of them have already felt misrepresented by scholars or the media and rather than attempt to correct all of those misrepresentations (an entire thesis in itself), I tried to shift my focus in relation to them into the form of a dialogue. Where that dialogue will ultimately lead, I do not know. This thesis only looks finished because it must be yet the underlying dialogue will hopefully continue and change.

The second part of the research aim was to focus on the conceptual critique of “freedom” and suggest an alternative “(un)freedom” using material drawn from those contexts and, by these means, simply present an argument—or perhaps more accurately a question—in regard to dominant regimes of thought and practice around “freedom” scholarship, asking people who think and write about “freedom” to either justify the continued use of the term or to radically re-configure it.

As such, this thesis —as I regard all science and culture— is regarded here as a form of story. It tells a tale of *how* I have come about this line of argument, *which* scholars have said something similar in certain respects, *what* the sources of my material are, *how* I substantiate my arguments, and *what* I recommend doing about the perceived problem. My aims here are very limited in that the goal here is not to provide new proof about “freedom” or any of the contexts examined here. As William Jones wrote in *Is God a White Racist?*, “My real purpose is not to preclude further debate by providing the truth, but to suggest an interpretative forum in which that debate can occur.”¹⁰²

Not only does the integration of a story-telling perspective here facilitate a link to indigenous knowledge systems and traditions, it also enables a generalist approach to research. This has been critical. The hyper-focus and hyper-specialization within academia is not conducive to seeing broader patterns that can bring conversations from various traditions together. Sometimes specialization is exactly what is needed in order to understand something (microbiology, for example). Other times, specialization focuses on a tiny part (see Fig. 8) and seems to miss the broader picture (see Fig. 9). Significantly, conversations about “freedom” are incredibly broad (stretching over millennia in multiple languages and in countless volumes of work) and span within so many disciplines (psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, history, political science, philosophy, religious studies, etc.). I have come to believe that one of the reasons why “freedom” is typically assumed to be a term that is useful and why it is so rarely investigated with a critical eye as a fictive ideological construct is precisely because specialization inhibits a scholarly mind to attempt a skeptical overview. Any intelligent scholar would instantly balk at the thought of setting sail on such a dark and stormy ocean in the hopes of finding anything useful. As it is, I am not intelligent enough to balk at the project so I embarked on the journey.

¹⁰² Jones 1973: 203.



Fig. 8
Material for specialized research focus.



Fig. 9
The broader picture that was overlooked by specialized focus (artwork by Tom Fiscella, ca. 1969).

Situating the Study Within Existing Research

This dissertation is written within the field of history of religion which in itself is part of the discipline of religious studies. Yet what qualifies precisely as “history” or “religion” is hardly a self-evident matter, and there is no consensus within religious studies as to what “religion” even means. Although there have been a number of attempts to provide an ultimate definition that could be universally acceptable, it would be optimistic to say that the jury is out. The jury has not even convened. With religious studies itself consisting of numerous sub-categories (anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, history of religion, law and religion, etc.) and specialized fields (Sanskrit studies, the neuroscience of belief, religion and theater, Aboriginal ritual studies, etc.) there is no common location for the jury to even consider convening. Lacking a standard technical definition, the burden currently lies upon each individual researcher to define for their readership what they mean when they use the term “religion.”¹⁰³

The purpose of this section is to help the reader understand both what is meant by “religion” in this thesis, how a study of “freedom” connects to religious studies, and how this project in particular connects with religious studies.

Critical Religion and Related Categories

Scholars of Critical Religion have located “religion” as a one piece of the larger puzzle of colonial order. In particular, Timothy Fitzgerald in *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity* (2007) located “religion” in relation to the colonial demand for the creation of “savages” who could be both conquered and rescued from their own state by “civilized” colonizers. The very idea of “religion” as a distinct field of study or area of life separate from “politics,” “science,” and “culture” is, for Fitzgerald, an *ideology* rather than a concept. Therefore, in order to be able to speak of “religion” in a meaningful sense, it always has to be accompanied by its “related categories” through which it is juxtaposed and given meaning.

According to Fitzgerald, the idea of “religion” as something separate from “politics” only developed gradually after it was suggested by John Locke in the late 1600s. Prior to that time, that which is thought of as “religion” permeated society and governance. There was not an inherent conceptual distinction. This all changed during the colonial period. With the growth of academic institutions, the colonial order that divided up indigenous land, people, culture, and rights into fragments received its conceptual counterpart in the reproduction of “religion,” “politics,” “science,” and

¹⁰³ Religious studies scholar J. Milton Yinger claimed that one could arrive at more than a hundred definitions in a couple hours (1970: 4). Anthropologist Jared Diamond listed 16 different definitions of “religion” offered by various scholars and, after noting the lack of disagreement, he then proceeded to concoct his own definition of “religion” based on pre-existing implicit assumptions about what “religion” *must* be (2012: 326-327). Some scholars have even presumed to see “religion” in the behavior of chimpanzees (e.g., Glass 2007).

“law” as if they were all distinct separate categories. They were not separate but the projection of them as if they were filled a function for the colonialists:

The categories of ‘religion’ and ‘religions’, which are being constantly regenerated by the subject area of religious studies, are an important constituent part of modernity. The ideology of religious studies defines both modernity and colonial consciousness. We are not studying what exist in the world, but by reproducing religion and religions we are tacitly reproducing the whole rhetorical configuration.¹⁰⁴

The configuration is not isolated to “religion” but is intrinsically interwoven with the “related categories” that co-define “religion” through ambiguous binaries. “Religion,” however it is defined, is presumed to be “not politics,” “not culture,” and “not science.” Yet those categories are similarly difficult to define. So science is “not politics” and “politics” is “not religion” and so on. To discuss “religion” and only discuss those topics typically placed in that category according to prototypical models simply reproduces “the whole rhetorical configuration.” Abiding by arbitrary boundaries makes them seem real.

This is one reason why it has seemed critical for me to study “freedom” in the field of “history of religion.” Conversations about “freedom” fit squarely within the critical study of “Religion and Related Categories.”¹⁰⁵ Crossing boundaries is a practical means of exposing them and simultaneously exposing ideology disguised as neutrality. In a critique of a prominent NRM scholar, Fitzgerald wrote:

Thus, Bryan Wilson exemplifies the neutral, objective scholar who looks out onto history and sees the various objects of his analysis changing. What he doesn’t see or convey is that his own consciousness, and the categories in which we think and attempt to understand them as rhetorical devices for persuading ourselves to see the world in a particular way. In short, the sociological consciousness and imagination, which is taken for granted and embedded in the description, is itself part of the problematic.¹⁰⁶

So for Fitzgerald the terribly difficult task is to tackle those thoughts that we take for granted. This task is difficult in part because it entails tearing apart a language from the inside. Unless one creates new terms, the old ones are likely to hold one’s thought patterns captive because they fit with in a network that supports them. “Religion” could shift meaning (as it did gradually and through much effort and organization) because it had powerful interests *shifting* it. States were created, constitutions were written, laws were enacted (and enforced), media was influenced through propaganda, and academic institutions were established with disciplinary boundaries that entrenched the shifts through specializations whose very practices reinforced the arbitrary divisions.

¹⁰⁴ Fitzgerald 2007: 26.

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, following Fitzgerald’s lead, the topic here at hand could well be described as “Freedom and Related Categories.” See also McCutcheon 1997.

¹⁰⁶ Fitzgerald 2007: 97.

Imagining research without disciplinary boundaries between “politics” and “religion” today has become a bit like imagining theology without “God.” Through their institutionalization the concepts have become imbedded in careers, jargons, policies, and practices that, in turn, determine their own necessity.

So even when “religion” has been critiqued (which is relatively rare in academic discourse), it has not always been done so wholeheartedly. Fitzgerald took up Jonathan Z. Smith as an example. On one hand, Smith critiqued “religion” for having “no independent existence apart from the academy” and therefore urged self-reflexivity. This seemed to be a solid stance until Smith later stated that there are massive amounts of data which could be regarded as “religious” and it was therefore a useful term. Yet, Fitzgerald wondered, if the term is devoid of meaning then how can it nonetheless be presented as something useful?¹⁰⁷ Because this unconscious colonial framework remains entrenched and unquestioned, research itself is affected and becomes inadvertently a tool for colonial ideology.

We are not really engaged in ‘secular’ neutral research and description of things that exist in the world, but are engaged in acts of rhetoric whereby we try to persuade others to see the world in this particular way. The discourse on religion and world religions is ostensibly about one domain, for example, the ‘supernatural’ (another unstable and unclear term), whereas it is just as much about constructing another domain, the ‘natural’. It is about ‘faith’, but it is also constructing and authorizing ‘knowledge’. It is about ‘deities’, but it is also about what constitutes fully rational (scientific and political) humanity. It is about the inner recesses of individual special experiences that go beyond reason, but it is also about legitimating the nonreligious state whose rationality is embedded in natural reason. It is ostensibly about ‘faith communities’ but it is also about naturalising the secular ‘discursive space’ from which these religions become objects of knowledge.¹⁰⁸

As Masuzawa (2005) has discussed, the history of Western theology and its counterpart comparative religious studies provided the source for and remains the major starting point for contemporary religious studies. This includes both colonial creations (such as “Hinduism”) as well as the diminutive status of the “little traditions,” formerly referred to as savage or primitive religions and now granted labels as “animism” or “shamanism.”

If we are to be serious in our critical intention, the exorcism of an undead Christian absolutism would not suffice. Instead, criticism calls for something far more laborious, tedious, and difficult: a rigorous historical investigation that does not superstitiously

¹⁰⁷ Here he provided Smith a possible “out” and surmised that because “...‘religion’...is laden with cultural and ideological assumptions and interests,” it is perhaps this intellectual and social baggage surrounding “religion” that “Smith believes we should be studying. If so, I agree with him” (2007: 39-40).

¹⁰⁸ Fitzgerald, 2007: 40-41.

yield to the comforting belief in the liberating power of “historical consciousness.” We must attend to the black folds, the billowing, and the livid lining of the fabric of history we unfurl, the story we tell from time to time to put ourselves to sleep. This is one of the reasons historiography must always include the historical analysis of our discourse itself.¹⁰⁹

Another critique toward the retention of colonial orders within religious studies can be heard from Peter Ochs:

...still echoing colonialist behaviors we otherwise disavow, our religious studies disciplines still tend to remove “religious phenomena” from the contexts of their societal embodiments and resituate them within conceptual universes of our own devising.¹¹⁰

For Ochs it was important when studying other cultures to take the time to enter their worldview, the matrix of concepts and practices that both inform their texts and which are used to interpret them.¹¹¹ The social and material relationships surrounding any revered text constitute an ecology that is hardly understood by dismembering it into isolated segments. For example, when critics of “Islam” or “Islamism” cite various verses of the Quran which they deem to settle the question on Muslims and violence, the detached and disembodied text becomes more of a tool for verbal warfare by the critic rather than a means for communication. Sacred texts, whether the Talmud, the Upanishads, or the U.S. Constitution are constantly being negotiated and laboriously interpreted by generations of scholars (even as a form of entertainment Ochs would add). The meanings of any given verse are hardly so self-evident to outsiders as they may initially seem.

For critical religion scholars, the very idea of “religion” distorts cross-cultural conversations before they are even begun. Fitzgerald, for example, would like to see the word “religion” dismantled altogether. It is unclear though that this would provide a solution (even if it were possible). Colonial powers can always find new means of legislating away rights. And in the meantime, one cannot just wait until the term disappears. In a review article, Fitzgerald praised Arvind-Pal Mandair for recognizing the concepts of “religion” and “secular” as forms of “epistemic violence,” and he simultaneously critiqued Mandair for accepting and reproducing those terms in his analysis.¹¹² In defending against this critique, Mandair explained how, in 2004, he testified in court in New York that Sikhs had a right to wear turbans at work because turban was a “‘religious’ item,” and “Sikhism was a religion.” Yet, within the span of a

¹⁰⁹ Masuzawa 2005: 328.

¹¹⁰ Ochs 2006: 126.

¹¹¹ This interpretation of Ochs has been supplemented by classroom notes, University of Virginia, Spring semester 2013.

¹¹² Fitzgerald 2010.

few months, he spoke to an advisory group working on a case in France in which religious symbols were being banned and he told them that the turban was “not a religious item” and that “Sikhism was not a ‘religion.’”¹¹³ He repeated this story at a recent conference in Uppsala and some people found it to be arbitrary and perhaps hypocritical.

Yet Mandair’s apparent “double-speak” made sense to me. Language has to be flexible according to pragmatic concerns. If we let language rules or terminologies steer our thinking even when they are suffocating us then we have become prisoners of our own constructs. A drawing of a triangle does not necessarily have the same conceptual associations in one culture as it does in another. Likewise, the word “semester” in the U.S. means “school term.” In Swedish, “semester” means “vacation” —when the school term has *ended*. Similarly, the fact that “religion” is spelled with the same letters in the U.S. as it is in France does not necessarily mean that the term has come to mean the same thing in each country’s jurisprudence. As the systemic logics and ecology of references and associations vary from the U.S. to French jurisprudence, even a slight change in the nuance of meanings attributed to “religion” can lead to very different legal ramifications. Subsequently, a speaker who wants to communicate a single message in two different languages must accordingly adjust their arguments to match the context, language, logic, and conceptual paradigms of the audience.

In this light, Mandair’s declaration that Sikhism was a religion in the U.S. and not a religion in France is no more contradictory or controversial than using “semester” to mean “school term” in New York and to mean “vacation” in Gothenburg. As I pointed out during the conference in Uppsala, the guiding principle in both cases was the same: Sikhs have a right to wear their turbans. Period. Governments did not have a right to remove that right. This principle was going to be communicated to various governments in whatever language *they* needed to hear to understand that. It only *seems* contradictory because we have gone so “native” that we have become blind to the fact that words like “religion” do not have an inherent meaning but are rather constructed for different purposes. And we have similarly become blind to the partisan interests of the state as it regulates meaning legally.

A counter-argument might be that smoking marijuana is legal in Seattle but not in Stockholm. It is not the right of the individual to decide the laws of the nation. Yet the Sikhism-religion case is different. With marijuana, there could be agreement on an object (Seattle and Stockholm laws could potentially agree on what constitutes marijuana) and agreement on the interpretation of law (limited marijuana sales and use is permitted in Seattle and banned in Stockholm). In light of that agreement, the law could be challenged. With “religion,” there is not even agreement *within* the United States court system as to what constitutes “religion” and certainly not agreement between New York and Paris. Whereas marijuana is a physical plant whose contents can be analyzed in a laboratory, “religion” is an abstract concept. However U.S. or

¹¹³ Mandair 2010: 239.

French courts currently define it, their decisions will say nothing about what “religion” *really* means. They only say what it is going to mean for the legal scriptures of their particular national contexts during a specific period of time.

Nor was there agreement between the countries on matters of public interest (e.g., turbans are bad for public health and therefore must be banned). So, in a very different way than claiming the right to smoke pot in Stockholm, a gray zone of arbitrary interpretation took place. Rather than challenging the law, Mandair offered his voice to clear the air as to how a judge ought to reasonably determine “Sikhism” *in that context* in order for each judge to apply the law. In fact, because the context was two different nations, Mandair’s stance was far less controversial than the proposal amongst U.S. legal scholars to interpret “religion” differently *within the same sentence* of the Constitution.¹¹⁴ Finally, the terms and interpretations all presume an equality of citizenship and access to the law which has never existed between states and colonized.¹¹⁵

As there exists no scholarly consensus on the definition of “religion,” the processes of arriving at a “true” definition of “religion” are arbitrary.¹¹⁶ Recognizing this, Mandair

¹¹⁴ The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Treating the establishment clause differently from the exercise clause could be defended because the logic would be that a narrow definition of “religion” for establishment would enable the state to engage in its affairs, public rituals, “ceremonial deism,” and so forth without risking infringement while a broad definition of “religion” for the exercise clause could provide rights to as many as possible without giving preferential treatment to only those groups who resemble white Christian manifestations of “religion.” One prominent scholar who has advocated a dual definition of the First Amendment is white Harvard legal scholar Laurence Tribe (1978: 827-28).

¹¹⁵ This means that not only are legal interpretations of ambiguous terms often quite arbitrary, the patterns of arbitrariness disfavor those without legal power, that is, the colonized. See, for example, how the term “tribe” was used to determine that a group of indigenous peoples were not allowed to get their land back in 1978 (*Mashpee Tribe v. Town of Mashpee*). Against federal law, several Native Americans in the area had sold their land to non-Natives and the rest of the tribe sued to recover the land within the tribe. The court ruled however that the Mashpee did not constitute a tribe, and were therefore not allowed to recover it. Because the Mashpee had genetically intermingled with Europeans, Africans, and other Natives, they were not, in the eyes of the jury and judge, a “tribe” (Harris 1993: 1764-1765). Yet, in a contrasting example, Jack D. Forbes told of how a basketball team from Tucson with dark-skinned Natives with long black hair were excluded from a tournament because they did not have enrollment cards from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They were “not Indians within the meaning of the laws of the government of the United States.” The opposing team from the Great Lakes consisted of urban youth and were lighter-skinned but they had their enrollment cards so they were therefore recognized as legitimately “Indian” (Forbes 1995: 3-4).

¹¹⁶ Sociologist of religion Peter Berger said as much himself: “Definitions cannot, by their very nature, be either ‘true’ or ‘false,’ only more useful or less so. For this reason it makes relatively little sense to argue over definitions. If, however, there are discrepancies in a given field, it makes sense to discuss their respective utility” ([1967] 1990: 175). Berger also mentioned Max Mueller who described “religion” as a “disease of language” and Max Weber’s insistence that a definition should come at the end of the task

declared that the “un-inheriting” of these terms for the formerly colonized “cannot be reduced to a scholarly exercise. It corresponds to a way of life.”¹¹⁷

My point is that postcolonial Sikhs, and postcolonials generally, cannot afford either to disown the terms ‘religion’/‘secular’, or to own them completely as has become commonplace in the neo-colonial reformist/modernist tradition. Rather they must deploy the logic of aporia [irreconcilable contradiction] which allows them to belong and not-belong at the same time. It is a practice that conforms to their existential situation in which the ‘I am’ and the ‘I am not’ become equal possibilities.¹¹⁸

My reading of Mandair here is that if the functional ambiguities inherent in the key terms of language are useful to colonialist and ruling classes in order to dominate people then the same ambiguities ought to be able to be used by colonized peoples to defend their ways of life.

In sum, “religion” can mean what it is supposed to mean to achieve certain ends regardless of whether the person deciding happens to be a scholar, a judge, a practitioner, or a defendant.

The Ideology of New Religious Movements Studies

If religious studies is a new discipline, only branching off from theology a little more than 100 years ago,¹¹⁹ the study of “New Religious Movements” (NRMs) as a separate sub-discipline is even more recent.¹²⁰ While a few sporadic studies existed prior to the 1960s, NRM studies only developed as a sub-discipline in its own right (with distinct conferences, journals, associations, etc.) after the 1960s. Particularly after the Jonestown massacre/suicide in 1978,¹²¹ NRM studies received considerable attention

not the beginning (but he never arrived at the end so he never defined religion overtly). Finally, Berger concluded: “In the long run, I suppose, definitions are matters of taste and thus fall under the maxim *de gustibus* [one cannot dispute matters of taste]” (1990: 177). The problem for many people, including Mandair, is that the arbitrary definition is not a matter of innocent “taste” or preference for one spice over another or one color over another but becomes legally codified into laws and guidelines that grant certain privileges to some groups and not others.

¹¹⁷ Mandair 2010: 239.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 240.

¹¹⁹ Masuzawa 2005.

¹²⁰ Ashcraft 2005.

¹²¹ More than 900 people died in Jonestown on November 18, 1978. Rather than associate this with “Christianity” in general, a special category of “them/not us” was made: “cult.” Given the negative connotations of “cult” and “sect,” most scholars avoid the terms when referring to the people or organizations that they study. Nonetheless, the association of NRMs with groups made famous by media coverage of deaths (People’s Temple, Aum Shinrikyo, Heaven’s Gate, Order of the Solar Temple, etc.) or accusations of “brainwashing” (Unification Church, Children of God, Scientology, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.) has also perhaps contributed to a certain degree of sensationalism within

and became more established within academic study and institutions. Nevertheless, NRM researchers still suffer from a notable degree of discrimination that favors scholars who focus on dominant faith traditions.

Yet, the problems inherent in “religion” as an ideology become only more compound when combined with additional ambiguous terms such as “new” and “movement.” Even if more recent work has used the term “minority religions,” the problem remains.¹²²

The most theoretical inspiration this study has drawn from anything resembling the study of “new religious movements,” would be theoretical work by Reinhold Niebuhr in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). The basic claim of his book was that there is a basic difference between the morality of individuals and that of social groups whether classes, races, or nations. He maintained that these groupings are necessarily more immoral than individuals.

In every human group there is less reason to guide and check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships. ...Failure to recognize the stubborn resistance of group egoism to all moral and inclusive social objectives inevitably involves them in unrealistic and confused political thought.¹²³

In order to fill the need for group cooperation and prosperity, the capacity of individuals for sacrifice and selflessness is channeled within the group toward loyalty to group members. In this way, *selflessness* at the individual level becomes *selfishness* at the group level. One of the ideas that I have found useful here is the way that he highlighted the dilemma that awaits any person’s ability (and even desire) toward routines of selflessness and sacrifice that do not merely shift the dynamics of selfishness to another level.

Rather than “shifting,” I’ll refer to this dynamic as “scuttling.” In other words, the problem of selfishness at the personal level is not cured by devoting oneself to a group. Rather, the problem simply “scuttles” to the next level, the level of the group. If one

NRM studies where those groups have attracted considerably more attention than thus reproducing the images of NRMs as something “controversial” even when many NRM scholars try to combat that stereotype. The association between “violence” and NRMs is, however, even perpetuated within NRM studies. For example, George Chryssides book, *Exploring New Religions* (1999), is laced with a depiction of a burning house surrounded by tanks on the cover.

¹²² Defining “minority” is not so simple in itself either. By what criteria is a group to be defined as a “minority”? Does “minority religion” refer to the faith traditions of ethnic, linguistic, or cultural minorities (e.g., Muslims or Jains living in France)? Or does it primarily refer to members of the dominant ethnicity, language, or culture who have adopted a faith tradition that deviates from that of the rest of the dominant class (e.g., Mormons or ISKCON members living in the U.S.)?

¹²³ Niebuhr 1960: xi-xii, xx.

lived in an isolated community on an island and in harmony with nature then scuttling may not be an issue. Yet that is not the case for us.

In a highly globalized world of both global interdependence and influence as well as acute awareness of global events and developments through electronic communication, the challenge is very real. The concept of climate change and human impact is but one critical example. Posed another way, the question is: How can people identify with all people and be in harmony with the nature of the whole planet in a way that is not hopeless abstract? How can the global be made local in a way that does not simply divert individual selfless and sacrifice to *some* particular group's selfish cause? If the problem does not scuttle to one's government or mainstream religious affiliation, as Niebuhr contended that it did, then where can one turn without selfishness somehow rearing its head? After all, even in marriage and the construction of a nuclear family, selfishness can be scuttled to that tiny group. For Niebuhr, there was no simple solution but he did regard "sects" as possible avenues to collectively pursue group selflessness and sacrifice on behalf of other groups and the larger whole. Niebuhr's concerns, written more than 80 years ago foreshadowed globalization discourse:

Our age is, for good or ill, immersed in the social problem. A technological civilisation makes stability impossible. It changes the circumstances of life too rapidly to incline any one to a reverent acceptance of an ancestral order. Its rapid developments and its almost daily changes in the physical circumstances of life destroy the physical symbols of stability and therefore make for restlessness, even if these movements were not in a direction which imperil the whole human enterprise. But the tendencies of the industrial era are in a definite direction. They tend to aggravate the injustices from which men have perennially suffered; and they tend to unite the whole of humanity in a system of economic interdependence. ...They, furthermore, cumulate the evil consequences of these brutalities so rapidly that we feel under a tremendous pressure to solve our social problem before it is too late.¹²⁴

For Niebuhr, there remained hope in "sects" (he named Quakers and as an example) and "religious inspired pacifists" to ultimately affect change without being compromised by the society it was trying to change.¹²⁵ Whereas fundamentalists and sectarians have been typically viewed with disdain by liberals, Niebuhr saw a constructive function as well:

The absolutist and fanatic is no doubt dangerous; but he is also necessary. If he does not judge and criticise immediate achievements, which always involve compromise, in the light of his absolute ideal, the radical force in history, whether applied to personal or to social situations, finally sinks into the sands of complete relativism.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Ibid 276.

¹²⁵ Ibid 73, 273.

¹²⁶ Ibid 222.

Asceticism, which often accompanies fanaticism, was both a great virtue and a great vice. Applied at the societal level, they could be useful. “Religion” in general and “sects” in particular had constructive potential because a committed and close-knit organization potentially “binds human beings together” in a cause of “non-violent resistance.”¹²⁷ Such actions would be necessary in a pursuit of social justice. It was not enough to rely on the state. Nor could one rely solely on “religion.”

“Reason” and education were the cure for ignorance while “religion” and benevolence were the cure for selfishness. In Niebuhr’s view, “reason” played an important role in the development of society and its potential for social equality and justice. It was, however, not considered to be enough to bring about the necessary change. He criticized the idea, rooted in the Enlightenment, that the development and spread of “reason” would, in itself, resolve social injustice. This would not happen because the state’s selfish concerns for justice were not moral but coldly calculated. Indeed, even in ideal circumstances, justice was not something that *could* be calculated. “Human life would, in fact, be intolerable if justice could be established in all relationships ...only by a shrewd calculation of claims and counter-claims.”¹²⁸ Therefore the burden was upon “society” to rectify this gap but conditions are such that collective responsibility for shared injustices easily becomes the shattered window that nobody wants to claim to have broken. Social inequality is sustained by a compulsive desire to pass the buck:

It is impossible to completely disassociate an evil social system from the personal moral responsibilities of the individuals who maintain it. An impartial teacher of morals would be compelled to insist on the principle of personal responsibility for social guilt. But it is morally and politically wise for an opponent not to do so.¹²⁹

The challenge was to organize social relations in such a way that people would take responsibility for those matters. Organized non-violent resistance then was for Niebuhr a matter of taking responsibility for that which is shared but which cannot be calculated.

Not only could persons from the dominant classes be regarded as responsible for an immoral society’s behavior but even oppressed minorities shared a responsibility before their fellow oppressed. Niebuhr gave the example of “Negroes in the United States” and noted that those who accept injustice against their race without resentment do a disservice to their race and the prospects for their ultimate emancipation. His work

¹²⁷ Ibid 254-255. He had lesser hopes for Europeans than Asians, however. Inspired by the example of Gandhi and disheartened by the lack of such examples in the occident, he wrote that “the white man is a fiercer beast of prey than the oriental” (1960: 255).

¹²⁸ Ibid 265.

¹²⁹ Ibid 249.

later had an influence on prominent African American activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Al Sharpton.

Writing as a theologian writing long before NRM studies, Niebuhr's work is not nearly as influential for contemporary scholars as Emile Durkheim or Max Weber yet this particular work is notable in part for both its critique of the state¹³⁰ and its depiction of "sects" as less a social concern than as a possible channel for social justice change.

Looking at the contemporary study of "New Religious Movements" (NRMs) or "Minority religions" we can find other studies that have, like this one, focused on three different contexts. Hutchinson (2009) studied the Unification Church, Nation of Yahweh, and Feminist Wicca (with a focus on antiquity). Mazur (1999) studied Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Native Americans (with a focus on legal contestations). Zeller (2010) studied the Unification Church, the Hare Krishna movement, and Heaven's Gate (with a focus on each group's view of science). This study, with an empirical emphasis on the Unitarian Universalist Association, the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore (and with a focus on each group's view of "freedom"), was originally intended to take shape along lines similar to those studies.

However, due to intellectual misgivings (the role of "objective" researcher providing "facts"), ethical concerns (scholarly power telling stories *about* rather than *with*), and a gradual shift in focus (from "alternative conceptions of freedom" toward a critical analysis of "freedom"), this study has deviated considerably from standard approaches.

Although this study has empirical overlap with research on Unitarian Universalists, the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore, the very nature of this study—engaging in dialogue *with* rather than merely *about* each group—separates it from such work. The goal here is less to provide information about such people than to draw from them in order to sketch out a means by which ideas can be more usefully discussed (as opposed to the using "freedom"). This thesis argues not just for an alternative theory but for a new methodology as well: one that integrates a critical analysis of colonial order—and subsequently colonial-critical methods—into *all* research projects.

This is also why this dissertation is largely not in conversation with contemporary NRM scholarship insofar as a critical perspective as outlined above is often lacking in

¹³⁰ It ought to be noted that despite his harsh critique of the state, Niebuhr was decidedly opposed to anarchism and regarded "Tolstoian pacifists" to be deluded into thinking that anarchism could work. In Niebuhr's mind, "there are definite limits of moral goodwill and social intelligence beyond which even the most vital religion and the most astute educational programme will not carry a social group, whatever may be possible for individuals in an intimate society" (1960: 20). Basically, for him, we are stuck with the state and the best we can hope for is to reign in its violence under popular control. Whether or not this merely scuttles the problem of violence to the realm of national and global democracy is up for debate. Due to his skepticism in light of the "stupidity of the average man" to let oligarchs deceive and control, Niebuhr was not particularly hopeful in this regard either.

that field.¹³¹ In NRM studies, there has been a great deal of study on “groups” or “movements” wherein the larger societal context (e.g., the objective violence of the state or colonialism) is often made invisible (and hence normalized) by focusing on social phenomena and contexts as singular entities that deviate from the backdrop.

In fact, it is one contention here that the tendency toward simplistic models is one reason why MOVE has received so little attention by NRM researchers: they did not match the prototypical images of other material. They did not overtly draw from “Eastern” sources (such as ISKCON, Osho), they did not overtly draw from “Islam,” “Christianity,” or “Judaism” (Nation of Islam, Children of God, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unification Church, Mormons, Nation of Yahweh), they certainly were not UFO enthusiasts (Heaven’s Gate, Raelians), they did not fit into the image of human potential movement (Scientology, Est, Silva Mind Control), and they were not European earth-lovers (neo-paganism, Wicca). Potential studies on MOVE disappeared in the gaps between the concepts that were informing research.¹³² Similarly, the UUA has received some but relatively little attention in NRM studies perhaps because many Unitarian Universalists are so enmeshed in the white cultural elite that they do not fit the stereotypes of NRMs as something deviant. Their respective backgrounds in humanism, transcendentalism, and Calvinism can also make Unitarians and Universalists seem to have a much longer (and more conventional) history than the actual date of the founding of the UUA in 1961 with its relatively radical departure from dominant views on “religion.” Finally, Unitarians happened to be among the earliest enthusiasts for comparative religion studies in the 1800s.¹³³ Consistently providing self-histories that stretch far back in time, UU scholars would be unlikely to characterize the UUA as a “new religion” and certainly not a “sect” or a

¹³¹ There are, of course, exceptions such as Tabor and Gallagher’s (1995) study of the Branch Davidians in Waco or Bron Taylor’s studies on faith and ecology (2002; 2011). However, studies such as Tabor and Gallagher tend to critique the state or law enforcement choices, but fall far short of critiquing colonial order and Taylor’s work is exceptional regarding ecology but again lacks both a critical colonial and critical race perspective. In reviewing two scholarly works on NRMs in 1999, Anthony Pinn noted how considerable analysis of sexism was present but not racism or ethnic conflict: “Virtually nothing, for example, is said concerning the overt racial conflicts of the 1960s (and 1970s) in the USA and elsewhere and the manner in which NRMs might have served as a response to these conflicts.” Despite tremendous social changes across the globe in relation to African independence, colonialism, and resistance movements, the silence of these books left Pinn wondering, “What is the relationship between NRMs, decolonialization, and the rise of liberation theologies?” (2000: 150). My own experience with NRM literature would suggest that this type of exclusion in NRM studies is the norm rather than the exception.

¹³² Only one scholar in religious studies has ever published an article on MOVE (Floyd-Thomas 2002).

¹³³ Mace 2014: 76. Currently, at least one prominent scholar within NRM studies identifies as Unitarian (George Chryssides).

“cult.”¹³⁴ Although taqwacore has received some attention by religious studies scholars,¹³⁵ it would be difficult to accuse taqwacore of corresponding remotely to common definitions of a “cult” and I have yet to see the scene described by a scholar as an “NRM.”

One recent example of NRM research is an anthology edited by James Lewis and Jesper Petersen entitled *Controversial New Religions* (2014). Neither the UUA, nor MOVE, nor taqwacore were covered there (although Knight’s work on the Five Percenters was cited). If many of the chapters were informative and interesting in their own right, two main problems with this type of work typify NRM research in general: an inexplicable focus on “controversy” and a Newton-era approach to methodology. Beginning with the latter, NRM scholar Susan Palmer was cited approvingly as stating:

If you’re interested in studying religion... NRMs are a great place to start. Their history is really short, they don’t have that many members, their leader is usually still alive, and you can see the evolution of their ritual and their doctrines. It’s a bit like dissecting amoebas instead of zebras.¹³⁶

The reader was intended to understand that studying NRMs can help deepen our understanding of “more established religions.” What the reader was presumably not intended to understand was that scholars of NRMs look at the people that they are studying as objects to “dissect.” Nor was the reader presumably intended to question the very idea that “religion” exists. As understood through critical religion theories, the very idea of “New Religious Movements” or “Minority Religions” build upon and reify the term “religion” as a supposedly objective category without questioning the ideology of the whole “rhetorical configuration” that constitutes it.

Yet, the text continued, “one could reasonably argue that one of the few common factors uniting [NRMs] is the fact that they are controversial.”¹³⁷ What remained unexplained was if “controversy” is the major commonality shared by NRMs, then why was that the most interesting way to categorize them? After all, controversy merely

¹³⁴ In fact, the UUA offers workshop material for young members in identifying “cults” and helping people who might be attracted to them. Drawing upon conventional scare tactics about groups of a more close-knit and communal nature, they use the Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones as their primary example of what a “cult” is (See Leader Resource 1: What Do Cults and Religions Do <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/bridges/workshop20>).

¹³⁵ See Abraham and Stewart 2014; Fiscella 2012; Luhr 2010; McDowell 2014.

¹³⁶ Lewis 2014: 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid. In other words, the title *Controversial New Religions* is redundant. While noting that the field of NRMs has focused on controversies surrounding groups such as the Branch Davidians and Aum Shinrikyo and NRM researchers have generally ignored larger but less controversial groups like Eckankar, the editors concluded that they would compile a new volume of work which brought together all of those groups already covered. This means that the anthology will essentially confirm and exaggerate the types of stereotypes already produced by NRM scholarship more than 30 years ago by associating NRMs with “controversy” and the specific names already repeated.

implies that somebody got upset along the way and therefore “controversy” may be saying just as much about the speaker than the one spoken about. For example, Unitarian Universalists were marrying gay people decades before it was legal. It was no doubt controversial. Gay marriage in the U.S. is still controversial (the recent Supreme Court ruling notwithstanding). Yet the UUA has hardly qualified as one of the standard research topics for NRM scholarship. If the category of “controversial” is unhelpful, it also obscures the “controversial” character of the larger societies where these groups developed: mass pollution, arbitrary invasion of sovereign nations, billions of dollars spent to bail out banks, and so on. Certainly the practice lanced by the United States of flying unmanned aircraft into the sovereign territory of various countries and killing civilians therein is regarded by many as extremely controversial but that has hardly led any religious studies scholars to include that in their study. Refusing to ignore this elephant in the academic living room has been one key focus of this study that simultaneously sets this dissertation apart from NRM studies. There are some points of convergence however.

One study specifically addressed tensions between the state and three “religious minorities” was *The Americanization of Religious Minorities* (1999) by Eric Michael Mazur. Through three case studies (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Native Americans), Mazur analyzed “religious freedom.”¹³⁸ If the Mormons were able to integrate more successfully within larger societal structures, it was due not only to their ostensibly “Christian” language and almost exclusively European American membership. It was also due to the fact that they caved in to state demands and changed the stories of their culture to adapt to that pressure: a convenient revelation allowed the majority of Mormons to reject polygamy as a central part of their practice and lifestyle. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, on the other hand, a group of mostly European American believers speaking a language recognized as “Christian,” met with incredible success in court. In standing their ground on key issues they won 70% of more than 50 Supreme Court cases between 1938 and 1960. This meant that a small group made big changes in the larger society who accommodated them and many others who did not belong to their fold but would fall into similar legal categories (such as conscientious objection). The ultimate success and integration of both groups stood in sharp contrast to the unresolved conflicts involving indigenous peoples who did not speak a “Christian”

¹³⁸ Mazur’s basic presentation involved the idea that there are three results from this scrutiny: 1) The courts can concede to the stance of the religious group in question in what he refers to as *constitutional congruence* (Jehovah’s Witnesses); 2) The courts can demand that the religious group that the religious group change and they do in what Mazur refers to as *constitutional conversion* (the vast majority of Mormons); and 3) The courts and the religious group remain in at odds with one another in what he calls *constitutional conflict* (Native Americans). Although his study was focused on legal concerns, it is relevant to the current project here because his work pointed toward underlying issues and intersectionalities (disparities and differences in class, ethnicity, belief system, and culture) that influence how tensions with the state can unfold in a variety of manners (even if Mazur did not always address or emphasize these disparities explicitly).

language and whose claims were often more fundamental (e.g., land rights) than technical (e.g., whether or not forcing schoolchildren to salute the American flag constitutes justifiable coercion). In one sense, his material could be divided between colonialist conflicts and intra-colonialist conflicts with the latter being easier to resolve precisely because the fundament of American society —colonialism and the expropriation of land— was not being questioned.

When the topic of “freedom” has been addressed within NRM studies, it has typically been concerned with either legal issues (“religious freedom”) or issues of personal autonomy (“brainwashing” controversies). In a chapter entitled “The Cage of Freedom and the Freedom of the Cage” (1995), prominent NRM scholar Eileen Barker addressed “freedom” as such and defended “new religious movements” against accusations of brainwashing and removing “freedom” and agency from their members. She countered that the claims are not supported by evidence because many people both testified to feeling “free” while being a member of a NRM and demonstrated that “freedom” by exiting the group. In the first instance, Barker suggested that members typically had reasonable evidence to back up their feelings of “freedom” such as being relieved of obligations to tend to a number of tasks one has to do as an individual such as insurance payments, parents, planning, buying trivial accessories, and so on.

Furthermore, in regard to the second instance, studies saw high-turnover rates which indicated that people stayed or left such groups at will. Even when there are instances of significant control, she observed that such groups are hardly unique and cited monasteries and the Marines as examples of highly controlled group situations. Finally, people who place “freedom” as their highest priority (she used Scientology as an example) can find themselves subject to even more social control and dependency. Barker concluded, “While some may find an increased freedom within a cage, others may find themselves increasingly caged by the very pursuit of freedom.”¹³⁹ This point is noteworthy precisely because of the way it suggests the ambiguity and essential arbitrariness in determining which meaning and connotations are attached to the term “freedom.” It is also noteworthy because it alludes to the idea that the very prioritization of “freedom” as a value can lead to experiences of “unfreedom.”

In addition to NRM studies, other relevant fields for this dissertation project have been African American religious studies (particularly in relation to MOVE but also to the UUA, especially through Black Humanism, and to taqwacore, especially via influence drawn from Moorish Science Temple, Nation of Islam, and the Five Percenters).¹⁴⁰ In relation to the topic at hand, a prominent work in relation to African

¹³⁹ Barker 1995: 116.

¹⁴⁰ For general overviews of African American religious thought and history, see West and Glaude 2003; Pinn 1998 and 2006; Raboteau 1995. For an overview of African American religious studies see Wilmore 1989; For theoretical assessments of African American religion, see Evans 2008; Johnson 2010; Pinn 2011. For work on the Nation of Islam, see Clegg 1997; Gardell 1996; For work on the Five

American faith, narrative, and organization, was James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) which soon became a classic for black theology students. Cone argued that theology itself is "contextual language . . . defined by the human situation that gives birth to it."¹⁴¹ In this context, God clearly takes sides in the battle of good against evil and justice against racism. Jesus is not a disembodied abstraction but a concrete reality living in the black community and struggling against oppression. Cone quoted Malcolm X: "I believe in a religion that believes in freedom. Any time I have to accept a religion that won't let me fight a battle for my people, I say to hell with that religion."¹⁴² Thus, it is from a sheer pragmatic perspective that black theology *begins*. This was hardly welcomed with open arms by all within the white theological establishment:

White theologians wanted me to debate with them about the question of whether "black theology" was real theology, using their criteria to decide the issue. With clever theological sophistication, white theologians defined the discipline of theology in the light of the problem of the unbeliever (i.e., the question of the relationship of faith and reason) and thus unrelated to the problem of slavery and racism. Using a white definition of theology I knew there was no way I could win the debate. . . . It was clear to me that what was needed was a *fresh start* in theology, a new way of doing it that would arise out of the black struggle for justice and in no way would be dependent upon the approval of white academics in religion. Again I thought of Malcolm: "Don't let anybody who is oppressing us ever lay the ground rules. Don't go by their games, don't play the game by their rules. Let them know now that this is a new game, and we've got some new rules. . . ." I knew that racism was a heresy and I did not need to have white theologians tell me so. . . . White *racist* theologians are in charge of defining the nature of the gospel and of the discipline responsible for explicating it! How strange! They who are responsible for the evil of racism also want to tell its victims whether bigotry is a legitimate subject matter of systematic theology.¹⁴³

This discourse is significant here because it describes a conflict between perspectives and positions of power that is applicable to conversations about "freedom." Just as white theologians had determined the parameters for what constituted "real" theology, so too have white theorists of "freedom" determined what has constituted "real" theories about "freedom." In this way, black liberation theologians in the United States had a double-battle. Like the advocates of Liberation Theology in Central and South America, they were asserting God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed. Yet,

Percenter, see Knight 2009. For intersections of NRM studies and African American religious studies see Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer 2004; Curtis and Sigler 2009; Knight 2009.

¹⁴¹ Cone [1970] 1990: xi.

¹⁴² Ibid xii.

¹⁴³ Ibid xiii-xiv.

at the same time, they had to struggle against white theologians who were not even willing to admit such discussion in the conversation. Subsequently, liberation in a black American context entailed both liberation in regard to class oppression as well as liberation from control of a racially tainted narrative.

Addressing the Nation of Islam, Anthony Pinn noted that they were founded on four principles of “peace, freedom, justice, and equality.”¹⁴⁴ Founded in 1930, in the midst of the Great Depression and the migration of southern blacks to the North, the Nation of Islam articulated a stark response to the pillars of white racism in the United States. Key to their teaching was “knowledge of self.” The man they knew as Allah, W. D. Fard, was God incarnate. There was no hereafter, no heaven in the afterlife. Instead, as these Muslims often stated “A White Man’s Heaven is a Black Man’s Hell.”

Once blacks realized that not only were not inferior beings but actually *divine* beings in contrast to whites (who were inherently wicked), they were to implement changes in their lifestyles to that effect. Proper exercise, a rigorous diet of one meal per day (avoiding pork and other destructive foods), obedience to divine regulations, and proper attire were all part of an enlightened lifestyle. Ultimately, this would lead to black self-sufficiency and collection liberation. Referring to Alice Walker’s “womanist” theology, Pinn observed that both in the Nation of Islam and womanist theology, white people had been removed as intermediaries of and symbols for divinity. Furthermore, Pinn added that the Nation of Islam “conceives of liberation as the movement of Allah over which they have no control, because Allah’s actions are part of the preordained development of world events.”¹⁴⁵

Pinn’s definition of African American religion entailed a recognition of and response to the need for more life meaning that creates and re-creates institutions, doctrines, and practices.¹⁴⁶ In the wake of this recognition and response followed a conversion that enables renewal and self-claiming of the self within the throes of historical racism and racialized blackness.¹⁴⁷ Conversion, according to Pinn entailed a triad consisting of (1) recognition of and confrontation with the historical terror against African Americans, (2) wrestling with one’s pre-conversion self and the hope for “regeneration,” and (3) an embrace of a new life in community with others, new relationships (including a new relationship to the larger community), and new modes of behavior.¹⁴⁸ One aspect of transformed behavior consisted in what Pinn referred to as an “ethics of perpetual rebellion” which means that people continue to struggle despite uncertainty, insufficient information, and with the knowledge that it “may not

¹⁴⁴ Pinn 2011: 31.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 35.

¹⁴⁶ Pinn labeled this search for more life meaning along with the search for its structural implications as “the quest for complex subjectivity” (2011: 62).

¹⁴⁷ Pinn referred to this as “the historically manifest battle against the terror of fixed identity” (2011: 95).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid (paraphrased) 66.

produce the desired results” but that the value of such work is “not in the product but in the process of struggle itself.”¹⁴⁹

Whereas Cone was speaking primarily to black Christians (or Muslims), a minority position within African American religious studies has taken up the mantle of Black Humanism. Hot on the heels of Cone, William Jones, a Unitarian Universalist minister published *Is God a White Racist?* in 1973. Here he raised the classic dilemma of theodicy: If “God” is *both* all-good and all-powerful then how can suffering be explained? That one group of people has endured centuries of oppression by another group presents a particular problem for theodicy. Either God is not “good” or God is not all-powerful and liberation from racism is not assured. Squaring this circle has been a long challenge for anti-racist theologians. In lieu of any other satisfactory answer, Jones raised the possibility of “divine racism.” In turn, he advocated relinquishing both belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. As spoken by a character in a book by Nella Larsen:

The white man’s God—And this great love for all people regardless of race! What idiotic nonsense had she allowed herself to believe. How could she, how could anyone, have been so deluded? How could ten million black folk credit it when daily before their eyes were enacted its contradiction?¹⁵⁰

Upon this Jones added the contention that without hope for divine intervention, blacks had to also give up hope that liberation was inevitable. Many atheists would regard this as a necessary step to take toward progressive social change with Karl Marx’s remark about “religion being the opiate of the people” being a near-obligatory point of reference. Yet Jones was not advocating the abolition of religion. To the contrary, he was advocating humanist (“humanocentric”) religion as a more plausible response to theodicy and a more constructive approach to social injustice. As Jones wrote:

...whatever impedes the characterization of that suffering [due to racism] as negative, constitutes an essential prop for oppression. If a theological or philosophical concept serves to make suffering neutral or, even worse, an essential ingredient of one’s salvation, it provides, at the same time, substantial support for the world view of oppression.¹⁵¹

While disposing of God and the inevitability of liberation, the burden is then placed squarely on the shoulders of each person to do what is necessary to bring about change.

An early black humanist theologian in the United States who held similar views was E. Ethelred Brown, a Unitarian minister. Without much support from the American Unitarian Association (AUA), he founded in 1920 the first African American

¹⁴⁹ Ibid 90.

¹⁵⁰ Floyd-Thomas 2008: 13.

¹⁵¹ Jones 1973: 43.

Unitarian fellowship in the United States in Harlem, New York.¹⁵² Because he was working as an elevator operator at the same time as he was ministering (because the congregation was too poor to pay him a full salary), the AUA held his ministerial work with suspicion. In his own words, Brown felt that the “the Negro ...needs a religion which at once appeals to his mind and to his heart and which in its creeds and its formulas is neither an insult to his reason nor an offense to his conscience.”¹⁵³

In a book devoted to Brown and black humanism, Juan M. Floyd-Thomas (2008) divided “Black humanism” or black “nontheism” into three varieties: contextual, contractual, and constitutive. Contextual humanism resulted from the questions that external circumstances of slavery and unjust suffering placed upon theism and theodicy. The second one, contractual humanism, “emerged in the era of quasi-freedom following the American Civil War” where, during the period of Reconstruction, African Americans were “directly targeted and victimized by overt white supremacy.”¹⁵⁴ The third, constitutive humanism, manifested “as a core and essential element within the sacred Black cosmos, one manifestation of Black faith and religious experience amongst a host of other alternatives, both sacred and secular/theistic and nontheistic” and, though largely ignored by historians, Floyd-Thomas stated (drawing support from William Jones) that “Black humanism must be interpreted as a specific strategy for liberation and a particular philosophy of liberation within, rather than outside of, Black religiosity.”¹⁵⁵

As an example of this type of African American Humanism, Floyd-Thomas brought up first the African American Humanists (and their founder Norm R. Allen, Jr.), prominent Unitarian Universalist Mark Morrison-Reed, and finally the novelist Alice Walker who rejected “alpha-male-dominant” theologies and articulated a starkly religious humanist perspective:

In a recent essay, “The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind,” Walker squarely articulates her theological vision by stating that “Nature, Mother Earth, is such a good choice ...Everyone deserves a God who adores our freedom: Nature would never advise us to do anything but be ourselves. Mother Earth will do all that She can to support our choices. Whatever they are. For they are of Her, and inherent in our creation is Her trust.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² It was a meeting place for both black intelligentsia and political activists such as the African Blood Brotherhood, the popular speaker Hubert Harrison, and a number of socialists. In his own words, Brown felt that the “the Negro ...needs a religion which at once appeals to his mind and to his heart and which in its creeds and its formulas is neither an insult to his reason nor an offense to his conscience” (Floyd-Thomas 2008: 1).

¹⁵³ Floyd-Thomas 2008: 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid 11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid 16.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 18.

Walker's words here resounded an African American paganism that turned directly to the trees and soil for an inspiration unavailable in white theology even when filtered through black voices. The resulting humanism was for her and others, as Floyd-Thomas emphasized, borne of a distinct philosophical lineage that separated it from white humanism. As Floyd-Thomas pointed out, black humanism and nontheism were not incompatible with religion and one type of religiosity where black religious humanism could claim its roots was in a relationship to nature largely foreign to "World religions"—one that could trace its lineage to a time before their conception, a time without patriarchy and religiously-sanctioned violence.

In his own work on African American humanism, entitled *The End of God-Talk* (2012), Anthony Pinn also cited Alice Walker:

I seem to have spent all of my life rebelling against the church or other people's interpretations of what religion is – the truth is probably that I don't believe there is a God, although I would like to believe it. Certainly I don't believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake.¹⁵⁷

Pinn quoted Walker tell a story of when she grew up and listened to preachers talk about suffering and then "pull heaven out of the biblical hat at the last minute." She said that people already lived in heaven but oppression by land-grabbers made life and work too hard to be able to enjoy that heaven. Her mother knew this but women were not allowed to speak. "They might have demanded that the men of the church notice Earth. Which always leads to revolution." Walker identified with the term "pagan" which she said meant "peasant" or "land-dweller." This described both herself and her family members: "a person whose primary spiritual relationship is with Nature and the Earth." Finding ways to worship and practice that spirituality she said was very difficult because "Christianity" had supposedly saved everybody from that sort of heathenism or barbarity.

Yet the simple fact for her remained: "We were born knowing how to worship, just as we were born knowing how to laugh."¹⁵⁸ Pinn identified this type of spirituality with that of Henry David Thoreau and the hip hop group Arrested Development. A problem here was that scholars and theologians had been failing to recognize this type of religiosity *as religiosity*. Not only that but they were also failing to recognize the ways in which that which has been legitimized as "religion" was actually failing in its mission to uplift and liberate.

What nontheistic humanism recognizes is what African American theistic theologians hope to ignore: The development of doctrines and institutions is actually the failure of religion—its collapse into the familiar and a push away from its sharper challenge to life as it has been safely formulated. This failure entails a push away from the manner in

¹⁵⁷ Pinn 2012: 152.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid 125-126.

which religion might expand our self-understanding (while also harming it) in relationship to others, the manner in which religion might recast difference by removing fear (while re-inscribing it in different ways). There are dimensions and layers of African American embodied life that have been sacrificed for the sake of God-talk, and this process should end. To accomplish this outcome, however, requires the end of God-talk and the beginning of a theological discourse that does not lose sight of the humans at work in this world.¹⁵⁹

In this nontheistic context, theology comes to mean “a method for critically engaging, articulating, and discussing the deep existential and ontological issues endemic to human life.” As such African American humanists and their theology are critically engaging in their personal and collective lives with stories and practices that herald the end of God as a symbol and begin an embrace of the gaping absence at the heart of the symbol.¹⁶⁰ Especially in contexts of white theologies where confessions of “God,” doctrines, and institutions are telltale signs of how “religion” is to be identified, the idea of recognizing “religion” in that which has no doctrine or institution is virtually unimaginable. Even in scholarship, this quest is only beginning. This may be, in part, because of white traditions that conceptually separated the “wild” from “civilization” associated wilderness with the “primitive” which was to be conquered. In contrast, according to Kimberly K. Smith, black intellectuals have pursued a very different tact.

The black tradition ...is centrally concerned with the relationship between identity and landscape, and particularly the historical relationship between a community and the land as that relationship is mediated by memory. ...Importantly, wilderness in this tradition is not always confined to the external landscape; there is also a wilderness within, an untamed vital energy that derives from and connects one to the external wilderness in which the race originated. Thus, wilderness is not radically differentiated from human society; it is the origin and foundation of culture, and intimately connected to one's cultural (and particularly racial) identity. Preserving wilderness means preserving not merely the physical landscape but the community's cultural forms and consciousness—its collective memories of the community's aboriginal environment.¹⁶¹

In this sense, religion is something “wild” and undomesticated, direct and unmediated, personal and un-bureaucratized. Not only does this religion appear wild, but “a relationship with the wild offers a set of meaningful patterns by which to understand existence.”¹⁶² The wild in this sense, has a perpetual source of enrichment and inspiration in whatever harshness, delights, or mysteries are offered in nature. In the words of Leslie Van Gelder, the wild provides:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid 155.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid 6.

¹⁶¹ Smith 2005: 281.

¹⁶² Van Gelder 2004: 210.

...the direct and often wordless connection to a greater than human force and the experience of the flow of the cycles of creation, change, and re-creation. Humans and human ways of being do not dominate this world-view, but are parts of a greater whole, subject to the same set of natural laws. [It constitutes] a continual system whereby the death of one feeds the life of another and the entire system, the life system of the world, grows richer through the interaction. The continuation of the life of the system is at the root of the implicit religious nature of the wild.¹⁶³

This type of conception resonates with the concept of “implicit religion” as articulated by Edward Bailey (2006). In concord with Fitzgerald and Pinn that the supposedly ordinary “secular” and the “political” are not opposites of “religion,” Bailey imagined implicit religion to consist in those expressions of social life that involve three characteristic traits: (1) some form of commitment, (2) shared topics of devotion or interest that unites participants and integrates them into a group, and intense concerns with visible effects.

The final area of religious studies related to this dissertation would be studies in punk and hardcore wherein religious studies has only in fairly recent times engaged the matter. In this category there would be three major types of studies: research on recognized faith traditions in the punk scene;¹⁶⁴ research that additionally regarded punk itself as an implicit religion;¹⁶⁵ and studies that focused on punk yet included aspects of faith traditions.¹⁶⁶ Relevant for this dissertation is work by Francis Stewart (2011 and 2012) who drew upon the work of Edward Bailey to point out that punk, particularly hardcore straight edge punk, qualified as implicit religion.¹⁶⁷ This was demonstrated through the commitment of scene participants, their use of music and fanzines as a focus (or foci, plural) that integrated members into a scene, and their intense concerns (social justice, drug-free lifestyle, etc.) that manifested in DIY concerts, independent clubs, graffiti, tattoos, protests, and collective lifestyle patterns.

Bearing that aspect in mind while studying three disparate contexts in one dissertation project has hardly been a simple task. It was suggested by colleagues that the project would become a lot easier if I narrowed it down to one or two. Indeed, the dissertation would have been simpler but not necessarily *better*. Each of the three contexts spoke not just of the diversity of each of the time periods in which they began or the larger communities to which they tended to draw new members, but also of the ways that similar ideas and personal connections ran through these diverse communities and time periods. Although it was a conscious choice to pick ethnically distinct contexts, one predominantly European American, one predominantly African

¹⁶³ Ibid 2010-211.

¹⁶⁴ Abraham 2012; Fiscella 2012; Hosman 2009; Malott 2009; McDowell 2014; Wilson 2008.

¹⁶⁵ Luhr 2010; Stewart 2011 and 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Hannerz 2013; MaGeary 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Stewart drew upon Bailey for her 2012 work but the 2011 study essentially argued the same points without invoking Bailey’s formula.

American, and one predominantly Asian American, I was not expecting race to play such a pivotal issue within each of them. As will become evident later, each context has played a vital role in contributing their own unique perspective to the total analysis.

At the empirical level, this thesis is situated in conversation with any study on Unitarian Universalists, MOVE, and taqwacore as “political,” “religious,” or “counter-cultural” contexts. In order to orient the reader toward these conversations, a brief summary of literature in relation to the UUA, MOVE, and taqwacore now follows.

The Material

The material for this thesis centered around three contexts based primarily in the United States: The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore. The first, a predominantly European-American liberal organization, was founded in the early 1960s in the midst of the African American Civil Rights struggle. The second, a predominantly African American organization was founded in Philadelphia by John Africa in the early 1970s in the midst of the Black Power movement,¹⁶⁸ the rise of the environmental movement, feminist struggles, and intense opposition to the United States war against people in Vietnam. The third, a predominantly “brown punk” scene, in the shadow of “the War on Terror,” was initially sparked by interest in the fictional Islamic punk novel *The Taqwacores* by Michael Muhammad Knight, led to social networks developing primarily online between 2004 and 2010.

Material for the UUA

The Unitarian Universalist Association is the result of the 1961 merger between two liberal denominations, the American Unitarian Association (AUA) and the Universalist Church of America (UCA). As a creedless religious institution, they became known as somewhat of an anomaly. Indeed, the questions surrounding what Unitarian Universalists (UUs) really believe—and if belief is even a relevant question (UUA president Peter Morales said “Belief is the enemy of faith”)—continue to be discussed among UUs themselves. The logo of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has undergone 7 changes since 1961. The eighth and most recent design was launched in 2014 as part of conscious attempt to re-brand the organization in a time of membership decline and financial constraints.¹⁶⁹ The UU conception of what constitutes “religion”

¹⁶⁸ See Carmichael and Hamilton 1967 for an example of civil rights discourse that changed from an emphasis on “freedom” to an emphasis on “power.”

¹⁶⁹ Much has been made in UU circles of the fact that American youth are abandoning traditional religion in droves. A 2012 Pew Study showed a dramatic increase in the number of young people who no longer identify with any religious affiliation. This group, popularly known as the “nones,” accounted for only

differs from common definitions. For UUs the focus is covenant (conscious relationship with others) rather than creed (a doctrine that all members must believe). The challenge for them has been to communicate that message.¹⁷⁰ The UUA currently has about 200,000 members and more than 1,000 congregations spread throughout all fifty states. With church legacies stretching back into the 1700s (and several U.S. presidents who were Unitarians), they have both the history and the institutional base to become a more popular movement. Historically, their views on God and Jesus have been regarded as heretical to many self-identifying Christians (UUs tend to regard Jesus as human rather than God and they are not even recognized as a religion in Spain because they do not espouse a creed).¹⁷¹ A 1966 study of more than 12,000 Unitarian Universalists, for example, revealed that 90 percent did not include immortality in the sense of “continued personal existence of the individual after death.”¹⁷² Typically wearing their heresy on their sleeves as a badge of honor, they have played significant roles in social justice causes in the United States (such as, for example, spearheading the right to gay marriage or taking a stand for immigration rights, see Fig. 10). The types of conversations about “freedom” that I tended to find there, where a sizable number of anarchists, libertarians, and socialists find their home, were similarly on the cutting edge of what average white liberals might believe. The themes tended to emphasize inclusivity, radical acceptance, community, social justice, and interdependence.

about 1 in twenty during the 1960s and grown to about 12% by the year 2000. In 2012 the Pew Study suggested that about 20% of Americans identified as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.” The trend was most noteworthy amongst youth where about 30% fell into this category of “nones” whom UUs see as their primary target audience. The UUs aim themselves toward the “nones,” not because they aim to “convert” them, but because they believe that they already *are* UUs but that they just don’t know it yet.

¹⁷⁰ They have previously tried to communicate through mass advertising in ad campaigns in magazines such as TIME with messages such as “When in doubt, PRAY. When in prayer, DOUBT,” “Is God Keeping You From Going to Church?,” and “Find Us and Ye Shall Seek” to little effect.

¹⁷¹ While there are few universally shared “positive” views on Jesus or God among UUs, the shared “negative” views are that if Jesus existed, he was not God but human; if God exists there is no original sin or hellfire. Not only are UUs not recognized as a religion in Spain, but a UU congregation in Texas was briefly denied religious status as well because it “does not have one system of belief” (*Christian Century*, “Texas flip-flop: UUA is church after all,” 15 June 2004: 13).

¹⁷² Tapp 1973: 55.



Fig. 10
Unitarian Universalists demonstrate for immigrants' rights in Phoenix, Arizona 2012. Photo by Chris Walton.

The central material I have gathered in regard to the UUA has been based on texts: song books, bylaws, history books, magazines, newsletters, Sunday order-of-service hand-outs, conference programs, and online blogs, sermons, or articles. I also garnered independent written material through a survey/experiment involving 375 Unitarian Universalists. These materials have been supplemented with attendance of about two dozen services (at about 11 different fellowships in eight different states), three General Assemblies (including various seminars and workshops), about one dozen personal interviews, a dozen e-mail interviews, a handful of small group sessions, and a volunteer service work experience in New Orleans. In order to examine some of the margins of the this context, I attended on one occasion a UU-related service at a Christian, non-UU, predominantly African American church in San Francisco which used the same song book as the UUA and shared similar values and another occasion I attended a non-UU, predominantly European American interfaith service outside of Washington DC.

Regarding literature on UUs and the UUA the difficulty has been in choosing from a nearly overwhelming amount of material. Existing research on Unitarian Universalism and the UUA in itself is a disparate field. Studies range from quantitative

sociology¹⁷³ to ethnography¹⁷⁴ to social psychological surveys;¹⁷⁵ from contemporary focus on racial issues within the UUA¹⁷⁶ to historiographies.¹⁷⁷ Peer review journals have published theologically critical articles on the UUA¹⁷⁸ as well as essays by Unitarian Universalist members.¹⁷⁹ It is not uncommon to run across academic literature written by UUs and UUs have written plenty about themselves. One of the first books I read more than a decade ago was an introduction to Unitarianism by NRM scholar and British Unitarian George Chryssides (1998). Indeed, some of the most critical research on UUs have been written by UUs and released on the UUAs' own Skinner House Books such as Mark Harris' work on class bias (2011) and Mark Morrison-Reed's work on racist practices in UU history (1992; 2011). On the UUA's publishing companies one can also find plenty of literature on social justice by UU authors¹⁸⁰ and non-UU authors.¹⁸¹ Much literature by or about UUs has dealt indirectly with "freedom" but, as far as I can tell, there seems to be no study so far that has directly addressed the topic of UUs and their conceptions of "freedom." Instead of a comprehensive review, previous research shall be addressed by dealing only with historical work relevant to the purposes of the thesis.

Material for MOVE

MOVE was founded in the early 1970s by John Africa. Meetings were initially held at his residence on Pearl Street and later relocated to 309 N. 33rd Street in 1973. The central teaching was the sanctity and fundamental unity of life in contrast to the "system" which is divisive. Amongst other things, this meant resisting additives to food and water and aspiring toward a raw food diet. "MOVE" as a name simply meant to be active, to move as all life does. Members also began to adopt the last name "Africa" in honor of John Africa and the place where life originated. After early demonstrations against zoos, circuses, and pet stores as well as "putting out information" at school board meetings, and various political or religious speakers, MOVE members began to be arrested in large numbers. MOVE members claimed that a MOVE infant was killed by police in 1976. No court case resulted and conflicts increased. Neighbors were divided about MOVE. Some had complained about food scraps that MOVE left on

¹⁷³ Tapp 1973; Green 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Doty 1999; Hoop 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Casebolt and Niekro 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Santos-Lyons 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Bressler 2001; Bumbaugh 2000; Floyd-Thomas 2008; Lee 1995; Perry and Sherman 2008; Schulz 2002; Williams 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Gomes 1996.

¹⁷⁹ Brown 1979.

¹⁸⁰ Deakin 2013; Lawrence 2013.

¹⁸¹ Dinbar-Ortiz 2014; Stephenson 2015; West 2014; Zinn 2002.

the ground to “cycle” and the subsequent rats and cockroaches (which MOVE members refused to kill because they too are “life”).

A 1978 siege of MOVE headquarters ended on August 8th with the death of police officer James Ramp and injuries of both MOVE members, police, and firemen. As a result, nine MOVE members were sentenced 30-100 years in prison and eight surviving members remain incarcerated today. John Africa was arrested in Rochester, New York in 1981 on bomb-making charges and, along with fellow member Alphonso “Mo” Robbins Africa. They represented themselves in court and were acquitted in July 1981. Also in 1981, Frank James Africa, nephew to John Africa, took a case to court to be allowed a raw food diet in prison. In *Africa v. Commonwealth* he lost the case, with Judge Arlin Adams establishing a notable legal precedent in regard to using a religious “test” when he denied the group’s recognition as a religion for the purposes of the First Amendment. On December 9th 1981, MOVE supporter, journalist, and taxi driver Mumia Abu-Jamal engaged in an altercation with police officer Daniel Faulkner. Both were shot and Faulkner died. After a trial wrought with controversy about racial bias in jury selection and misleading allegations by the prosecutor, Abu-Jamal received the death penalty. After decades on death row and long-time international campaign, his death sentence was overturned and he was transferred to general prison population in 2011 where he was recently diagnosed with Hepatitis C (for which prison authorities have not been giving proper treatment). Although not a member, Abu-Jamal counts MOVE, the teaching of John Africa, as his faith.

In 1985, MOVE’s agitation for the release of fellow members came to a head when police surrounded MOVE’s headquarters on the early dawn of May 13th and before the day was done, police had dropped an FBI-supplied explosive containing Tovex and C-4 on the roof of the row home where MOVE had built a fortified bunker starting a raging fire that burned down an entire neighborhood leaving 250 people homeless and 11 people dead (all MOVE members including John Africa and 5 children). Only two people survived: one adult, Ramona Africa and one child Birdie Africa aka Michael Moses Ward. Ward died suddenly in 2013 during a cruise. Ramona Africa was convicted on charges of rioting and served a seven-year sentence. All government authorities were exonerated by the court system. Subsequently, no police or government official served time for the deaths of May 13th. The city of Philadelphia later awarded Ramona Africa and relatives to killed MOVE members \$1.5 million dollars. MOVE has continued to agitate for the release of the “MOVE 9” and Mumia Abu-Jamal. In 2002, a custody dispute between one-time MOVE supporter John Gilbride and Alberta Africa ended when Gilbride was found dead in his car due to gunshot wounds. No suspects were ever identified by police.

These incidents have captured people’s attention largely because they involve violent clashes. They are not, I argue here, the best way to approach an understanding of MOVE or MOVE members. It is difficult to discuss MOVE in detail because their history is a complicated one, too little useful research has been engaged with them, and their complex stories are entwined with very infected and divided responses to them from the beginning. Especially in light of the suffering inflicted on both sides of

conflicts related to MOVE (two dead police officers, one neighbor dead, two unresolved deaths of former members, 13 deaths on MOVE's side, and 9 current imprisonments of MOVE members or supporters) discussion can be easily infected by intense emotions of anger and sorrow. The news coverage however has not been even-handed. Two recent studies¹⁸² have suggested that media coverage was disproportionately negative in regard to MOVE.

The MOVE Organization consists of less than 100 members, all of whom live in or near Pennsylvania (most of whom live in or near Philadelphia). They stopped accepting new members in the 1980s so the new generation of MOVE members (more than half of the members today) consists of those who were born into the organization. Basing their beliefs on the teaching of John Africa who preached on the sanctity and oneness of life and with a membership that is predominantly African American, the conversations about "freedom" that I have tended to hear in the context of MOVE have been very diverse. Some of them were conversations that have been going on for hundreds of years under the rubric of "religious freedom," some of them were extremely topical (such as prison abolition, racism, inclusion, pollution, war, animal liberation, and police brutality), and some of them were more or less absent from popular or scholarly work (captured in John Africa's exhortation to "free" the metal from trombones in a patriotic parade and put it back in the ground).

After I first met MOVE members in Philadelphia in 1992, I maintained sporadic contact with them over the next eight years. I attended a couple of events in Philadelphia and interviewed Ramona twice for articles that were never published. Later, as I entered university studies and undertook formal research on MOVE, I interviewed various MOVE members and ex-members, in prison and outside.¹⁸³ I went out to government and university archive centers gathering court documents, trial transcripts, FBI files, and old newspaper articles. I interviewed people who had been former neighbors of MOVE back in the 1970s.

A major challenge to studying MOVE's central text is that I have never seen it in its entirety. I have since been informed that the text, originally titled *The Book* or *The Guidelines*, had been released to the public in the early 1970s and was recalled by MOVE shortly thereafter and, as far as I know, nobody outside of MOVE has a copy. MOVE members refer to their belief as simply "Life." The Teaching of John Africa is an explanation of that belief. John Africa continued to teach and his teaching continued to be written down so that all of the writings compose the Guidelines—not just the

¹⁸² Sanders and Jeffries 2013; Ekeogu 2014.

¹⁸³ My only friendship in association to MOVE has been to an ex-MOVE member who did not want to be interviewed so those conversations are not cited here but it has been difficult to not let them influence my general understanding of "MOVE." If I have learned anything, it would be that as simple as the teachings of John Africa may seem to be and despite years of studying MOVE, I cannot pretend to understand them in "Total" as they say.

book released in the 1970s. No compilation of his teaching since then has ever been published.¹⁸⁴ Without having access to the complete Guidelines (numbering “altogether maybe ten thousand pages” and they are not all in one location¹⁸⁵), or even a copy of the original edition of several hundred pages released in the early 1970s, I have resorted to various quotes from the Guidelines and John Africa that I have found over the years in MOVE-related literature, newspaper editorials by MOVE members, interviews, recordings, and films. I began this dissertation knowing that the textual corpus from which I would draw in relation to the context of MOVE would be limited and incomplete. Despite a limited amount of access to the Guidelines (I now have a few dozen pages), it has proven more than sufficient to address key points in regard to the question of “freedom.”

MOVE makes distinctions between “MOVE members” (all of whom have the last name “Africa”), “MOVE supporters,” and “MOVE sympathizers.” Supporters tend to devote considerable time toward assisting MOVE in their work and furthering causes that MOVE is engaged in (principally demanding the release of the MOVE 9 and Mumia Abu-Jamal as well as organizing annual events around the 13th of May and 8th of August). Supporters visit the MOVE 9 in prison and sometimes live with or marry MOVE members. Sympathizers tend to arrange an occasional event such as a movie showing, sing a petition, write an occasional letter on behalf of a MOVE member, and attend demonstrations. The network “Friends of MOVE” connects both a core of supporters with a broader span of sympathizers. I was a MOVE sympathizer for about 10 years (distributing their literature and occasionally arranging demonstrations in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal). The first demonstration I participated in was in July 1992 (see Fig. 11). While a sympathizer, I collected a number of books about MOVE and literature published by MOVE and interviewed Ramona Africa. When I began a scholarly approach to MOVE in the early 2000s, I interviewed Alphonso Africa, former MOVE supporters Tony and Lori Allen as well as a MOVE supporter/sympathizer based in Virginia.

After the dissertation project began, I added to these existing materials, experiences, and perspectives by attending MOVE commemoration events on August 8 and May 13 which marked the 1978 police raid and imprisonment of members (still incarcerated) and the bombing in 1985 respectively. I performed more interviews (primarily with Mike Africa, Jr., Sue Africa, MOVE supporters Kevin Price and Maiga Milbourne, and an early acquaintance to John Africa named David Finkelstein). I stayed at the home of MOVE supporters. All of those were in Philadelphia. Additionally, I attended an event (a movie screening of *Long Distance Revolutionary* about Mumia Abu-Jamal) organized by a MOVE sympathizer in Norfolk, Virginia. As

¹⁸⁴ As there is no public edition of these Guidelines, some people have referred to John Africa’s teaching as a “hidden bible” because nobody outside MOVE ever sees it. To complicate the matter, John Africa also gave specific Guidelines to individual MOVE members which were personal and not directed to other MOVE members and certainly not to non-MOVE members.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Mike Africa, Jr. in Philadelphia at MOVE event, 11 May 2013.

far as written material, I expanded my single contact of a MOVE member in prison (Eddie Africa) to the other MOVE members in prison. I wrote to all of them and an additional five responded (Janine, Debbie, Charles, Mike, Sr. and Phil Africa). In addition to the major published literature on MOVE, I also tracked down the few remaining publications and articles that I had not yet acquired. Other documentation has included several documentary films about MOVE and Mumia Abu-Jamal, audio CDs by MOVE music projects and Mumia Abu-Jamal. Well into the dissertation project, two notable additions were released in 2013: a new documentary film about the 1985 bombing and, for the first time ever, a biographical publication about the early life of John Africa as told by his sister and former MOVE member Louise James. Finally, I attended an event indirectly related to MOVE—a support event for Black Liberation Army prisoner Russell Maroon Shoatz (organized in part by a UU woman at a UU sanctuary in Brooklyn). One of Shoatz’ main supporters was musician-activist Fred Ho whom I met at a MOVE event shortly before he died in 2014.



Fig. 11
Young MOVE members and supporters demonstrate to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal in 1992. Photo by Karin Johansson-Mex.

Although the existing literature on MOVE is far less than on Unitarian Universalists, there is still not enough space here to provide a review nor is it necessary for the purposes of this dissertation. Little academic material has been published on MOVE in the last 20 years and of that material only one master's thesis¹⁸⁶ and one doctoral dissertation¹⁸⁷ were based on original primary research. Most work has focused on the conflicts between MOVE and city authorities in Philadelphia. Three of the 8 books on those conflicts were journalistic works.¹⁸⁸ In *Burning Down the House* (1987), John Anderson and Hilary Hevenor followed the court and commission hearings of 1985 closely and included plenty of material from the trial of Ramona Africa. They also set a common tone that attempted to stake out a supposedly neutral territory of non-support for either MOVE or police: "Our only prejudice, if that is the word for it, is for the victims and the innocents, for MOVE's children and for its neighbors."¹⁸⁹ Charles Bowser (1989), a lawyer and Philadelphia's first deputy Mayor, reported from his personal interactions with MOVE members and his work with the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC). Michael and Randi Boyette (1989) engaged in direct interviews with MOVE and spent the most time of any book in dealing with MOVE as a group. Michael Boyette also served on the grand jury and voted with the majority decision to not press charges against police for the killings of MOVE children and adults on May 13th ("The criminal code must punish wickedness, not mistakes," he said and "no court, no commission ...can restore those children back to life").¹⁹⁰ Margot Harry's *Attention, MOVE! This is America!* (1987) was the first book on the 1985 bombing to use footnotes and cite sources. She spent the least time covering MOVE as a group, wrote from an activist stance (she was also a writer for *Revolutionary Worker*), and located the attack on MOVE as part of the larger context of racist attacks on blacks in the U.S. The final two books are the only full-length academic studies on the conflicts: Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1988/1990) and Wagner-Pacifci (1994). Assefa and Wahrhaftig's work was the only one of the two to actually cite personal interviews with MOVE members and engage primary source materials (aside from newspaper

¹⁸⁶ Ekeogu 2014. This same exception also is notable for being one of the few academic works that has not focused primarily on MOVE's conflicts with government authorities.

¹⁸⁷ Lynch 2006.

¹⁸⁸ Anderson and Hilenor 1987; Bowser 1989; Boyette 1989. One could also mention literature that addressed MOVE marginally: LaVon Wright Bracy (1990) focused on the neighbors and their process of recovery after the bombing, John Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire* (1990), blended a fictional tale and with some description of MOVE and the 1985 bombing, and Elijah Anderson (1990) did an ethnographic study of the Powelton Village section of Philadelphia where MOVE was founded (referring to them by the pseudonym "ACT"). Ethnographic studies on MOVE specifically are completely absent with the exception of anthropologist Carole Yawney (who never published her findings before her death in 2005).

¹⁸⁹ Anderson and Hilenor 1987: x.

¹⁹⁰ Boyette, 1989: 266.

reports and hearings from court and the PSIC). Wagner-Pacifici's work is, by far, the most cited scholarly work on MOVE to date.¹⁹¹

In 1986 Craig McCoy, a journalist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, published a lengthy article entitled "Who Was John Africa?" It was the most thorough historiography of MOVE and John Africa by any researcher or journalist up until that point at it quickly became the source for many researchers in regard to early MOVE history. Another important journalistic piece has been an interview with former MOVE member Sharon Sims Cox by Carol Saline.¹⁹² In 1988 J. Clay Smith published a helpful bibliographic index of news articles that covered MOVE. Over the years, Philadelphia journalists Kitty Caparella, Linn Washington, and Monica Yant Kinney (the latter who interviewed former MOVE supporters Tony and Lori Allen) have contributed a significant amount of coverage of MOVE.

No religious studies journal has ever published an article on MOVE. The only religious scholar to publish an article on MOVE was Juan Floyd-Thomas who published "The Burning of Rebellious Thoughts: MOVE as Revolutionary Black Humanism" (2002) in *The Black Scholar*. There he compared MOVE to Rastafarians due to their "cultural rebellion, naturalist philosophy, and African-centered utopianism" as well as black liberation theology with their emphasis on theologies of and for the poor.¹⁹³ Floyd-Thomas also emphasized black humanist elements in their philosophy. He wrote:

In the early 1960s, Malcolm X argued, presaged such an ontological opposition to mainstream America by contending that the oppressed cannot look to the oppressor to provide a mutually beneficial form of logic or rationality. Specifically, Malcolm X argued, "There just has to be a new system of reason and logic devised by us who are on the bottom, if we want to get some result in this struggle..." Simply put, MOVE was making a concrete effort to advance one example of "a new system of reason and logic." ...[MOVE] organically blended black culture, religion and political radicalism from a decidedly non-Christian perspective. The MOVE family adopted many of the virtues of the African cosmologies and faith systems recently outlined by social ethicist Peter Paris, namely: beneficence, forbearance, practical wisdom, improvisation, and justice.¹⁹⁴

There has been almost nothing written about MOVE by NRM scholars and, in any case, no original research with one notable exception: Jennifer Clark's (1998) undergraduate work on MOVE at University of Virginia for the "New Religious

¹⁹¹ With at least 129 citations, her book has considerably more than the second-most cited work by Wahrhaftig and Assefa (approximately 30 citations).

¹⁹² Cox 1985.

¹⁹³ Floyd-Thomas 2002: 13.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid 12-13. Floyd-Thomas also linked their beliefs to Herbert Marcuse's critique of technological domination over nature.

Movements” webpage organized by white NRM scholar Jeffrey Hadden. Clark drew from four books, two newspaper articles, one scholarly article, and five websites for her entry on MOVE.¹⁹⁵ Members of MOVE were quoted several times throughout the entry.

Two NRM scholar have written more than one page on MOVE within larger works: white psychologist Marc Galanter dedicated 3-4 pages to MOVE in *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion* (1989) and white historian of religion Timothy Miller included 1-2 pages on MOVE in *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (1999). Galanter based his assessments on three newspaper articles from 1985 and described MOVE as a “cult” and whose philosophy amounted to “an ill-defined blend of primitivism and anarchy” wherein members allowed “their children to roam naked.”¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, his work served as the apparent source for Robbins and Anthony (1995) when they provided a brief presentation of MOVE. In contrast, unlike Clark and Floyd-Thomas, no NRM scholar ever quoted a single member of MOVE. The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) does however have an entry on MOVE on their homepage. Their website currently states that the ICSA is religiously and commercially unaffiliated and “is a global network of people concerned about psychological manipulation and abuse in cultic or high-demand groups, alternative movements, and other environments.”¹⁹⁷ Describing the philosophy of the ICSA, they wrote:

Each person is unique; Each group is different; Groups change over time and can vary from place to place; People respond to the same group differently; To be useful, information must be accurate and relevant; Information without understanding can negatively affect a relationship; Understanding takes time and effort.¹⁹⁸

The ICSA’s single-page entry on MOVE began by stating “The 2002 murder in Philadelphia of John Gilbride, former husband of MOVE matriarch Alberta Africa, remains unsolved.”¹⁹⁹ The entry continued to state that Gilbride, who had been involved in a child-custody dispute with his ex-wife Alberta Africa, “claimed in divorce papers that ‘my attitude toward my wife was going to cause a situation that would involve my death.’” The one quote from a MOVE member in the entry was from Alberta Africa saying, “Jack [Gilbride’s father] was not pushin’ me because he wanted Zack, because he knew that MOVE belief would not allow me to give him Zack.” The entry then included information about Jack Gilbride’s (still) unpublished book

¹⁹⁵ Clark’s work also provided the basis for the entry on MOVE in *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects, and New Religions*, edited by James Lewis (2002).

¹⁹⁶ Galanter [1989] 1990: 119-121.

¹⁹⁷ ICSA “About Us,” <http://www.icsahome.com/aboutus> Accessed 19 January 2015.

¹⁹⁸ ICSA “Philosophy of ICSA,” <http://www.icsahome.com/aboutus/philosophy> Accessed 10 January 2015.

¹⁹⁹ ICSA “MOVE,” <http://www.icsahome.com/groups/move> Accessed 19 January 2015.

dedicated to his grandson Zack. Finally, the ICSA entry ended by discussing threats issued from MOVE to an unnamed journalist and accusations of hypocrisy: “Previously eschewing the finer things in life, as well as pop culture and technology, they now ‘vacation in Europe, listen to opera, play video games, record rap propaganda, throw Harry Potter parties, and use the Internet to spew hate.’”²⁰⁰ The sources provided for this information were anonymously referenced to *ICSA Today*, edited by white psychologist Michael Langone, the founder of ICSA. In actuality, the sources were three newspaper articles by Monica Yant Kinney.²⁰¹ No other work on MOVE (scholarly or otherwise) was cited, mentioned, or referenced. It is important to note that Yant Kinney had stated in one of the very articles cited by the ICSA that she was biased against MOVE. Yant Kinney wrote that, in the 1990s, she had “helped put a halt to the lucrative Millions for Mumia Abu-Jamal campaign with stories about MOVE’s efforts to free the infamous cop killer by flouting fund-raising laws and the IRS.”²⁰² This is noteworthy for three reasons. First, the entry did not reveal her bias (or even her name). Second, it is noteworthy because the ICSA clearly flouted its own principle that “Understanding takes time and effort.” After reading only three biased newspaper articles by a person who stated her partisan stance openly, they sought no further for more information. Thirdly, the ICSA entry did not give any hint to the reader that there might be any other side to the story. Timothy Miller, in contrast, used existent literature to provide a more balanced overview.

Briefly, the remaining literature on MOVE can be placed into the following the categories: critical studies (challenging mainstream view and engaging MOVE in

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ The three articles (in the order cited in the entry) were: Monica Yant Kinney, “Murder of Ex-MOVE Member Remains a Mystery,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 September 2012; Ibid, “A Son Slain, He Fears He’s Lost a Grandson to MOVE,” 12 September 2012; Ibid, “The Madness of MOVE Continues,” 7 May 2010.

²⁰² Yant Kinney, “The Madness of MOVE Continues,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 May 2010.

dialogue);²⁰³ legal Studies;²⁰⁴ media and rhetoric analysis;²⁰⁵ conflict studies;²⁰⁶ political management studies;²⁰⁷ religious studies/NRM studies/“Cult” studies;²⁰⁸ studies relating to MOVE through focus on Mumia Abu-Jamal;²⁰⁹ a biographical book on the childhood of John Africa by his sister;²¹⁰ literature by Mumia Abu-Jamal;²¹¹ literature about Mumia Abu-Jamal;²¹² and activist literature green/socialist/anarchist/black liberation/prisoner rights/political prisoner/POW material.²¹³

Material for Taqwacore

Then there was taqwacore.²¹⁴ Michael Muhammad Knight, a Catholic-raised male and convert to Islam, created the term “taqwacore” in his novel *The Taqwacores* (2004).²¹⁵ The story told a tale of a group of various types of punks mashed up with various types of Muslims (e.g., Sunni straight edger, Shia skinhead, Sufi drunk punk, riot grrrl in a *burqa*, etc.) who all shared the same household in Buffalo, New York. The “fiction

²⁰³ Ekeogu 2014; Guillaumaud-Pujol 1999; Lynch 2006; Nicola 1991; Taylor 2004; Williams 1988; Yawney 1997.

²⁰⁴ Harvard Review 1997; Siegel 1997-1998; Feofanov 1994; Washington 1989. These focus on MOVE-related court rulings. None engage in original research on MOVE. While they can be very useful I regard to understanding court rulings, they typically offer only very minimal insight on MOVE as a group. A significant exception was provided by long-time Philadelphia journalist Linn Washington (1989). In the *Yale Journal of Law and Liberation*, he presented a significant amount of (largely unfavorable) coverage on MOVE as a group in his legal critique of the double-standard applied in court rulings related to MOVE members and police. Although Washington was critical of MOVE, he reserved more critique for the court system who gave extraordinarily harsh sentences to MOVE members and demonstrated extreme lenience in regard to city officials.

²⁰⁵ Maurantonio 2008; Nelson and Maddox 1996; O'Brien 1992; Sanders and Jeffries 2013; Wells 1990.

²⁰⁶ Bentley 2014; Blackburne 1986; Dickson 2002; Feldman 1987; Laue 1986; King and King 1990; Mitchell 1986.

²⁰⁷ Persons 1987; Nagel 1991.

²⁰⁸ Galanter 1988; Fiscella 2007; John R. Hall 1995 and 1999; Hall, Trinh, and Schuyler 2000; Mikul 2010; Miller 1999; Robbins and Anthony 1995.

²⁰⁹ Black 2012; Corrigan 2006; Schiffmann 2004.

²¹⁰ James 2013.

²¹¹ Abu-Jamal 1991, 1997, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2009, 2015; Abu-Jamal and Fernández 2014.

²¹² Appel 2003; Fort 2014; Gardner 2005; Hones 1999; Syeda and Thompson 2001; Taylor 2001.

²¹³ Pellow 2014; Rosebraugh 2009; Wall 1999.

²¹⁴ The term “taqwacore,” a mash-up of Arabic *taqwa* (piety or “god-fearing”/“god-consciousness”) and core (as in hardcore, krishnacore, queercore, etc.), is not capitalized here. Many journalists and researchers capitalize it but, in keeping with the non-capitalized use in the original novel as well as the tendency to not capitalize “hardcore” in relation to hardcore punk, it is spelled here without caps.

²¹⁵ The book was first self-published in 2003 and eventually distributed by punk label Alternative Tentacles before it was released by anarcho-publishing company Autonomedia.

became real” as the story goes, when young people like Kourosh Poursalehi, son of Iranian immigrants, and Basim Usmani, son of Pakistani immigrants read the book and began to identify with the label. Poursalehi wrote music to lyrics Knight had published in the book and “Muhammad was a punk rocker” became the first taqwacore song through his solo project dubbed Vote Hezbollah after one of the bands in the book.²¹⁶ From there, a small scene of online friends developed and a few bands formed, notably the Kominas, and Secret Trial Five. Two other bands, Al-Thawra and Diacritical, had formed prior to reading the book. All of them went on tour together in 2007. Two movies were made—one a documentary and the other a dramatization of the novel—by the end of the decade. That is, in a nutshell, the “story.” Yet, “nutshells” often seriously distort or obscure the stories untold.

The term “taqwacore” was first used to refer to: (1) a Muslim punk scene in a fictional book published in 2003 but has also come to refer to: (2) any group of Muslim punks, (3) an idea of “punk Islam,” (4) a perceived global “movement,” possibly a “scene,” and, most often perhaps, (5) the small group of friends who, for the most part, met each other online through shared interest in *The Taqwacores* novel, through bands who were associated with the book’s author (Michael Muhammad Knight), mutual friends, or through attention garnered by the book and bands. The conversations about “freedom” that I have tended to hear in those contexts have addressed social issues of discrimination, colonialism, identity, personal struggles, gender issues, and social justice. Several participants were interviewed by mass media (and even film productions), but most of them seemed to leave feeling that their actual stories were either distorted or excluded from what the media produced.



Fig. 12

The first taqwacore compilation (2008) included tracks by Vote Hezbollah, the Kominas, Dead Bhuttos, Al-Thawra, Diacritical, Sagg Taqwacore Syndicate, Michael Muhammad Knight, Citizen Vex (UK), Fun-da-mental (UK), Secret Trial Five (CAN), and Al-Qaynah (DK).

²¹⁶ Ironically, “Vote Hezbollah” also happened to be the name of an LP by the prolific ambient-ethno-noise solo project of Bryan Jones, Muslimgauze.

The material here has consisted of the central text, *The Taqwacores* (2004) and secondary texts. The latter included one collaborative fanzine²¹⁷ *The Taqwacore Zine*, organized by Kaitlin Foley (see picture from the zine, Fig. 16), one solo fanzine BiTCHfACE (by Randall “Sagg” Harris), ten books by Michael Muhammad Knight, blogs including the *Taqwacore Webzine*, *Taqwacore Journal*, *The Gaza Stripper*, individual profiles, videos, as much taqwacore-related music as possible²¹⁸ (including one taqwacore compilation CD, see Fig. 12), and the numerous studies and news articles about the scene. Secondary texts also include subsequent books by Knight (nine were to follow with the most recent being released 2015): the autobiographical road odyssey *Blue Eyed Devil* (2006), an academic historiography in *The Five Percenters* (2007), a semi-fictional/semi-real blend of characters from *The Taqwacores* and the real life scene titled *Osama Van Halen* (2009), the autobiographical *Impossible Man* (2009), thoughts and coverage of his pilgrimage to Mecca in *Journey to the End of Islam* (2009), a manifesto on race and language, *Why I Am A Five Percenter* (2011), an exposé of his relationship to Peter Lamborn Wilson in *William S. Burroughs vs. the Quran* (2012), a discussion of drugs, race, and commerce in his semi-autobiographical travelogue *Tripping with Allah* (2013), and his attempt to unite the dichotomies his personal history: his teen years as a “Salafi” and later embrace of heretical Islams in *Why I am a Salafi* (2015).

Additional writing has come from publications by people associated with taqwacore (Sabina England published a book of short stories *Urdustan*, Kaitlin Foley published a taqwacore zine, and Taz Ahmed published a short piece in *Love Inshallah* as well as a regular blog). I also collected material related to taqwacore such as the pro-queer, pro-taqwacore Bay Area-based fanzine *Totally Radical Muslims* (see Fig. 13) that has featured several contributors associated with taqwacore (Taz Ahmed, Sabina England, Omar Waqar, etc.) and *SubChaos*, an Indonesian fanzine by anti-queer, anti-taqwacore punk Muslims (see Fig. 14).

²¹⁷ “Fanzine,” a mix of “fan” and “magazine,” is the term that is used to describe grassroots, often home-made literature produced in subcultural contexts. Typically, the term is shortened to simply “zine” (pronounced “zeen”).

²¹⁸ Most taqwacore music has remained online releases, ranging from a total of two songs composed by Vote Hezbollah to about a dozen songs by Fedayeen and Secret Trial Five. The Kominas, Al-Thawra, Diacritical, Atari Creed, and Sagg Taqwacore Syndicate however all have full-length releases with Kominas and Diacritical being the most accessible to acquire. Also, the soundtrack to *The Taqwacores* was composed by Omar Fadel who also identified with taqwacore.



Fig. 13 and 14
Fanzine covers, *Totally Radical Muslims 2* (2013); *SubChaos 13* (2013).

Finally, there were two taqwacore-related films made: *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam* (2009) a documentary directed by Omar Majeed about the real life scene and *The Taqwacores* (2010) a dramatization of the novel directed by Eyad Zahra. By the time this dissertation project began, almost no bands still identified as “taqwacore.” The “scene,” if it ever existed, had essentially evaporated.²¹⁹ Nonetheless, the most well-known band to have been associated with taqwacore, The Kominas, have continued to release music and perform concerts. In fact, they and Riz MC (also associated with taqwacore) and now part of the new music project Swet Shop Boys, were declared by *Buzzfeed* to be one of the “21 Kick-Ass Muslims Who Changed The Narrative In 2014.”²²⁰ I saw them perform once in Graz, Austria in 2012 and again in Philadelphia

²¹⁹ Although the term “scene” is used to describe the taqwacore context, it is used primarily as a contrast to movement, group, trend, or phenomenon which all seem to be even worse (less accurate) ways of referring to something which was both amorphous, small, and temporary. One might call taqwacore a “network” but the personal character of it seems to better be suited by “scene” because in punk contexts, local “scenes” are very personal and the smallest basic unit in the larger national or global punk scenes.

²²⁰ Ahmed Ali Akbar, “21 Kick-Ass Muslims Who Changed The Narrative In 2014,” *Buzzfeed*, 16 December 2014. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ahmedaliakbar/kick-ass-muslims-of-2014> Accessed 30 December 2014. Also on this list was G. Willow Wilson who has counted Knight’s books as a major

in 2014. As there was no central location for people associated with taqwacore contexts, I traveled around to meet activists in their hometowns when possible (about 9 live informal interviews) and I interviewed some by e-mail (about 7 more) and a couple by phone. Finally, I attended what might be considered a taqwacore-related event when there was a book release event for *45 Muslim American Men* in Washington DC. Knight had contributed a chapter but he was not at the event. I did, however, get a chance to meet and chat with former goth-punk G. Willow Wilson. Also listed on the “21 Kick-Ass Muslims” list, she is a Muslim sci-fi writer and co-creator of Ms. Marvel, a Muslim comic book superheroine. Wilson told me that Knight’s work, including *The Taqwacores*, had played an influential role in her own writing career.²²¹

No full-length academic book has been published on the taqwacore scene. Academic literature consists of doctoral, master’s and bachelor’s theses, chapters in anthologies, and journal articles. Several of these involved ethnographic work such as concert attendance and interviews.²²² Some restricted their study to published literature, online discussions, lyrics, and blogs.²²³ Some restricted themselves to examining *The Taqwacores* and/or other works by Knight.²²⁴ A significant amount of media attention has been garnered largely through interviews. Articles or reports on taqwacore appeared in many of the major news outlets in the UK and the U.S.: *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and so on. Independent and non-English media also covered the scene. Widespread attention has attracted people across the world to taqwacore (see image by Indonesian proponents, Fig. 15).²²⁵

source of inspiration. She helped create with Sana Amanat the first Muslim superheroine for Marvel Comics: Ms. Marvel.

²²¹ LoveInshallah.com (where Taz Ahmed is a frequent contributor) described Wilson’s book *Alif the Unseen* as “one of the most fantastic debut novels ever.” Source: Anonymous, “#RamadanReads – A Book Buying Revolution,” 1 July 2014. <http://loveinshallah.com/2014/07/01/join-the-national-ramadanreads-campaign> Accessed 3 July 2014.

²²² Fiscella 2012; Hosman 2009; Hsu 2011; McDowell 2014a and 2014b; Mitter 2010; Murthy 2010.

²²³ Anderson et al 2010; Attolino 2009; Bratus 2012; Davidson 2011; Hsu 2013; Luhr 2010; Macke 2012; Vekić 2013.

²²⁴ Bowe 2012; Guthrie 2009; Hampton 2011; Kalareh 2013; Moore 2013; Yulianto 2011. One master’s thesis study, Wilson (2008), devoted one page to taqwacore in a broader study of Hinduism and Buddhism in punk and goth subcultures.

²²⁵ Some of the debates on the *Indonesia Taqwacore* blog seem to have engaged in theological debates more akin to the ones in the book. See Taqwacore Indonesia https://twitter.com/taqwacore_indo For documentation of the spread of taqwacore and the international links between people online, see Hsu 2011 and 2013. Outside of the scene, taqwacore sparked debate amongst others in the punk scene. For example, at *Reddit*, a picture of Tesnim Sayar a Turkish-Danish woman who designed a hijab with a mohawk sparked a lengthy debate about Islam and punk where one of *Reddit*’s moderators went by the name “taqwacore.” See http://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/jtu08/muslim_punk/ Accessed 15 July 2014.



Fig. 15 and 16
 Logo for Taqwacores Indonesia, @taqwacore_indo (2015); Taqwacore “ad” in *The Taqwacores Fanzine* (2010).
 Design by Citizen Vex.

Methods of Study

Originally I picked three contexts upon which to draw material because I wanted to draw from contexts that were different from one another yet with some common features. I wanted them to all be English-speaking and based in the United States as well contexts with which I had some familiarity. All of these reasons were to facilitate the study. Just getting to know a group can take years—especially given my limitations of being based in Sweden. I also wanted them to have central text so that there was an easy way to access material and have a conceptual center for whatever stories about “freedom” might have been central for people associated with those contexts. It was also important that “freedom” somehow played a central role in each of those texts. All three of the ones I chose satisfied these conditions. Regarding differences, each of the three texts constituted a distinct and separate genre (legalese; revelation; and fiction respectively). They were each originally composed during a separate time period (1960s; 1970s; and 2000s). They were each originally directed toward a different audience (predominantly white liberals; predominantly urban Philadelphians; and Muslim/punk subculture). Finally, each of the texts drew from a separate faith affiliation or tradition (liberal Judaism/Christian traditions/transcendentalism/humanism; the Teaching of John Africa; Rastafarianism, punk and a variety of Islamic and Islam-related traditions including Nation of Islam, Five Percenters, and the Moorish Science Temple).

Comparisons may do more representational harm than good and the three contexts are juxtaposed in relationship to one another here primarily to help orient the reader and explain some of the reasons why I initially chose them. Yet the complexity of each context far surpasses what can be clarified in this dissertation. It ought to be emphasized that this dissertation is not a study on these contexts per se even if material and insights from this study might be used by future researchers. Instead, this study aims primarily to work with ideas, perspectives, and feelings culled from these contexts in order to address the topic of “freedom.”

The methodology of this dissertation has consisted primarily of text analysis complemented by a small degree of interviews and ethnography. Regarding text analysis, I tried to read selections from each text in light of its genre and parcel out (a) what were the premises for the type of “freedom” being discussed, (b) what types of “freedom” were being referred to, and (c) what types of “unfreedom” were being discussed or implicit in the text. Regarding ethnography and interviews, I engaged in conversations that felt as comfortable as possible for both parties. If I recorded the interview, I set a date and time and place to meet and checked with the person(s) ahead of time if it was okay to record. Often I took notes after our discussion. The point of the interviews and ethnography was two-fold: to gain access to information and contextual cues that were unavailable through literature (such as examples of what sorts of activities bring the participants together) and to establish a human contact with actual people (giving an opportunity for feedback and lay the groundwork for long-term dialogue).

Aside from standard dissertation courses at Lund University, I spent a half-year in the U.S. sitting in on courses related to “religion” and “freedom” at University of Virginia. The stay also enabled me to gain closer access to various people in the three contexts as well as access to scholars and library materials that were difficult to reach when living in Sweden.

If there were any methodologies that were particularly useful here they were: (1) reading a vast range of material (some would say too vast but they contributed to bringing together seemingly disparate parts); (2) giving myself lots and lots of time to do absolutely nothing —just think. This practice was inspired largely by studies that suggest that the brain needs more time to do nothing in order to think more effectively.²²⁶ This step became useful in a practical sense because after each session of doing nothing/daydreaming I recorded each new thought or insight about the project in my journals (totaling hundreds of pages);²²⁷ (3) discussing the project relentlessly

²²⁶ See Andrew Smart, *Autopilot: The Art and Science of Doing Nothing*, 2013.

²²⁷ I am quite aware that a presentation of methodology is supposed to be devoid of emotion in order to present an allure of scholarly objectivity. However, I am convinced that literally shedding tears as I daydreamed, read, or wrote was just as integral to this research process as the act of deliberated reasoning itself. The social denial of public expressions of sorrow, combined with norms of emotional detachment within academia, seems to somehow convince many of us that it is more proper to read about the torture

with friends, colleagues, and advisors;²²⁸ (4) I organized the material thematically according to the focal points of inclusivity, explicit use of “freedom,” and implicit or explicit advocacy of “unfreedom.”

When I have been compelled to write narratives about an individual or group, I have tried to stick to “facts” that all parties would agree on. For example, if I were to write that the Unitarian Universalist Association was formally founded in 1961, that MOVE members universally regard John Africa to be their founder, or that Michael Muhammad Knight coined the term “taqwacore,” these would be non-controversial statements. I have tried to stick to such statements as much as possible. Yet ultimately, I am telling stories as well.

Concluding Remarks

Conceptually, a turning point for me in my approach to this study was Orlando Patterson’s claim that most languages had no word for “freedom” prior to contact with Europe. Even if his claim that “freedom” did not exist in the vocabularies of non-European languages was only partially true, it suggested to me something very significant. That is, if it were true that *any* functional egalitarian society thrived without police, prisons, enslavement, or armies and simultaneously lacked a word for “freedom” then, it seemed to logically follow that “freedom” was not a necessary component in order to organize a functional society (and one that many people would consider to be “free” precisely due to their lack of enslavement and prisons). So, it further seemed to follow, if “freedom” were a superfluous term that was not necessary in order to establish a healthy functional society, what did it *add*? Well, and this part seemed obvious, it added prisons and enslavement, police and armies. It seemed suddenly quite strange to me that societies that knew perfectly well how to live together without prisons were being excluded from conversations about “freedom” by scholars who could not even *imagine* a society without prisons. Furthermore, such scholars seemed to be perpetuating the idea of European “genius” — the idea that Europeans had invented this wonderful thing called “freedom” that nobody else had ever thought of. The claim of “genius” seemed to pale before another possibility: that of colonial European “insanity,” or, to put it more mildly, cognitive dissonance.²²⁹ I’m not a psychologist

of an animal or human being with equanimity than it is to feel some sort of living connection with their suffering.

²²⁸ This was standard academic procedure except that many of these discussions were at 5 AM when all of the other knowledge workers had gone home.

²²⁹ See Festinger 1957. Basically, cognitive dissonance refers to tension between contradictory input such as people who want to be healthy and know that smoking is an unhealthy practice but choose to smoke anyway. Festinger meant this to apply to everyday behavior and emphasized that essentially, as soon as one deliberates a decision dissonance arises to some degree. Like hunger leads to desiring food,

and this is not a psychological study but the implications of that possibility have certainly colored some of my readings. After all, if “freedom” *was* necessary for societies who condoned bullying tactics, domination techniques, and mass abuse (such as enslavement) but *not* necessary for relatively non-coercive, egalitarian societies who rejected enslavement and prisons, then it seemed that egalitarian social orders might be better pursued without “freedom” than with it.

The more I looked at conversations about “freedom,” the more I found that European-language scholars were attributing a considerable amount of “unfreedom” to the concept of “freedom” (in the form of limitations, borders, racial exclusion, inequality, power, monopoly of mass violence, imprisonment, war, property, duty, responsibility, obedience, obligations, voluntary servitude, etc.) and yet every scholar considered more than one of these “unfreedoms” to be integral to a proper conception of “freedom.” Even if unspoken or implicit, the “unfreedoms” were not only there, they also outnumbered the “freedoms” in variety and/or importance. At the outset, in concern to principles of democratic inclusivity, there seemed to be a general apathy or even antipathy toward inclusiveness for all people (especially amongst the early scholars).

From this I concluded that a more precise and useful way to speak about “freedom” and “unfreedom” was *(un)freedom* because *some* sort of “unfreedom” always seemed to accompany a conception of “freedom.” This term, (un)freedom, would refer to the general area of conversation and imply that in order to understand whatever it was one was talking about in any given context, at least one “freedom” and more than one “unfreedom” ought to be located. As most conceptions of “freedom” today tend to assume the necessity of the state and are rooted in ideas derived from the so-called Enlightenment,²³⁰ some of those “unfreedoms” that accompany “freedom” are the mass monopolization of violence by the state, colonialism, a recent history of enslavement, and hundreds of years of institutionalized racism.

In order to facilitate alternative conceptions, I imagined three different types of (un)freedom and used them to organize the material in this thesis. These types, it would seem, can be seen in a wide range of contexts (at least in all three of the contexts I chose). Significantly, these (un)freedoms ought to help develop conversations about

dissonance leads to desiring consonance. Often this translates into people deceiving themselves (“smoking isn’t really *that* bad”). Over the years, numerous studies and experiments have lent strong support to cognitive dissonance theory.

²³⁰ By using the term “so-called Enlightenment,” the intent here is not to be dismissive but rather to simply reject compliance with the “Enlightenment” as an ideological term. To be enlightened is to be wise. To refer to “*the* Enlightenment” in such a manner that readers understand that one (of course) means to refer to white supremacist thinkers such as John Locke or Immanuel Kant and not (ever) other possible meanings of “enlightenment” (such as the Buddha), is to reproduce an ideological position about where wisdom is located. For European elites that period of time might have seemed like a golden age. For indigenous peoples across the world, it was a painfully dark age descended upon them from abroad.

“freedom” and “unfreedom” that embrace inclusivity for all people and welcome them and their traditions into conversations that ultimately bear impact on everybody.

The aim with this thesis is not to “prove” anything. Instead, it is to argue that concerns of democratic inclusivity are hampered by “freedom” and may be better addressed by alternatives (possibly including the suggestion outlined here). In order to facilitate discussion regarding this topic, I present two questions:

(1) How might one engage in a study with empirical data that deals with the question of “freedom” from a perspective that does not assume “freedom” to exist and that simultaneously acknowledges the colonialist, enslaving, and racist interests that both shaped its development and thrived through its dominance?

(2) From the field of religious studies, how might one explore alternative conceptions of “freedom,” how would they relate to dominant conversations of “freedom,” and how would these questions be meaningful in a broader societal perspective?

In addition to that primary aim, there are several secondary contributions that this thesis may provide: (a) To issue a call for critical inquiries of “freedom” by providing an overview of relevant work and arguments to those ends, (b) To connect scholarship on prison abolitionism, critical race theories, critical religion theories, and decolonialism to one another, (c) to contribute to existing research on Unitarian Universalists by providing new primary material (in particular a discussion of the Right Relationship Team which has, hitherto been unstudied) while furthermore contributing to existing dialogue on the UUA and race relations,²³¹ (d) to broaden to the type of conversations in scholarship about MOVE by discussing MOVE philosophy with the help of primary data (as opposed to most scholarship which has focused on the matter of conflicts involving MOVE or their media representations—often based on secondary data), (e) to contribute to existing research on taqwacore by addressing philosophical and ideological implications as well as by broadening the scope of potential interviewees and challenging the reification of the term “taqwacore” that took place in the media but which was largely absorbed by scholarship, (f) in regard to both MOVE- and taqwacore-related research, to compile more comprehensive bibliographies than any of those compiled by scholars to date.

The rest of this introductory section shall first provide some relevant background information and arguments that relate to the structure, form, and content of the thesis (colonial history, “state of nature,” democratic inclusivity, etc.). It shall then provide conceptual descriptions of the two key terms of the thesis (“freedom” and “unfreedom”) and discuss the importance of these concepts. After a brief discussion about words and inclusive language, the introductory section will address ethical concerns, and then finally conclude with an outline describing the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

²³¹ Morrison-Reed 2011; Santos-Lyons 2006.

Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is tied to what has seemed to me to be an implicit structure for conversations about “freedom.” They start with speakers and audiences. Borders of “us” and “them”; people in the room, and people who are not; people who have a right to speak and people who have been excluded or marginalized. In other words, conversations about “freedom” as a social philosophy (as opposed to conversations about “freedom” in terms of “free will” or personal abilities) begin explicitly or implicitly with assumptions about democratic inclusivity. Those assumptions may articulate varying degrees of limitations on inclusivity and they need not be articulated but they do exist. Yet whereas inclusivity often occurs in print, exclusivity often takes place in practice. Similarly, while conversations about “freedom” usually are based around the explicit use of the word “freedom” or “liberty,” these terms are always accompanied by the presence of “unfreedom” that often manifest implicitly rather than explicitly.²³² Subsequently, the structure of the thesis addresses questions of inclusivity, explicit discussions of “freedom,” and advocacy of “unfreedom” (either implicitly or explicitly) in both text and practice. After addressing technical questions of language usage in this thesis and ethical concerns, the structure shall proceed according to the following outline.

Chapter Two shall begin by addressing questions of language in a broader sense and how words, names, and labels affect the stories and cognitive perceptions that build upon them. Thereafter, it shall provide a brief overview of scholarship on “freedom” for the reader to grasp a general idea as to which dominant conversations of “freedom” this thesis is responding to. This is followed by discussions and examples of both exclusion and inclusion in societal conversations. Alternative conceptions of “freedom” are presented as well as the implications of “unfreedom” being consistently bound to “freedom.” In both cases, the idea of “borders, bonds, and bondages” is presented as a way to conceptualize these “unfreedom” (or, phrased differently, as limits, human connections, and oppressions). In contrast, depictions of “freedom” can be understood as “wills, ways, and wars” (or, phrased differently, as “free will,” opportunities, and domination). Also, an alternative way of examining conversations about “freedom” is presented and discussed. As opposed to the traditional binary that regards “freedom” and “unfreedom” to be mutually exclusive opposites, the concept of (un)freedom is presented as a means to reunite concepts that were historically and conceptually entwined prior to the advent of enslavement.

²³² These “unfreedom” can be bound to “freedom” in a negative sense in that they help define “freedom” by stating what it is not (e.g., constraint, impediment, enslavement, incarceration, addiction, tyranny, etc.) but also in a positive sense in that “freedom” is considered to require certain other values or conditions in order to function (e.g., limits, law, duty, responsibility, obligation, the state, virtue, discipline, etc.). No philosopher discusses “freedom” without binding it either positively or negatively to some “unfreedom.”

Chapter Three brings forth the empirical material through selections of texts from each of the three contexts. After drawing selections from the central text within each context, secondary “texts” are drawn out (from magazines, newspapers, interviews, etc.). The organizing guidelines for the selection and discussion of these texts are based on highlighting questions of inclusion, the centrality of “freedom,” and the associated “unfreedom.” It also addresses the other side of written text: social text, or practices. By looking at practices, as culled through participant observation, interviews, literature, or second-hand reports, this section goes through each of the three contexts and examines how inclusivity has manifested, how “freedom” has been interpreted, and how “unfreedom” relate overtly or covertly to the context in question. Rather than presenting overviews of the context in question, examples are selected that somehow relate to the questions of inclusivity and “freedom/unfreedom” in the previous chapter.

In Chapter Four, the concept of (un)freedom is developed as a lens through which to analyze conversations about “freedom.” In order to be useful, three different types of (un)freedom are presented as prominent concerns for persons and groups grappling with questions about “freedom”: Negotiating the Limits of Language, Shouldering Incalculable Responsibility in Community, and Feeling an Obligation to Challenge Injustice. Each of these concerns (and/or experiences) can be understood as expressions of both “freedom” and “unfreedom” simultaneously. Framed in this sense, conversations about (un)freedom could potentially function as a bridge between exclusive and dominant conversations about “freedom” and excluded and decolonial conversations about “unfreedom.” Rather than overly analyze material, the emphasis here has been to bring forth excluded voices.

The last chapter, Chapter Five, sets our gaze toward the development of critical inquiries of “freedom.” How might such inquiries of “freedom” manifest, how can inclusive conversations be configured, and how could such conversations relate to the exclusive nature of academia itself? Rather than provide answers, this dissertation leaves with the material presented as a basis for future dialogue to engage and create potential answers and new questions.

A Few Words About Language

The Dao that can be spoken is not the true Dao.

-Dao de Jing

There are a number of quirks in the language of this thesis that are worth addressing all at once. First, the discipline within which I write is ostensibly History of Religion but as I do not believe much in the existence of “history” or “religion” except as ideological constructs serving powerful interests, it is problematic for me to speak of this discipline as something real or to speak of its constituent parts as meaningful. Even within a

supposedly single cultural tradition, “history” is, as my old friend noted, a series of re-writes—to say nothing of the multitude of possible histories untold and histories that have been squelched or edited out of dominant conversations. So rather than history then I try to speak of histories in the plural sense or, even better, stories and storytelling.²³³ Rather than “religion,” “philosophy,” “culture,” or “science,” I prefer to think of life-organizing stories. “Religion” within a European-language context tends to imply a general ideological system based on certain dominant tendencies within what has been called a “Judeo-Christian” tradition. It is presumed that some people are “religious” and others are not. Instead, I am interested in universal expressions that do not arbitrarily privilege exclusive European-language-based ideas. “Life-organizing stories” is meant to refer to those stories—whatever they are—that orient us as we negotiate the large and small decisions of our daily lives.²³⁴ It is irrelevant whether a person retrieved those ideas from a “sacred book” or a “comic book,” from a Catholic Mass or a comedic movie, from a sweat lodge or a Moose Lodge, from a newspaper or a shaman, from an elder or a child. That is, whether a person believes in “God,” “ghosts,” “UFOs,” “nothing,” or “science” or not is irrelevant to determine whether or not that person has a life-organizing story. Everybody reading this is informed by life-organizing stories of various sorts. Words such as “automobile,” “Big Bang,” “Gandhi,” “Mom,” “America,” and “Republican” all reference the stories in which they are imbedded. We locate ourselves within those stories, we share them, and they somehow help organize and direct our lives.

Related to the idea of stories is the idea of conversations. Again, I am using a term that is intended to bring academic language back to earth and away from ideas and terms that privilege whites and/or males and/or academics. A popular term in academia for what I am referring to is “discourse.” None of the working class friends I went to school with would know what that meant. By they would understand the word “conversation.” For my purposes here, that is good enough. I am talking about written

²³³ See Carlshamre 2011 for a discussion on “history” as storytelling.

²³⁴ This approach would be consonant with the definition of “religion” offered by Charles Long: “For my purposes, religion will mean orientation—orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one’s place in the world. ...it is experience, expression, motivations, intentions, behaviors, styles, and rhythms. Its first and fundamental expression is not on the level of thought” (1986: 7). I am not however interested in defining “religion” any more than I am interested in defining “freedom.” As an ideological construct, I would like to move beyond that and be able to have conversations where people may use the term “religion” but it is not understood to be in opposition to aircraft carriers and comic strips, Wall Street investments and revolutionary syndicalism, birthday parties and bathroom decorations. For example, studies have suggested that people who “have a strong belief in a just world experience less negative and more positive emotions in response to stressful situations than weak believers in a just world” and factors that can shape one’s belief in a just world can be influenced in part by comic books wherein children “use superheroes as a way of understanding themselves and culture” (Naidu 2012: 11, 17).

and spoken conversations in textbooks, talk shows, and theoretical lectures. I do not want any of the intellectual baggage that accompanies “discourse” and “discourse analysis” anyway. That’s not what I am doing here and I think any discourse analyst would agree. Conversation simply refers to people talking with one another either directly or through various mediums. The conversations that I am most concerned with here are the ones that have been going on for centuries between scholars about the topic of “freedom.” These have been pretty exclusive conversations and, as I cannot see any justification for that, I am trying to open the door so that ultimately anyone who wants to walk in and participate constructively on equal terms can do so. Current language, economic barriers, and other modes of exclusion now hinder that from happening.²³⁵

In the meantime, I use a phrase that consciously blurs the line between potential inclusion and actual inclusion: “in conversation with.” When I state in this thesis that someone’s ideas are “in conversation with” someone else, I do not mean that they necessarily have talked to one another, nor that either of them has read material by the other. Instead, I mean that such ideas are referring to common conceptual terrain. I mean that whether or not these sets ideas are in agreement they are at least talking about the same topic. Hence, in regard to the topic of “freedom,” I am interested in showing that some people’s ideas are in conversation with others even though one of them has been excluded because they were assumed to have nothing to add to the conversation.

If it is jarring for some readers that I refer to my material as three “contexts” rather than three “groups,” “communities,” or “movements,” it has nonetheless felt necessary because I cannot honestly describe all of them with the same term. They all share the fact that they have a close relationship to a central text but, beyond that, they take very different shapes in terms of organization, size, and structure.

Then there is the matter of bias that is inherent in language. “Language constraints” of a sort. Word-binaries such as “he” and “she” imply the existence of only two genders. Conventional white male scholarship has furthermore tended to use words like “man” or “he” when referring to everybody (but it was often unclear because many times they really did only mean *men*). I do not change the use of “men” when it is used in such cases, unless I felt particularly annoyed that a scholar in recent times continued to use exclusively male-gender pronouns. In Swedish the word *hen* is beginning to be used as a gender-neutral alternative to *han* (“he”) or *hon* (“she”). As we do not yet have such a tradition in English (no use of *hem* that I know of),²³⁶ I refer to “they” or “them” when speaking about a generic or universal person.

This type of language critique has made my thinking and speaking slower in many respects and it has made it difficult to write in a way that feels genuinely respectful.

²³⁵ Not only are universities and literature expensive ventures but access to basic information through scholarly journals is typically reserved for those who are associated with an institution or who can afford the hefty subscription fees.

²³⁶ It has been suggested however that there be developed a gender-neutral term for people that is not based on “man” as in “human” or “son” as in “person.” With this in mind, Upendra Baxi proposed the term “huper” as a non-sexist alternative (1998: 125).

Some of these battles I have chosen to neglect for the sake of writing a text that is easy to read. In other cases, I have changed how I speak and write. An example of a recent change is my rejection of the terms “slave” and “master.” It is problematic for one thing to identify a person according to a relationship of violence. Instead, it is the act of committing violence that is important. Second, and more importantly, the terms are not equal. To be a “slave” is hardly a compliment. A “slave” to something implies a lack of will and is often used to describe someone disparagingly (e.g., a “slave” to drugs or alcohol). Even in ancient Greece, Eumaeus, a king’s son who had been enslaved as a child, is recorded to have said, “All-seeing Zeus takes half the good out of a man the day he becomes a slave” and ... “When servants no longer feel their master’s firm hand they are no longer ready to work as they should.”²³⁷

On the other hand, to be called a “master” at something is a positive thing. Who would not want to “master” a sport or a skill or to receive the title of “master”? So the very use of the terms “slave” and “master” replicate the ideology of the violence that produced the social relationships that are being referred to. Those relationships are based not on isolated instances of personal violence but on the cultivation of *routine* and *extreme* violence. A large part of that violence included the mental conditioning of people to accept coercion and inequality as a natural part of daily life.

One important part of inculcating that mentality is the normalization of fear and terror. As such, one could justifiably describe enslavement as a relationship between an ordinary “person” and a “terrorist.” Yet, I do not think most non-Native readers are ready to view George Washington as a “terrorist” (any more than he was prepared to view his victims as “persons”). Even though the domination of a few hundred people by means of force and coercion might reasonably qualify as terror, I shall instead speak here of people who are or have been “enslaved” by “enslavers.” The terms “slave” and “master,” except when citing others, shall be avoided. Not only do these alternative terms dispose of the positive/negative associations with “slave/master,” they also dispose of the passive implications of a “master” who simply “is” a master without necessarily doing anything. “Enslaver” highlights the act that is taking place and signals more clearly that there is a subsequent accountability that would in normal circumstance accompany that act. Likewise, rather than assigning the identity of “slave” to a person, they describe the condition of a relationship in which abuse is taking place. These terms emphasize the *act* of enslaving and, in using different forms of the same term, they refer to a shared relationship. While hardly a perfect solution (a sort of hierarchy may still be read into it), they seem at least preferable to “slave” and “master.” Consequently, “slavery” shall be replaced with “enslavement.”²³⁸

²³⁷ Pohlenz, citing Homer (1966: 5).

²³⁸ In favor of this type of consideration an online commenter posted on an academic forum: “Slave is reductive and static and does not accurately reflect reality. Enslaved individuals are ... complex human beings.” In favor of the term “enslaved person,” white author Andi Cumbo-Floyd said: “We carry them

Enslavement is often regarded to be the opposite of “freedom” yet, as I argued earlier, there is no reason why “justice” ought not to be the opposite. Being released from captivity is but one step in a process of reconciliation, restitution, or reparations. The term “freedom” is used here exclusively in quote marks to signal the fact that I am talking about the ideology of the use of the term “freedom” when I use that word. If I were to simply write “freedom” without quote marks, my concern is that the years of social conditioning that have told readers that “freedom” is something real would encourage them to believe that I too believe in “freedom” and I am debating what it “really” means. Atheism has become a strong enough tendency for atheists to speak of God and have people understand that they believe it is a non-existent myth. People do not have to agree with atheism to understand it. Regarding “freedom,” its insidious effect is such that people often take it to mean that there necessarily is something there because the word is so prominently used to describe an array of examples. After all, people *are* released from prison, aren’t they? After many, many years of struggle and abolitionism, “slavery” ended and people *were* “freed” were they not? Citizens of the United States *are* “free” to speak their mind in a letter to the newspaper without risk of imprisonment, aren’t they? My simple response to these typical examples of how obvious “freedom” is would be to ask a question: Is “freedom,” with all its multiple connotations, ambiguities, and contested content, really the most useful and precise way to describe these circumstances or would it be more accurate and helpful to speak about degrees and types of violence, terror, or coercion? In all of these cases, the state is involved in committing, sanctioning, or negotiating acts of violence upon or between human beings (whom might be designated “citizens” but in all cases are human whether or not the state ascribes them “rights”). What is relevant for discussion is how such systems of violence can be justified or dismantled (along with other systems of violence such as property, national borders, sexism, homophobia, and racism).

As an addendum to “freedom-talk,” one might add that it is not uncommon for scholars to attribute agency to “freedom” or some other abstract concept such as “nation,” “the people,” “justice,” etc. Sara Ahmed’s comments on “nation” are relevant here.

forward as people, not ...property” (Cumbo-Floyd however titled her book *The Slaves Have Names*). White historian Eric Foner argued against using “enslaved person” rather than “slave” and stated: “I was taught long ago by my mentor Richard Hofstadter that it is always better to use as few words as possible in conveying an idea,” he emailed. “Slave is a familiar word and if it was good enough for Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists who fought to end the system, it is good enough for me.” For more on this debate see: Katy Waldman. “Slave or Enslaved Person?” *Slate*, 19 May 2015. http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_history_of_american_slavery/2015/05/historians_debate_whether_to_use_the_term_slave_or_enslaved_person.html?wpsrc=sp_all_native_by-section Accessed 11 October 2015.

The emotionality of texts is one way of describing how texts are ‘moving,’ or how they generate effects. ...So a text may claim, ‘the nation mourns’. We would pause here, of course, and suggest the ‘inside out/outside in’ model of emotion is at work: the nation becomes ‘like the individual’, a feeling subject, or a subject that ‘has feelings’. But we would also need to ask: *What does it do to say that the nation ‘mourns’?* This is a claim both that the nation has a feeling (the nation is the subject of feeling), but also that generates the nation as the object of ‘our feeling’ (we might mourn on behalf of the nation). The feeling does simply exist before the utterance, but becomes ‘real’ as an effect, shaping different kinds of actions and orientations. To say, ‘the nation mourns’ is to generate the nation, *as if it were a mourning subject*. The ‘nation becomes a shared ‘object of feeling’ through the ‘orientation’ that is taken towards it.²³⁹

The one exception that I would grant to Ahmed’s astute observations is the contention that terms exert a form of influence by means of their impact. As it has been noted “race is a social construction that can kill you.”²⁴⁰ A term can take on a bit of a life of its own in the relationship that manifests in the minds, stories, and behaviors of those who use it. The fact that a term may be socially constructed and not actually refer to real life phenomena certainly does not mean that it is hindered from creating real life impact.

A person (with agency) may strike a nail with a fist and accomplish little, the same fist holding a hammer may sink the nail. The hammer does not necessarily have agency but becomes an extension of the actor’s agency. At the same time, the hammer influences the way that the user thinks. Hence, the saying “If all you have is a hammer, then all problems look like nails.” The same holds true for words that are used for their impact. Words such as “nation,” “America,”²⁴¹ “God,” or “freedom” carry an impact that words such as “racket,” “fidget,” or “porridge” do not. One way to look at this type of impact is by designating them “god-terms.”²⁴² These socially constructed “hammers”

²³⁹ Ahmed 2004: 13. Ironically, the author in this case, broke her own rule when she wrote that “a text may claim.” Just as a nation cannot mourn, a text cannot claim. Authors stake claims (as she did) *through* texts. Texts can only be interpreted—even by authors. Authors alone retain agency.

²⁴⁰ This quote was attributed to professor John Powell by Matsuda 2001: 181.

²⁴¹ “America” is problematic for additional reasons. First, it is a settler designation and second, it erases or marginalizes Central and South America (see Nguyen 2012: 191).

²⁴² By “god-term,” I mean, (1) the term is universally agreed upon in U.S. political discourse as something “good” (while its purported opposites such as “slavery,” “dictatorship,” “addiction,” “totalitarianism,” “constraint,” and so on, are, as “devil-terms,” deemed to be “bad”); (2) It is generally considered a fundamental value that unites citizens with a sense of purpose; (3) It is generally considered a vital value without which society would lose its meaning—so vital that many citizens are willing to kill others and/or sacrifice their lives in its name; (4) Its precise meaning is both highly contested in technical debates and highly ambiguous when used to mobilize people in public contexts. This is similar to and inspired from (though not necessarily identical to) “god-term” or “charismatic term” as used by Ralph

may help solve problems of social cohesion at the same time as they complicate matters by temporarily disguising internal conflicts and/or the terrain which they aim to describe.

In *After the Revolution?* (1970), white political scientist Robert Dahl looked at the statement “rule by the people” and wondered what was the meaning of “rule” and “people.” In regard to “people” he wrote that, after having “puzzled over the problem for years,” he became gradually persuaded that there was “no theoretical solution to the puzzle, but only pragmatic ones.”²⁴³ Most attention in scholarship had apparently gone to defining “rule” and almost none to “people.” He said that even when we talk about raising or lowering the voting age or including suffrage for women, we already have an idea in our heads about citizenship. Yet, who actually constituted this “people,” to what degree, and how did they come about to become *a* “people”?

Strange as it may seem to you, how to decide who legitimately make up ‘the people’ — or rather *a* people— and hence are entitled to govern themselves in their *own* association is a problem almost totally neglected by all the great political philosophers who write about democracy. I think this is because they take for granted that a people has already constituted itself. How a people accomplishes this mysterious transformation is therefore treated as a purely hypothetical event that has already occurred in prehistory or in a state of nature.²⁴⁴

In a “nation” such as the United States where “the people” were consistently and violently divided and stratified —not only by class and gender but by race as well— on occupied land whose original inhabitants were a sore reminder of citizenry’s painful ambiguity, it is hardly surprising that the question has been discretely swept under the rug.

So, as we have seen, some terms *do* do things. They have a sort of agency and “freedom,” I believe, belongs in this category. In fact, I would argue that “freedom” has hammered our English-speaking brains so much so that it is difficult to imagine a world without it. For many of us, our thought patterns have become chained, anchored if you will, to “freedom.” Unpacking some of the implications and perhaps unveiling an escape from this constraint is one aim of this dissertation.

Ellison and Kenneth Burke (see Hickman 2008: 177) or Richard Weaver respectively (see Stivers 2008: 91).

²⁴³ Dahl 1970: 60.

²⁴⁴ Ibid 60-61. Dahl continued: “For two thousand years, philosophers who wrote about rule by the people took it for granted that ‘the people’ would be a single, well-defined, and probably small subset of humanity, and that this subset of people would rule through a single, sharply bounded, and completely autonomous state.” As this was clearly not the case within contemporary nation-states, Dahl imagined that a solution could be *polyarchy*. That is, “rule by the people requires not one form but many forms including, paradoxically, nondemocratic forms of delegated authority” (92, 95).

Ethical Concerns

There is an Old Russian proverb that is relevant in regard to the study of history: “Dwell on the past and you will lose an eye. Forget the past and you will lose both eyes.”²⁴⁵ I find this proverb interestingly reminiscent of an old Zen saying: “...do not lose either the eye of oneness or the eye that discerns differences.”²⁴⁶ I think both of these statements are applicable to philosophy. Engaging in this study has indeed cost me an eye and, while I cannot claim to have resolved some of the dilemmas, I aim to clarify some of the difficulties I have encountered.

It starts in the beginning... the very matter of choosing a topic of study is one primary ethical choice that every researcher makes. To exemplify why and how it can be problematic to simply choose a group of people to study out of casual interest, I'll begin with a story.

During the spring of 2015, I was at an event in Philadelphia for the purposes of my research. While there I came into contact with a Native American woman. We tried to have a conversation as best we could although the music at the event was quite loud. She asked what my thesis was about and I half-shouted in her ear something about “decolonizing ‘freedom.’” The woman, however, clearly liked the idea of “freedom” and even used “freedom” in the title of her personal homepage. So now it possibly seemed as if I was trying to take away from her something that had meaning to her. If I was saying that “*freedom*” was a colonialist term, then what was I trying to say about *her*? It would be a natural reaction to think: “What is this pompous white guy doing by trying to tell me *anything* about freedom ...*or* me?” She was very polite and gave no overt sign that that was what she felt but my instinct said that I had crossed a line that I should not have crossed. Under calmer circumstances, I would have preferred to sit down quietly and listen to what *she* meant by the term. What I should have done in that circumstance was downplay or ignore my own work for the moment and (despite the loud music) just listen to her. Feeling excited about what I am doing and feeling excited to talk with her and hear her response, I trampled over my own ethical boundaries and, possibly, over hers as well.

I have not had direct experience with indigenous communities in the U.S. and, knowing that I would be inclined to make many such mistakes, I chose not to bring such communities directly into my study. It can take years to get to know people, learn their social mores, their language, and to gain trust. Even if I were to have had time to investigate such a community, would I be prepared to sustain my connections to that community after the research project was done or would I simply move on after they had filled my purpose? Even beyond those issues lay another difficult question: What would give me the right to feel that it was okay for me to study people whom I did not

²⁴⁵ Cited by Perlmutter 1999: ix.

²⁴⁶ From the Pure Standards of Eihei Dōgen Zenji written in the 1200s (Leighton and Okumura 1996: 38).

already know? How is it that a white person like me could feel comfortable pulling out a microscope and placing it on the lives of people who have been terrorized by white people?

So the first ethical consideration that I had to face was the idea that I cannot pretend to engage in any research outside of colonial processes and their legacies. As my concerns tend to be of a more pragmatic character, I am interested not so much in what research says, but what that act of “saying” is *doing*. Aside from securing income and prestige for a number of scholars, I have wondered what would the impact look like in the world if I could see “footprints” from various academic books and papers. Some forms of scientific research are clearly used to make more effective weapons or surveillance equipment. Some are used to create new pharmaceutical drugs or banking procedures. Yet if one could look at the impact of religious studies, what would one see? Religious studies scholar James Spickard wrote:

Rulers needed data, so they hired ethnographers to record their subjects’ folkways, mores, and customs, as well as their political structures, material accomplishments, and worldviews ...[to serve the European aspiration] to dominate the world. ...all ethnography is political—in both its colonial and its post-colonial versions.²⁴⁷

Spickard did not mean that all ethnography was necessarily colonialist—only that none of it can be extricated from colonial history in which the histories of ethnography are imbedded. What then, I have wondered, is happening today with my own work? What footprints might my texts leave without my knowing it? My words, my cognitive frameworks, my research, and the institutions in which I have worked were built on the type of complicity that Spickard described. Being a “good” researcher has felt a lot like trying to be a “good” cop or a “good” soldier. I could try to be “fair and equal” but “fair and equal” did not build my university, socialize me into whiteness, or pay my salary. Even if many academics strive for equitable transformation and a great deal of work has been achieved to those ends, the institutional and intellectual frameworks that enable our work has made it difficult for me to imagine a role for myself wherein I do less rather than more harm. With each sheet of paper drawn at the cost of living organisms through the labor of other living organisms, I begin my work with a deficit in my account. I could not in good conscience engage in a study that bore no impact yet nor could I deceive myself into thinking that I already knew how to create an impact that did not do yet more damage.

This examination of colonial-critical perspectives led to an increasing disillusionment with academic study in general as it is commonly performed within the supposedly “neutral” institutional, conceptual, and methodological framework that has arisen with “the academy.”

I became aware of how academic conversations could inadvertently be used to exclude others and confirm prejudiced perceptions of the world. In an article entitled

²⁴⁷ Spickard 2002: 237, 249.

“Indigenous Knowledge in the Social Work Academy,” Dumbrill and Green (2008) share a story that is illustrative of how “science” can often interact with “material”:

After hearing that Indigenous ways of knowing were a good thing, a White professor wanted to bring this knowledge into the academy but did not know how. He read book after book but found no answers.

‘Maybe’, he thought, ‘if I get in touch with nature, the answers will come to me’. So donning a backpack he set out for the bush. After walking for several hours he sat beneath a large tree and began to think, but although bit by mosquitoes and blackflies he was bit by no ideas. Feeling sorry for himself, he sighed, ‘Will I ever learn how to include Indigenous knowledge in social work?’.

High in a tree Raven watched and began to worry. Experience had taught him that every time a White person included Aboriginal people in something, the White people took something away from Aboriginal people; there was no telling what this professor might come up with if left to his own devices. Raven decided to help.

‘Hey’, shouted Raven, ‘I can tell you how to do that’.

The professor nearly jumped out of his skin! This was just a little too close to nature for him. But he quickly calmed his fears realizing that perhaps this was the break he was looking for, and besides, there was sure to be at least one journal article in it! He grabbed his notebook and pen and asked Raven to explain.

‘What you gotta do’, Raven said, ‘is give the traditions and ways of knowing of the Qallunaat a part of your academic space. Once you’ve done that, you’ve got your problem beat!’.

Excited, the professor said, ‘Tell me about the Qallunaat’.

‘The Qallunaat are a strange and ancient people’, Raven replied. ‘They have three types of sage, the first keep learning until their people call them a “man without a marriage partner”. Now these sages don’t have to be men and it’s okay if they are married.’

‘So why call them a “man without a marriage partner”?’ the professor asked.

‘Tradition’, Raven answered. ‘Now if they keep on learning some of them will eventually reach the next level and people will call them, “a man with dog or a servant”. But again they may not all be men and they probably won’t have dogs or servants.’

‘More tradition?’ the professor asked.

‘Yes more tradition’, Raven acknowledged. ‘Now, getting to the final level of knowing takes a lot more learning than the first two stages put together and not many of them can handle that much knowledge in their heads—some go crazy trying. But those who

make it get to be called “healers of thinking”. These are the real big shots in the tribe because they do all kinds of magic with words and numbers to determine whether something is true.’

As Raven spoke the professor took hurried notes, but when he looked up to ask where the Qallunaat might be found, Raven had gone. ‘Never mind’, thought the professor, ‘I now know what I have to do, I will find the Qallunaat and invite them to the campus. There should be no problem giving them a small place in the academy where they can enjoy their ways of learning and strange traditions—as long as they promise not to interfere with anyone else at the school’.

So the professor set out looking for the Qallunaat. First he traveled east and asked the Mi’kmak if they knew the Qallunaat, but they said they’d never heard of them. Moving south he met the Mohawk and Lakota Nations who had not heard of the Qallunaat either. He journeyed west to the Salish who could not help him. He then turned north, further and further he walked and when the Inuit saw him they came to greet him and said, ‘It is not often we see a White guy up here—what brings a Qallunaat like you this far north?’²⁴⁸

As Dumbrill and Green pointed out “being inclusive does not begin with the social work academy understanding Other knowledge, it begins with the academy understanding how it is dominated by European knowledge.”²⁴⁹ This domination permeates academic institutions and affects not only form but content.

Given these circumstances and factors, I chose to keep it simple and study a concept and how it related to people in real life. When a person of color takes a course in *The Philosophy of Freedom* at a university and sees only white people in the curriculum, that’s a real life experience. The people I chose to interact with in this study were people drawn from contexts that were already somehow part of my life. When the project was over, my relationships, my bond to those contexts would likely continue in one way or another. If nothing else, this thesis then would be a continuation of — rather than a departure from— my ordinary life.

That said, I am aware that whatever is written here, if it is useful in any regard, could ostensibly be useful for any side in social struggles. The very unequal wars of colonialism, the wars that instituted the dynamics of the global order today, have been perpetrated largely by those with more and more effective weapons against those with less and less effective weapons. The social structures that I, as a person, and research as sets of institutions, grew up within were shaped categorically by the outcomes of those wars. To pretend that whatever “knowledge” I produced was not intimately interwoven with the inequalities that produced me and my research position would, it seemed, be

²⁴⁸ Dumbrill and Green, “Indigenous Knowledge in the Social Work Academy,” (2008: 491-492).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid* 492.

rather naïve. I have asked myself the question: “Can the academy be non-violent?” and could not justify any attempt to answer in the affirmative.

To the contrary, as soon as I began my dissertation studies, I took an introductory course in which required reading included a Swedish textbook that provided a “history” of “science.” Covering a range of philosophers and scientists 600 BC to 2002 AD, this narrative managed to exclude virtually all non-Europeans.²⁵⁰ A North African Berber such as Augustine was included on Molander’s list presumably by virtue of his identification as a “Christian” while European polymaths such as Ibn Bajja/Avempace and Ibn Rushd/Averroes were notably excluded presumably because they were “Muslims.”²⁵¹ This took place, as it often does, under the guise of scholarly neutrality. The pattern was a standard one in which scholars drawn from the colonizing class²⁵² would invisibilize those on the receiving end of colonial history. In *The Death of White Sociology*, Joyce Ladner wrote that the

inability or refusal to deal with Blacks as a part and parcel of the varying historical and cultural contributions to the American scene has, perhaps, been the reason sociology has excluded the Black perspective from its widely accepted mainstream theories. Mainstream sociology, in this regard, reflects the ideology of the larger society, which has always excluded Black lifestyles, values, behavior, attitudes, and so forth from the body of data that is used to define, describe, conceptualize and theorize about the structure and functions of American society.²⁵³

White sociologists have been far from alone in upholding colonial orders. Hence, colonialist projects and European-language scripts establishing the presentation of “self” and “other” were made possible by a threefold intellectual pursuit of the racist narrative, scientific enterprise, and a belief that science could be “neutral.” In biology, eugenics offered its objective voice in favor of racial distinctions. Anthropologists studied “primitive” culture like bugs in a jar.²⁵⁴ Sociologists (such as Durkheim) analyzed those studies to produce their own conclusions with an implicit conception of evolutionary society growing from the primitive (Aboriginal) to the advanced (European). Geographers designated territory according to the resources that could be

²⁵⁰ Molander, Joakim, *Vetenskapsteoretiska grunder: Historia och begrepp*, (2003: 9).

²⁵¹ For an alternative cultural narrative of the history of science see Bala 2008.

²⁵² Swedes were failed colonizers but their unconditional status as “white” (since the early 1900s at least), the contributions to racial eugenics and stereotypes by Carl Linnaeus, the hearty consumption by Swedish readers of English colonialist tropes and images (repeated in, for example, early textbooks, news reports, and editions of *National Geographic* translated into Swedish), Sweden’s virtual membership status in NATO, and the Swedish government’s embrace of neo-liberal policies may justifiably qualify ethnic Swedes as a de facto part of the colonizing class.

²⁵³ Ladner 1998: xxiii.

²⁵⁴ For a report on racism in contemporary anthropology see Smedley and Hutchinson (2012).

extracted: “The Gold Coast,” “The Ivory Coast,” and “The Slave Coast.”²⁵⁵ Legal scholars established racial codes and hierarchies of rights. Historians wrote and re-wrote episodes to suit the larger story of “progress” and “civilization.” Medical doctors engaged in brutish experiments upon “primitive” peoples including sterilization. Theologians confirmed the social order through their interpretations of key scriptural passages. Engineers, mathematicians, chemists, and physicists developed key technologies that could provide colonialist militaries with better equipment and weapons to win wars and squash rebellions (domestic and foreign). Educational institutions often worked in tandem with theologians, government officials, and other disciplines to re-program indigenous, kidnapped, and colonized peoples into whichever dogma was politically correct for that time and place. Political scientists framed capitalism in general and European democratic nation-states in particular as the peak of civilization while justifying the colonialist projects while they were taking place and later excusing them after the fact.

Regarding geographers’ roles in colonialism, legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie described some background to the Lewis and Clark expedition in the early 1800s. Thomas Jefferson had noted that Native Americans were not happy about losing their land and so he proposed a more “civilized” lifestyle that would involve more agriculture and less hunting (and hence, less need of more land space). He also encouraged the use of trading houses, which would ostensibly increase both trade and debt which, Jefferson hoped, would force them to give up land in order to pay off the debts. Congress approved Jefferson’s request on February 28, 1803 and allocated \$3,000 to fund the Corps of Discovery, which would be led by Lewis and Clark:

A few months later, on April 30, 1803, Jefferson signed a treaty with France, concluding the Louisiana Purchase, which effectively doubled the United States’ territory. Rather than being a covert expedition through foreign territory, the Lewis and Clark Expedition was publicized as a survey of “American-owned land.” In this way, the Lewis and Clark Expedition epitomized the “Enlightenment” thinking that Jefferson espoused: “the triumph of reason, the rightness of nature, and the improvement of society through knowledge.” ... This scientific expedition had a direct and enduring effect on indigenous peoples. They were studied as objects of scientific inquiry, much like the region’s plants and animals. Although tribal lands were annexed to the United States through the treaty with France, the Indian Nations had no right as nations to consent or object. The European Doctrine of Discovery only pertained to “civilized nations” that could acquire “title” to newly discovered lands merely by virtue of being the first to “discover” the lands and establish a minimal settlement upon them. The Doctrine of Discovery may

²⁵⁵ The Ivory Coast retained the name, “Gold Coast” was approximately contemporary Ghana, and “Slave Coast” was approximately contemporary Togo and Benin.

have originated in the international law authorizing European colonialism, but it was ultimately incorporated into domestic law.²⁵⁶

Thus, while researchers could pursue their intellectual endeavors as if they were taking place in a social vacuum, their practices were often supported and made possible by state financing and law. In this way, seemingly innocent projects were procured with a price paid by other peoples. If scholars were then indebted to such peoples, the debt was never paid. To the contrary, the trails that Lewis and Clark forged in the halls of scholarship have been steadily secured as tight as the land codes legislating the borders of Indian reservations. This type of debt incurred through occupation and terror raises further questions for academics who wish to build on previous work. As Mimi Thi Nguyen, in *The Gift of Freedom*, discussed in a more general sense,

The gift of freedom is a thing, force, gaze, and event that refers both to the wars that promised it and those that must follow after. In this spirit, because there is as yet no end to empire, mine is an argument that we do not forget the debt that demands of us that we remember. ...Against the commodity logic of race, gender, or property, can we think of debt as producing another economy of intense contact with all the multiple, heterogeneous, not-same strangers that goes into making and remaking the boundaries of an exclusionary collectivity of humanity? ...Debt points toward a different social order, keeping us in contact with alternative collectivities of others who bear the trace of human freedom that falls apart, seizes hold, in its giving. Put another way, we may join an audience of all those who have heard this song of empire and freedom before, and therein lie other passages to an unknowable future.²⁵⁷

When the stories of Native peoples are told in academic contexts, they have been most often told by non-Natives. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote from the vantage point of a researcher who grew up within the fold of the colonized (New Zealand) where she critically examined scientific complicity with colonial projects:

The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. ...The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who we are. It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then

²⁵⁶ Tsosie 2012: 1143-1144.

²⁵⁷ Nguyen 2012: 188-189.

simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments. ...Researchers enter communities armed with good will in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets, they bring medicine into villages and extract blood for genetic analysis. No matter how appalling their behaviors, how insensitive and offensive their personal actions may be, their acts and intentions are always justified for the 'good of mankind.'²⁵⁸

Smith also critiqued the ways that entire cultures are dissected and fragmented. Whereas such fragmentation in Europe has been described as “postmodern,” Smith viewed it to be an imposed consequence of colonialism. It was neither “post” nor “modern.” It was colonial without the “post.” If it were “*post*-colonial” she commented (with a nod to an indigenous activist), the colonizers would be gone.

Though all sciences are implicated in imperialism, she argued, anthropology in particular cooperated with the need to dehumanize local peoples. As such Smith called for a separate sort of research methodology—one based on cooperation and interaction with indigenous peoples (rather than a one-way street of observation), one that is responsive to them and their needs (rather than benefitting only one party). This would involve understanding knowledge in multiple ways, oral as well as written, collective as well as personal, implicit as well as explicit.

Even within my own specific cultural context of white, English-speaking male citizen of the United States, there are layers of exclusion that can be produced in academia. Pinker (2014) and Billig (2013) are among those academics who have critiqued institutional structures for facilitating writing that confuses rather than clarifies. Pinker cited Calvin and Hobbes in his own text (see Fig. 17).

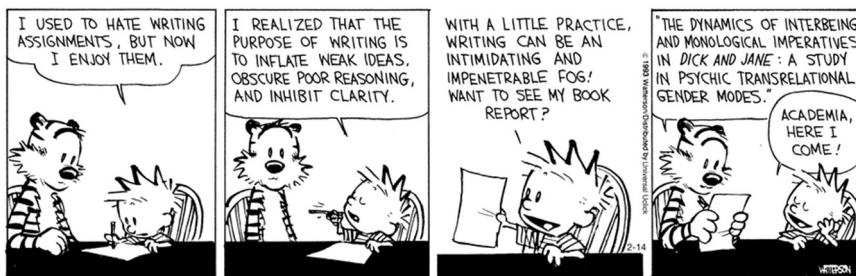


Fig. 17
Calvin goes academic...and is, in turn, countered by academic Steven Pinker.

²⁵⁸ Smith 1999: 1, 24.

Specifically, Pinker stated he suffers “the daily experience of being baffled by articles in my field, my subfield, even my sub-sub-subfield” precisely because the authors are speaking “academese” rather than plain English. As an example he had once read a colleague write in a methods section about an experiment “Participants read assertions whose veracity was either affirmed or denied by the subsequent presentation of an assessment word.” After a bit of puzzlement, he finally figured out that they meant “Participants read sentences, each followed by the word true or false” and observed that the “original academese was not as concise, accurate, or scientific as the plain English translation.” In conclusion, Pinker stated that Calvin in the cartoon above “got it backward. Fog comes easily to writers; it’s the clarity that requires practice ...[and] showing a draft to a sample of real readers and seeing if they can follow it.” Although neither Pinker nor Billig were particularly concerned about the effect that “bad writing” has on the prospects for democratic inclusivity and broad participation in academic conversations, those are the concerns I have had to face and they manifest as a difficulty in finding a way to write that is at home in both the academy and general public. Regarding talk about “freedom,” I not only believe that obtuse technical language is unnecessary even for an academic audience, I also believe it contrary to basic principles of democracy.

Beginning with material close to home was one strategy that I used to counter these hindrances implicit in academic ethnography. A particularly inspirational article early in my work was “More Like Jazz than Classical: Reciprocal Interactions among Educational Researchers and Respondents” by L. Janelle Dance, Rochelle Gutierrez, and Mary Hermes (2010). Here, I was encouraged as a researcher to work within relationship with others as a form of collaboration rather than hierarchy. It also called for a greater emphasis on connection and listening to those whom one collaborates with in order to change and adapt the research process: “Cultural intuition and reciprocity together allow for the kind of improvisation we believe is at the heart of research that authentically responds to historically subjugated communities.”²⁵⁹ The contexts I have researched have been, to some extent, my own communities of sorts even if I only exist at their fringes and the position of “researcher” furthermore entails an inequality in power. Yet, there are strategies for dealing with this. Kovach, for example, based her research on *Nèhiyaw Kiskèjihatowin*, or Plains Cree knowledges, which stood at the center of a research process composed of various parts (such as tribal epistemology, decolonizing and ethics, giving back, etc.). She emphasized that the Nèhiyaw epistemology, upon which her words were based, had to be understood as nested within that larger framework of living relationships. The elements of such knowledge are fluid and connected rather than static and linear (as the appearance of words in written text suggest). This is consistent with indigenous theory which includes flexibility, organic community-based processes, non-harm, and user-friendly results in a language that

²⁵⁹ Dance, Gutierrez, and Hermes 2010: 333.

everybody can easily understand. Rather than “universal,” the ideas are “portable” which means that they can be applicable to various degrees or are at least in conversation with ideas and experiences in other contexts.²⁶⁰ Ultimately, I felt that I had to at least try to work through the inherent violence of the academic research process as non-violently as possible. This ultimately shifted some of my priorities and it is reflected in the structure of this thesis where concerns related to MOVE have taken a larger place than the UUA and taqwacore precisely because they have been the most subject to state violence and remain the most excluded from dominant conversations both in terms of their voices, their standpoints, and the conception of “freedom” as articulated by John Africa. This did not provide me a “free ticket” however. I have still had to be aware of sensitive issues and asymmetrical power relations.

In each of the contexts that I entered, I had to be aware of these types of dynamics. Even when interviewing wealthy, white men and women awareness of these issues compelled me to be conscious about whose voices were being privileged and whose were being excluded. In particular, considering their experiences with police and the fact that some members are still in prison and most members are African American, MOVE especially faced me with such matters to consider. On one hand, ex-MOVE supporters told me that MOVE was authoritarian and dangerous and that I was asking all of the wrong questions. On the other hand, while I knew of early reports from neighbors who had complained of threats from MOVE, I also knew that in the broader picture, MOVE was on the receiving end of a lot more violence than they ever came close to dishing out. Furthermore, my experiences and other interviews contradicted some of what ex-members had told me while other reports lacked substantiation. I have seen MOVE members engage in friendly contact with their neighbors and have yet to hear of any complaints from neighbors in the last couple of decades.

MOVE’s history and continued existence is extremely complicated. Just doing “more research” would not provide any benefits per se. As research can also be damaging and can reproduce the simplistic images that researchers typically aim to dismantle, I have had to be cautious because asking more questions or revealing new details is not always healthy for either research or the people being questioned. I tried to imagine what it would feel like for some researcher to come up to me and tell me that they would be studying *my* family for their next thesis.

Even though I am a member of the Unitarian Universalists, the very act of studying them has set me apart. It has been impossible for me to simply be a “member” while listening to a service, for example. Those times I have not pulled out my pen to jot something down during the service, I did so immediately afterwards. I have chosen not to make the organizations or individuals anonymous whom I have interviewed because I was not interested in private or sensitive information. I have chosen a macro-view perspective of these contexts. This means that I tried to avoid terrain that seemed to be private matters, I focused on already public events or literature, and I did not

²⁶⁰ Kovach 2009: 44-47.

interview children. As long as the persons interviewed had been informed of my project and the material was not sensitive, it seemed better for reasons of source-accessibility and practicality to keep the names as they were. Only when spoken in intimate settings such as a service or private meeting have I made sources anonymous.

Even with public figures —white, male public figures— I have found that research can have unsettling effects. When reading Michael Muhammad Knight’s second most recent book *William S. Burroughs vs. the Qur’an*, I read his words, “It’s hard to write when your old books have already determined the place for your new one and you have to worry about whether the new one can or even should fit in that place.”²⁶¹ Then he proceeded to describe a conversation that I had had with him and it was clear that the project that I was interviewing him for (Islamic anarchism) was not a box that he wanted to be placed. Yet what choice does he have about what academics do with his work? I thought of it again in his most recent book *Tripping with Allah* where he wrote about how:

Becoming an object of study isn’t that hard: just place yourself at the intersection of two categories and they’ll spend all day coming up with a name for your new place. Give them any reason to say that you’ve *deconstructed* something. ...Offer a pile coded symbols and obscure references that aren’t too complex, but complex enough to make the scholars work, and they’ll take themselves seriously enough for having deciphered you. ...We make the words, and then the words make us. ...This is all the stuff that Master Fard Muhammad has already told us. *He likes the devil because the devil gives him nothing*, says Master Fard Muhammad in the sixth degree of his English Lesson C-1 [reference to Nation of Islam founder W. D. Fard and the “120 lessons”]. The devil gives you these tools for organizing your reality into categories, and through them the devil reorients you toward his own vision of the world. It’s the same thing with religion and the ways that colonialism and globalization created a template of “religion” that is now projected upon all times and places as though it’s a self-evident universal.²⁶²

It made me think about the boxes we make and the ones we already have and the tiny violations we make every time we put someone in one of those boxes. Perhaps this might explain why I feel so hesitant today to put any of the people I’ve talked in boxes and why I feel so hesitant to even doing what I’m doing because even something so fundamental as referring to taqwacore as a “scene” with “participants” does not sit well in my mouth. I have the “devil’s” tongue but I am at a loss to find better terms. The very act of assuming that something is “researchable” might be one of the first violations of integrity when engaging in a study project. It assumes there is a thing to be researched, a box to be filled, charted, measured, and explained. Apparently, I am in league with Satan. Or rather, as the Lord of the Flies implied when speaking to Simon, Satan is within me, within the institutions I work, within each library, within the

²⁶¹ Knight, *William S. Burroughs vs. the Qur’an*, 2012: 150.

²⁶² Knight, *Tripping with Allah*, 2013: 30, 33.

computer on which I write, and within the daily assumptions I make. The language of domination cultivated by British monarchs steers my thinking as much as any academic literature I've ever read.

Inspired in part by Smith's exhortations, however, I do see potential for research that is rooted in dialogue and reciprocity and this project has gradually changed accordingly. I don't think that there is any perfect solution or that referring to "dialogue" can erase any "sins" inherent in my research but hopefully it can help keep me a bit more honest and minimize damage. Nor does "dialogue" mean entail the removal of critical thinking in order to accept everything one hears at face value but it does entail placing the detailed information retrieved through specialized studies into broader perspectives of ethics and societal dynamics before drawing overly simplistic conclusions. If my personal rationality consists of the stable points that appear throughout various waves of intense emotion, group rationality amounts to those points that are consistent throughout various encounters, debates, cooperative ventures, and conversations with a wide range of people. Where exactly research methods might fit into that scheme, I am not quite sure. Whatever an egalitarian religious studies research project would like if it were to be done on terms of genuine dialogue and communication, I cannot say. I can try (and have tried) to deal with people as co-participants rather than objects of study but I've yet no solution. In the meantime, I am still in league with the devil.

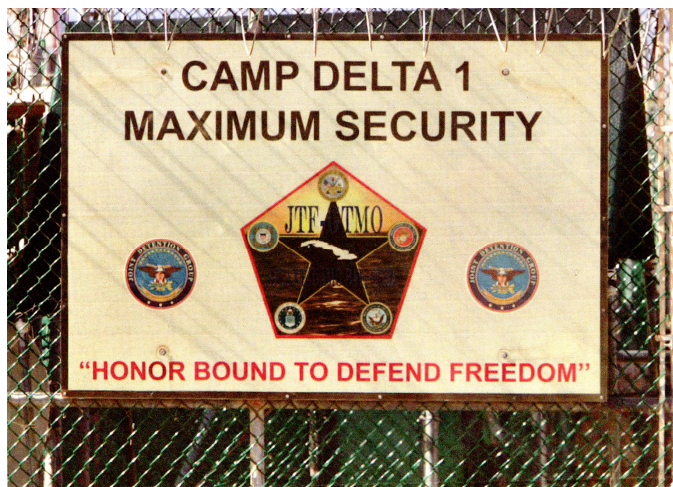


Fig. 18

The “freedom curtains”: An advertisement (top) by a life insurance company in *National Geographic* (1956, v. 110, no.5) showed white people preparing to vote in a gymnasium that has been cleared of basketball players. The ad assured readers that “A simple curtain of cloth—not iron or bamboo—is a symbol of our liberties” without commenting on the policeman in the picture. The ad image is complemented by another type of “freedom curtain” (bottom) made of barbed wire fences located at the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base where, as of mid-June 2015, there remain 116 persons incarcerated without trial. Together these uses of the term symbolize “freedom” as a curtain.

2. *yin* Exclusivity, Inclusivity, and Ambiguity in Language and Conversations

In his renowned work entitled *Freedom* (1991), African American sociologist Orlando Patterson wrote that “most human languages did not even possess a word for [freedom] before contact with the West.”²⁶³ This perception relieved him and countless other scholars who study “freedom” from even learning the languages and cultures about which “freedom” is understood to not have existed. Patterson’s claim (which follows the standard procedure of exclusion in studies of “freedom”) essentially has served to isolate a tiny minority of Europeans (including the white supremacists who appeared in the following 500 years after the final period of his study which ended in the 1500s) and constitute them as the exclusive point of departure (or at the very least the ideal prototype) for all conversations about “freedom.”

Now it is not the purpose here to determine if Patterson’s claim is literally true or not. It is enough here to point out that (a) such a claim has been made, (b) these are standard boundaries for conversations about “freedom,” and (c) even if true, these boundaries are arbitrary because having a word for “freedom” is not necessary in order to be able to make meaningful contributions to conversations about “freedom.”

²⁶³ Patterson, *Freedom*, 1991: x.

A Few More Words about Language

For it is impossible for any one to believe the same thing to be and not to be... this [principle of non-contradiction] is naturally the starting-point even for all the other axioms.

-Aristotle

Defining freedom is like capturing a snake: the snake sheds its skin, and we are left with the relic of her trickery as a souvenir of our aspiration.

-Svetlana Boym

The premise that Aristotle defended in the above principle of non-contradiction, alludes to a basic conceptual building block in Aristotelian thinking: binarism, that is, the idea that everything people think can be broken down into an either/or state of *this* or *that*.²⁶⁴ The idea of paradox (or Mandair's *aporia* cited above) would be, according to Aristotelian logic, an illusion. More than two millennia before the advent of computers, Aristotle's claim laid the conceptual groundwork for philosophical assertions that human consciousness functions like a computer, albeit in hugely complex but nevertheless strictly binary terms. The analytical drive to break down objects into their most basic indivisible components has undergirded systems of categorization in biology, chemistry, physics, and so on.²⁶⁵

According to general semanticist Alfred Korzybski, however, this has led to tremendous technical advancement while philosophical development has barely moved since Aristotle's day.²⁶⁶ An either/or binary approach to understanding, for example, human relationships does not only fail, it can contribute to results that most people today find reprehensible such as Aristotle's contention that some people were naturally meant to be "slaves" (*doulos*) and others natural "masters" (*despotes*).²⁶⁷ This binary mentality permeated ancient times so much so that in some languages, the opposite of the word "slave" was not "free person," but "master."²⁶⁸ It is perhaps not a coincidence that Aristotle's defense of enslavement later became a prominent feature in justifications of enslavement by white Americans —an observation noted by, amongst others, Karl

²⁶⁴ Whether or not Aristotle's claim is true in the literal sense or not is not at issue here. Rather, my argument is that none of us know definitively how it "is" or "isn't" or if it's both and that such states of uncertainty necessitate contradictory conceptions in order to negotiate these gaps between experience and the ability to categorize.

²⁶⁵ Although Hobbes disagreed with Aristotle in other respects, his binary rejection of contradiction and categorical breakdown of the disciplines of "science" followed an Aristotelian spirit.

²⁶⁶ Korzybski 1933: xc.

²⁶⁷ See Millett 2007.

²⁶⁸ Fischer 2005: 4.

Marx.²⁶⁹ Significantly, the difficulty in holding two opposite thoughts in one's head simultaneously is exacerbated when those opposite are not mere descriptors (Southwest-Northeast) but laden with values (good-bad).

The label "cognitive dissonance" has been used to describe those instances when a person experiences an inconsistency between two perceptions — very generally in terms such as "I am a *good* person" plus "I did a *bad* thing to somebody else."²⁷⁰ In order to achieve consonance (that is, a sense of consistency between belief and behavior or between understanding and experience) a person can resolve the matter by saying something such as "It was well-intentioned," "It wasn't that bad," "It didn't happen," or "That person deserved it."

Stanley Cohen, in *States of Denial* (2001) discussed the phenomena by which colonizing peoples can reject information about abuses and oppression of colonized peoples that clash with their self-image as a good people. In particular, he drew on examples from South Africa and Israel where persecution and abuses against Native South Africans and Palestinians were commonplace. Although the abuses were exposed, they remained unacknowledged as abuse by the majority white and Jewish populations respectively. Rather than acknowledge the abuse, they denied that such abuses ever took place ("outright denial") and attacked whoever reported the abuse ("discrediting"). If the abuse was indisputably proven to have taken place then the abuse was not so bad or was very infrequent ("renaming"). If it did take place and was as bad and as frequent as evidence suggested then the victim deserved it ("justification").²⁷¹ These four strategies enabled people to achieve consonance in the stories about themselves and the others in whose abuse they were somehow complicit. For the last example, (justification) Cohen cited Golda Meir's comment that it was the Palestinians' fault for "making" nice Israeli boys do all those horrible things to them.²⁷² It is this type of cognitive dissonance, at a structural, societal, and historical level, that I think of as *colonial dissonance*.

It is worth looking at the very beginning of Festinger's book where he provided the first example of cognitive dissonance: "A person may think Negroes are just as good as whites but would not want any living in his neighborhood."²⁷³ This is notable for two reasons. First, his example is, in a surface-level reading, a classic example of colonial dissonance. Most white Americans do not regard themselves to be racist but anyways sustain racist attitudes.²⁷⁴ Second, it is also an excellent example of how colonial

²⁶⁹ Millett 2007: 178.

²⁷⁰ According to Leon Festinger, "cognitive dissonance" consists of "the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions." such as when a smoker knows that smoking is harmful and wants to be healthy but chooses to smoke anyway. As hunger leads to the desire to eat, the presence of dissonance leads to the desire to achieve consonance (1957: 3).

²⁷¹ Cohen 2001: xi. One might also add fifth strategy here: intimidation of witnesses.

²⁷² Ibid, 96.

²⁷³ Festinger 1957: 1.

²⁷⁴ See, for example, O'Brien 2010 and Unzueta and Lowery 2008.

dissonance imbeds exclusivity into the language even of those who would claim to be anti-racist.

By using the word “person” here as a signifier for “white person,” Festinger implicitly set “Negroes” in a separate category from “person.” The reader was not intended to assume that the “person” Festinger had in mind was in fact an African American (or a Native American, Asian American, etc.). Then at the end of the sentence, two more character traits are revealed: the “non-Negro” person to whom Festinger was referring was also a male (“his”) and a property owner (“neighborhood”). In other words, the implicit prototypical model for “person” articulated by Festinger was also the same implicit prototype implied by Thomas Jefferson when he wrote, “All men were created equal.” Both of them *could* be read to refer to “people in general” yet in practice they were both more specifically referring to “white male property-owning citizens of the United States.” This act of double-meaning is a key facilitator of colonial dissonance in that it enables a person (particularly white persons) to both think in universal and particularistic terms simultaneously. The context draws out whichever of the two is relevant.

So Festinger’s own use of double-meanings inadvertently suggested how the feeling of cognitive dissonance can acquire consonance within the mind of the white person that he described. Namely, the implicit ambiguity in “person” allows for this “person” to believe that anonymous “persons” (meaning potentially *both* “everybody” and “white male property-owning citizens”) *are* equal. This is a firm conviction ingrained in the sacred scriptures of the United States. At the same time, everybody knows U.S. history and U.S. history has clearly demonstrated how “person” ought to be interpreted. This has demonstrated that the exclusive interpretation (except in private white circles) must be *silent* and revealed only through actual behavior and practice.²⁷⁵ The white male property-owner who rejected racism but did not want a “Negro” living next door was therefore no worse of a “person” than Thomas Jefferson. To the contrary, Thomas Jefferson was a great man, a Founding Father, and this particular “person” that Festinger had in mind was behaving no worse but rather following the example that Jefferson had set. If anything, this “person” was behaving

²⁷⁵ Nixon’s accidental recording in 1968 about “damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups” and Lawrence Summers’ confidential memo about plans to use Africa as a dumping ground for toxic waste are two cases in point. It could be argued that the official interpretation has changed. For example, U.S. Constitutional Amendments grant equal rights to all citizens and shall not restrict electoral access according to “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Yet the courts ultimately determine how the Constitution shall be interpreted. The death sentence for Warren McKleskey and the subsequent ruling that burdened people of color with proving discrimination, together with the lenient sentence for Ethan Couch exemplify the type of gross disparities that continue in the practice of court interpretation. In fact, the Constitutional amendments further enable colonial dissonance by allow white people to refer to the matter of inequality as something settled many years ago. In this way, existing inequalities can be explained away as the responsibility of people of color and their failure to succeed rather than white racism.

better than Jefferson because this “person” did not enslave anybody and rejected the idea of enslavement on principle.

Another significant point that Festinger made was that cognitive dissonance is a very ordinary—even daily— occurrence. It begins to manifest as soon as a person makes a decision. Once the choice has been made, a story is typically constructed that devalues the choice that was not made. Hence, in a case, for example, where a couple breaks up, each one of them may retain an inventory or “bad” memories that are accessed to confirm each time they break up as well as an inventory of “good” memories that confirm why it makes sense to get back together again. While colonial dissonance is conceived here as a permanent condition imbedded in social structures and shared by a larger populace, it is, like cognitive dissonance, triggered daily. The simple act of reading the newspaper, passing a beggar on the street, enjoying a movie, or being unmoved by the image of Andrew Jackson on a twenty-dollar bill can elicit conscious or unconscious means of sorting and prioritizing peoples’ lives into categories of “important,” “not so important,” and “completely insignificant” (often with racial implications).

The very breadth of categories of types of people, faiths, nationalities, and so on creates its own demand for simplification which, in turn, create new false images. As sociologist L. Janelle Dance put it, “Monolithic images like the noble savage or the cool ghetto dweller transform the members of ethnic groups into an undifferentiated mass of cultural automatons” and thereby remove or limit their agency.²⁷⁶ In this way, living people can be excluded and neglected or even dehumanized and terrorized because if one person in a certain category is understood to be “*w*” (criminal, dangerous, lazy, worthless, etc.) then they are all of them can be written off as “*w*.” At the same time, close first-hand experience quickly reveals that people are complex than the simplistic racial and class categories that they are placed in. As racial categorization and inequality has run deep throughout U.S. histories, the demand for consonance is very high for white people in the U.S.²⁷⁷

This point is relevant in relation to what psychologist Berit Ås described as five “domination techniques” (2004).²⁷⁸ Collectively, these maneuvers form some of the

²⁷⁶ Dance 2002: 16.

²⁷⁷ Colorblind racism can then seem to provide a perfect solution: acquire most of the material benefits afforded whites during periods of overt racism (walking away with material advantage) *and* reject racism as a matter of principle (walking away with a clear conscience).

²⁷⁸ Though she was generally referencing systems of violence toward women by men (“women-based” systems of violence have been acknowledged since then in Elvin-Novak and Thomson 2012) her concerns and insights are relevant for a broad range of situations and relationships even at the structural level. Building on previous work by Ingjald Nissen, the five domination techniques that Ås outlined were: (1) Making someone invisible (“*usynliggjøring*” in Norwegian = “invisiblizing” in English), (2) Ridiculing someone, (3) Withholding information, (4) The double-bind (punishing or belittling a person regardless of how they act), and (5) Heaping blame/shame on someone. Ås later added two more:

means by which people in power assert control and domination over others.²⁷⁹ Of the five techniques of domination that Ås listed, the one that interests me here is “invisiblizing,” the act of making another person or group of people invisible. This strategy removes somebody’s presence, voice, or perspective from a shared conversation or narrative. This could take place at a meeting in which the chairperson or others neglect to hear one or more of the participants. This could also take place in stories in which actors’ voices or roles are consciously or unconsciously edited out of the story. Invisiblizing is interesting precisely because the very names and terms that are used as building blocks for stories can edit entire lives and traditions off of the horizon of perception without even giving the slightest hint that an act of domination is taking place. Also, invisible are the subtle nods of positive or negative assessment of a person or a category with which a person might likely be cognitively associated (such as “black” with “evil,” “light” with “good,” “pussy” with “wimp,” or “queer” with “inappropriately different”). As the values associated with such terms correlate to specific social hierarchies, one could say that the language of domination has contaminated the thinking supply.

It can be a significant challenge to speak and think inclusively when the very language that shaped our thoughts and helped categorized our experiences (“I have seen the light,” “It was the darkest day of my life,” “I felt like a pussy,” “What a queer idea!”) are inundated with unconscious values and associations. Eleanor Rosch (1973) has argued that many fundamental concepts are conceived through prototypes—that is, prototypical images that serve as central reference points. These prototypes are unstable (shifting over time) and have fuzzy boundaries (even overlapping at some points). They stand in contrast to Aristotelian either/or categories and function in a gradient fashion along the lines of Wittgenstein’s conception of how concepts are categorized according to “family resemblance.”

With categorical systems based on a primary hierarchical ordering between “good” and “bad,” associations can lead to social discrimination. If, for example, a prototypical

objectification of a person, and the use or threat of force. In contrast to domination techniques as articulated by Berit Ås, strategies and techniques have been proposed by scholars in Stockholm to first expose and then undermine them. Regarding exposure: Where there is invisiblizing, *take your place/open up space and expose it*; where there is ridicule, *question it and offer respect*; where information is withheld, *ensure transparency and share information*; where people are subject to double-binds, *break the pattern and offer double-rewards*; where people are shamed, *critically engage it support reasonable norms* (ENSU 2004).

²⁷⁹ In these ways, scripts of violence can be played out even when the central actors have cast themselves in the role of “good” person or “savior.” To the contrary, the domination techniques are ideal for such scripts precisely because the veneer of goodness enables the violence to be properly justified. At the same time, the genuine aspiration toward goodness may hinder us from acknowledging this very fact since it would call into question a fundamental part of our script: namely the role. We can change many things but the role is much more difficult because it has to do with who we think we are.

association with power and strength is height, then a tall person can elicit more respect and confidence than a short person. Exclusions and prejudice can therefore take place without any conscious process or judgment being involved. As Korzybski has stated, “We read unconsciously into the world the structure of the language we use.”²⁸⁰ In 1933 he coined the phrase, “map is not territory” later popularized by Jonathan Z. Smith who (without mentioning Korzybski) titled his book “Map is Not Territory” in 1978. Although Korzybski was concerned about words and concepts as signs that distort the terrain that they refer to and Smith focused on the application of academic concepts (such as “religion”) upon social phenomena they were both observing how the act describing the world necessarily creates gaps between the descriptors and the described, between names and that which the names are intended to refer to. Korzybski emphasized that addressing the gap between silent perception and verbal categorization was a critical issue:

Whatever we may say something is, obviously is not the ‘something’ on the silent levels. Indeed, as Wittgenstein wrote, ‘What can be shown, cannot be said.’ ... I firmly believe that the consciousness of the differences between these levels of abstractions; i.e., the silent and the verbal levels, is the key and perhaps the first step for the solution of human problems.²⁸¹

According to this view, language is always leaving *something* out and, when placed in a social context, that something means leaving *someone* out. This can be exemplified by the very phrase that Korzybski and Smith used to explain this dilemma: “Map is not territory.” What they probably meant to say was: “Map is not *terrain*.”²⁸² By conflating “territory” with “terrain,” the two white scholars managed to invisibilize the acts of conquest, occupation, removal, property, domination, and violence that accompany “territory” as if it could be used in an uncritical and non-ideological sense. So even when exclusion is the exact opposite of one’s concern, it can nevertheless be reproduced because of the very fact that we cannot see what our unconscious language habits are excluding from our view until that which has been hidden is somehow exposed to us.

To these ends, intersectionality theories were initially developed by black feminist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s. They arose, in part, in response to the fact that perspectives of women of color were being diminished or excluded by male-dominated scholarship on racism and white-dominated scholarship on gender. These theorists,

²⁸⁰ Korzybski (1933: 60).

²⁸¹ Korzybski (2005: 21).

²⁸² I am grateful to my friend and colleague Johan Blomgren for this observation. I had overlooked this nuance myself and probably would not ever have seen it were it not for his insight. It was interesting to see that I had adopted the phrase “Map is Not Territory” rather uncritically without even questioning its content. This was doubly ironic because the very message of the statement refers to the disconnect between signs and the signified while. So there I was holding the map without looking at the terrain. And there was Smith and Korzybski looking at the terrain and labeling it “territory” in supposed opposition to “map” when the idea of “territory” is terrain that has *already been mapped*.

such as Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, helped expose the various types of intersecting oppressions that workers, women, gays, people of color, people with disabilities, older people, younger people, and people located farther away from centers of power are subject to, especially in binary contexts where people are typically categorized according to one primary identity or another. Other significant factors are global location and age that play into a person's experience in relation to structural discrimination. The act of emphasizing one category thereby hides the oppressions that take place in other categories. This act of organizing categories and identities is both constructed and socially expedient for certain interests: "It is important to remember that what appear to be natural and normal ideas and practices concerning sexuality are in fact carefully manufactured and promoted by schools, organized religions, the news media, and, most importantly, government policies."²⁸³ These norms and constructions start early and they run deep. As R. Gordon Kelly put it,

We may properly regard a group's children's literature, then as constituting, a series of reaffirmations over time of that body of knowledge and belief regarded as essential to the continued existence of the group, for not only must children be convinced of the validity of the truths being presented to them, "but so must be their teachers..." By creating fictional order, children's authors...may also renew their own commitment to certain principles of social order—for example, shaping their fictional response, in part, to meet threats posed by alternative belief systems.²⁸⁴

In contrast to simplistic binary stories and terms that are cast early in life, intersectionality theories provide frameworks for acknowledging and addressing the types of complex varieties of human relationships that appear in real life. Rather than binaries such as "oppressed" and "oppressor," oppression as a concept is re-constructed to match the terrain. That is, people experience oppression "in varying configurations and in varying degrees."²⁸⁵ The experience, for example, of a leisure-class white woman in the United States differs both quantitatively *and* qualitatively from that of a working-class black woman in the same country even if both are subject to oppression based on their gender. These distinctions tend to be obscured in dominant conversations (and thereby as well in policies and norms).²⁸⁶

In the face of gendered and racialized norms imbedded in language, some options available are the acceptance of language categories with adaptation, acceptance of the

²⁸³ Collins 2000: 145.

²⁸⁴ Cited by MacCann 2001: xv.

²⁸⁵ Ritzer and Goodman 2003:461.

²⁸⁶ For example, Patricia Hill Collins wrote that "Black women wanted to withdraw from the labor force, not to mimic middle-class White women's domesticity but, rather, to strengthen the political and economic position of their families. ...On all three dimensions of middle-class power—economic, political, and ideological—the Black middle-class differs from its White counterpart" (2000: 61, 72).

language categories with overt critique, or the direct challenges to the language categories themselves. An example of the first option can be heard in the voice of 14-year old Jaminica:

Unless you want to get into a big activist battle, you accept the stereotypes given to you and just try and reshape them along the way. So in a way, this gives me a lot of freedom. I can't be looked at any worse in society than I already am—black and female is pretty high on the list of things not to be.²⁸⁷

Subsequently, the “issue of the journey from internalized oppression to the ‘free mind’ of a self-defined, womanist consciousness has been a prominent theme in the works of U.S. Black women writers.”²⁸⁸ Re-inscribing existing categories of blackness or womanhood with positive rather than negative connotations is an example of critical acceptance. The essential categories remain but they are significantly redecorated. This can happen with various categories but it is most powerfully asserted in contestations over the divine. An example, famously expressed in Ntozake Shange’s play, was “i found god in myself / & i loved her / i loved her fiercely.”²⁸⁹ For a black woman to identify God with being a black woman with oneself, something that white males had been doing for centuries and black males had been doing since at least the 1930s, was a radical step. It furthermore re-organized concepts of self-care. In the words of black lesbian Audre Lorde, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”²⁹⁰

Accepting the category but rejecting it as negative can be another form of critique such as the African American actress Butterfly McQueen’s rejection of “God” and “religion” as fictive.²⁹¹ Direct challenges to the language categories themselves can be seen in the ways that terms such as “functionally hindered,” “person of color,” and “cis” have appeared in language use to replace existing labels or add, where no such categorical label previously existed.

In order to develop a more nuanced and useful perspective, it may be necessary to start thinking about “freedom” and “unfreedom” in non-binary ways, ways that reject the simplistic duality of “master-slave,” “leader-follower,” “violence-non-violence” and so on, in favor of ways that work more comfortably with ambiguity, uncertainty, and

²⁸⁷ Collins 2000: 31, citing from Rebecca Carroll, *Sugar in the Raw: Voices of Young Black Girls in America*. (New York: Crown Trade) 1997: 94-95.

²⁸⁸ Ibid 123.

²⁸⁹ Shange 2010: 87. The context of this statement, it might be added, was when a black woman had told the audience of the pain she felt after seeing her children killed.

²⁹⁰ Lorde 1988: 150.

²⁹¹ Karan Pittman, “Butterfly McQueen (1911-1995).” *Georgia Encyclopedia*. 18 June 2009. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/butterfly-mcqueen-1911-1995> Accessed September 17, 2015.

both/and options. As Isaiah Berlin wrote in Aristotelian fashion: “Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture.”²⁹² To this type of rhetoric, German American philosopher Herbert Marcuse responded:

And there is no more unphilosophical motto than Bishop Butler’s pronouncement which adorns G. E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*: “Everything is what it is, and not another thing”—unless the “is” is understood as referring to the qualitative difference between that which things really are and that which they are made to be.²⁹³

That is, Marcuse was pointing out that the assertion of an “is” in relation to things, is an assertion of normative ideology in disguise as non-normative description. The long history of “freedom-talk” has been plagued by the sorts of ambiguities and double-meanings that Marcuse criticized here. There is hardly space in this thesis to delve into a fraction of what has been written on the topic of “freedom” (and, quite frankly, I don’t understand much of what has been written) yet a brief overview is both necessary and potentially fruitful for the purposes of beginning an exercise in a non-binary conversation about “freedom.” In discussing philosophers of “freedom,” this section shall also note how each thinker binds “freedom” to some sort of “unfreedom” or another. This inevitable binding collapses the binary into at least one more option: the relationship between the two which shall here be labeled (un)freedom—that is, a reference to any concept or set of concepts that draws on both “freedom” and “unfreedom.”

Much like a union between two or more parties is termed a “marriage,” which is conceptually its own category but inseparable from the actuality of parties involved, the concept of (un)freedom is both distinct from and inseparable from its constituent parts. As marriage is also conceptually distinct from any specific couple (or group) of married persons, so too is (un)freedom conceptually distinct from “freedom” and “unfreedom” as supposedly separate categories. The very term (un)freedom implies that “freedom” and “unfreedom” are wed to one another and neither of them can be meaningfully discussed in isolation from the other (or, at the very least, “freedom” cannot be discussed separately from “unfreedom” whereas it may be conceivable to have

²⁹² Berlin 1991: 37. This type of assertion was similarly expressed by Bernard Crick during the same time period: “Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history or economics; ...and it is not one political doctrine, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism or nationalism, though it can contain elements of most of these things. ...Politics is politics” ([1962] 1972: 15-16). Crick’s example is illustrative here: of all the “political doctrines” that he mentioned, “colonialism” was not one of them. While the relationship between “politics” and “colonialism” is hardly the same as between “politics” and “liberalism” or “socialism,” the distinction would be more akin to the difference between an older sibling-younger sibling relationship and the relationship between a parent and various children. Colonialism and “politics” grew side by side. As Fitzgerald has pointed out, the rhetorical construction of “politics” as something distinct from “religion,” “law,” or “economics” did not develop until well after colonialism was underway.

²⁹³ Marcuse 1964: 184.

“unfreedom” discussed without “freedom”). Before addressing (un)freedom, however, this brief history shall provide an overview of dominant conceptions of “freedom” as well as examples of how various conceptions of “freedom” are conceptually bound to “unfreedoms.” Yet, in beginning any discussion of “freedom” in this sense, it becomes important to designate which stories are at the prototypical center and which ones are at the periphery. Dominant conversations about “freedom” are, by and large, white conversations with largely white priorities. Instead of prioritizing the removal of colonial occupiers and the liberation of land from ownership, priorities have tended to emphasize either the maintenance of occupation and property rights or abstract philosophical questions that distracted from critical issues that have faced people of color. As such, these stories are designated here “white histories.”

“The Blessing of Freedom”

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article I.

*A baby emerges from the womb. Nothing apart from itself is moving it, but it moves nevertheless. It is self-activated, possessing what Aristotle called *energeia*. Some of the baby's movement go unimpeded. It extends its legs, twists and turns. Other movements encounter obstacles. Does a case like this give us the conditions necessary to our notions of freedom and unfreedom; the conditions sufficient to those notions?*

-Richard Flathman²⁹⁴

Seven Types of “Freedom” in Conversations

After studying “freedom” for five years, one of the most remarkable aspects of it that has struck me is its incredible ambiguity. Not only could “freedom” mean different things, but intended meanings could also point in different directions. Not only could it intended meanings point in different directions within the same conversation, but there appeared to be a number of different conversations that occasionally overlapped but often did not. Supposedly more precise terms such as “positive freedom” could mean very different things from one author or conversation to the next.²⁹⁵

As if this were not complicated enough, the task of telling a linear history of “freedom” without implicitly privileging dominant conceptions has proven near impossible. In telling a history of racism or theology, for example, there are given assumptions within scholarship that racism can (and ought to be) questioned or that

²⁹⁴ Flathman 1987: 15.

²⁹⁵ See Hill 2004: 508-512 for a discussion of historically different uses of “positive freedom.”

the idea of “God” can (or ought to be) examined from a position of academic agnosticism. Yet discussing a history of “freedom” within European-language contexts offers no such distance or equivalent platform from which to begin. “Freedom” is generally assumed to be something about which one can speak as if “it” exists. Its meaning can be hotly contested but the assumption is that it is a useful term in regard to the one or more meanings that it is intended to refer to.

Any public speaker who was pressed to define it by a journalist could always resort to any of the stock answers such as “freedom of speech,” “freedom of religion,” “freedom of assembly,” and so on without having to dig any deeper than that. After all, those matters are supposedly “rights” which, for scholars, is a separate conversation. Rights fall squarely within political conversations of “freedom” and, insofar as they extend into social, physical, and economical conversations (which they inevitably do), they address those matters that the state claims jurisdiction over to enforce, judge, or survey. As an example of how stark a contrast can be between a conversation about “freedom” and a conversation about “rights,” we can hear from Jean-Paul Sartre who said:

We were never as free as under the German occupation. We had lost all our rights. First of all, the right to speak. We were insulted every day and had to keep to silent. But that is precisely why we were free. As the German poison seeped into our mind, as we were constantly watched, every gesture we made was a commitment.²⁹⁶

Sartre’s logic was imbedded in his view that we are all each moment inescapable “free” and “responsible” for every decision we make. With Nazi occupation making “unfreedom,” so clear, so too was it possible to be clear about the importance of taking each opportunity and decision with the gravity it deserves. In a striking contrast to both “rights talk” and Sartre’s anti-Nazi depiction of “freedom,” Patterson wrote:

Nazi Germany was, for Germans, a free state, the freest and most powerful collective experience of any Western people up to that time. In their identity with the powerfully free Third Reich, the Germans experienced a freedom that was liberating, ecstatic, and empowering. They correctly called what they experienced ‘freedom.’²⁹⁷

Patterson justified his comment by stating that Nazis were, according to him, building on a long-standing Western tradition of “sovereignal freedom” that dated back to Plato. Interestingly, Patterson implicitly adopted a Nazi definition of “German.” After all, one could hardly defend the idea that Jewish Germans, communist Germans, anarchist Germans, gay Germans, Romani Germans, and German members of the Jehovah’s

²⁹⁶ Taken from the documentary film “Sartre: The Road to Freedom,” *BBC*, 1999.

²⁹⁷ Patterson 1991: 404.

Witnesses, and many others who did not perfectly match the “experienced a freedom that was liberating, ecstatic, and empowering.”²⁹⁸

In light of these bold ambiguities and wildly divergent approaches to the meaning of “freedom,” it has not been a simple task to demarcate the boundaries for where “freedom” conversations begin and end. Rather than set any technical lines, general parameters have been used here to refer to broad categories of terms typically associated with “freedom” and another set of broad categories that have been typically associated with “unfreedom” along with a few significant terms that swing both ways. The first set of categories, “freedom,” are thought of here generally as “wills, ways, and wars” with wills consisting of terms such as “free will,” “autonomy,” “independence,” etc.; ways consisting of terms such as “ability,” “virtuosity,” “skill,” “opportunity,” etc.; and wars consisting of terms such as “competition,” “conquest,” “colonialism,” “the state,” “capitalism,” “corporate power,” “free market,” “democracy,” “human rights,” etc.

“Unfreedom” here include broad categories of terms that might often be described as “non-freedoms” but which shall generally consist of those terms related to “freedom” but which “freedom” is generally assumed to be distinct from. They are labeled here loosely “borders, bonds, and bondages.” Borders consist of “unfreedom” such as “boundaries,” “limits,” “necessity,” “needs,” and “determinism.” Bonds consist of those “unfreedom” that have to do with social connections that are often—but not always—reciprocal. This entails concepts such as “responsibility,” “equality,” “equity,” “obedience,” “loyalty,” “honor,” “rules,” “justice,” “fairness,” “transparency,” “accountability,” “acceptance,” “trust,” “respect,” “community,” “belonging,” “devotion,” “dedication,” “reliability,” and so on. Bondages consist of those types of “unfreedom” that are almost always posited explicitly as “unfreedom” rather than “non-freedoms” even if the boundary is non-existent and they are also sometimes regarded to be desirable and/or necessary. This includes concepts such as “violence,” “coercion,” “enslavement,” “imprisonment,” “debt,” “poverty,” “control,” “addiction,” “discipline,” “deception,” “dependency,” etc.

Terms such as “power” and “property” can be described as either “freedom,” “unfreedom,” or both at once. Many other terms such as “friendship,” “marriage,” “relationship,” and “body” (indeed, huge chunks of social life) could be as easily described as characterized by “freedom” or “unfreedom” but do not typically enter conversations about “freedom.”

²⁹⁸ Even so, it seems a remarkable “freedom” that would be bound to mass extermination, military expansion, and torture. Ask contemporary Germans who today fit a prototypical image of “German” if the Nazi experience was “liberating” and “free.” To take a slice of history and examine it detached from its karmic implications is akin to saying that a child who blows on a lit stick of dynamite and imagines it to be a birthday candle would be in any meaningful way or that an alcoholic who is driving wildly into the night are somehow “free” or “empowered.” Only a little distance is required to see that the picture is quite the contrary.

In my own attempts to parse out what the different conversations of “freedom” were, I imagined a total of seven types separated into three areas “mental,” “locational,” and “material.” My shorthand memory device for these three is to think of them as: “wills,” “ways,” and “wars” respectively. Wills are bound to varieties of “free will” conversations, “ways” are bound to conversations about ability and opportunity, and “wars” are bound to struggles over access and control of technological violence and resources. The first two (existential and psychological) could be termed “mental” in that they have largely to do with our basic outlooks on life and how we think. An example of an existential conversation would be one that addressed the question of causal determinism and “free will” (that is, how can there be any space for something called “freedom” in our ability to make decisions if everything in the universe — including the molecules and cells in our brain— are subject to the predetermined laws of physics, of cause and effect?). Examples of psychological conversations can be seen in debates about internal vs. external “freedom” as seen in Saint Paul or within contemporary studies of the mind.

The next two (physical and social) can be termed “locational” as they are both spatial in the way “freedom” is located in relation to the physical body and to specific social relationships between members of a certain community. Flathman’s illustration above is an example of a conversation about physical “freedom.” Discussions about whether or not the baby is “free” when the child is older and subject to gender norms, language constraints, etiquette, and so on are examples of conversations addressing social “freedom.” These “locational” types are also the central location for the intersection of the mental and subsequent “material” conversations.

The fifth and sixth types (political and economical) are described as “material” because they discuss the legitimation and organization of material effects such as governance, border patrols, aircraft carriers, resource distribution, and money. They could also be thought of in terms “technological” terms: a technics of state, police, and military in the former case and, in the latter case, the additional technics of distribution, capital, and access.

All six of these conversations of “freedom” are interwoven. Even if the ones in the same categorical space (mental, locational, material) seem to be most clearly linked, none of them can be completely detached from the others. Together they form an ecology of conceptions wherein all of these types of “freedom” are enmeshed in broader constellations of ideas ranging from “love” and “democracy” to “time” and “race.” And there is yet one more type of “freedom.”

Before addressing the seventh type, it can be worth considering Flathman’s illustration above. He described a newborn baby. It is a universal state that all of us have been in. He described the infant as “self-activated.” This, however, would not necessarily be accepted by all people as a proper description. He then asked a question: “Does a case like this give us the conditions necessary to our notions of freedom and unfreedom; the conditions sufficient to those notions?” Flathman answered this question in the negative (he argued that it was a good start but not nearly sufficient). Yet his framing of the question in this way obscured an entirely different conversation

based on the same (albeit ambiguous) empirical material: a newborn infant. This is presumably not the meaning intended in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Where Article I reads that “All human beings are born free,” this is quickly followed by the qualifier “and equal” as well as the descriptors “in dignity and rights.” So already in describing a newborn, we see two different meanings behind the concept of being “born free.” The idea, however, that “free” in either sense is a useful way to begin a conversation about “human beings” or that infants are a useful way to begin a conversation about “freedom” turns on a more fundamental assumption about the independence and individuality of humans which Flathman characterized as “self-activated” in the form of an infant.

Yet a spark from a fire can similarly fly unimpeded as an “independent” unit with its own energy. What does independence mean here? It means for a few seconds it departs from its source, yet whether it triggers a new fire or returns to the old one, its characterization as “spark” is *dependent* on that source, the fire. It can certainly *seem* as alive as a butterfly as it flutters in the wind before ebbing out. But the question of whether or not the spark is “self-activated” is a question of determining whether it has its own will or if it is behaving according to pre-determined causal factors and is actually no more than one link in complex series of physical chain reactions. The same question applies to a baby as it does to a spark both in terms of dependency (even more so) as well as self-activation. Although we have been conditioned to accept the idea of “free will” as a matter of faith, that is exactly what it is: a matter of faith. No scientist has ever proven the existence of “free will.”²⁹⁹ It is a very convenient idea. It is so useful that our conceptions of law and accountability are based upon this belief.³⁰⁰ But usefulness is another matter altogether. As a statement about scientific and falsifiable fact “free will” wholly lacks substance.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ If anything, current studies in neuroscience have tended to offer the opposite conclusion (see, for example, Libet 1983; Custers and Aarts 2010) while studies in quantum physics complicate the idea of straightforward Newtonian physics of cause and effect. Arguments *against* “free will” (Honderich 1973) or *for* “free will” (Dennett 2003) are never closer to being resolved than theological disputes. In sum, the jury is still out.

³⁰⁰ This would seem to be a very real concern even at the cognitive level. One of the interesting aspects suggested by studies is that disbelief in free will can decrease performance (Bandura 1989), increase cheating (Vohs & Schooler 2008), and decrease our physical state of readiness (Rigoni et al 2011). As the old joke goes, “We *must* believe in free will. We have no other choice.”

³⁰¹ That said, I can only state that this viewpoint of mine is just that: a viewpoint. Some researchers, such as David Dennett in *Freedom Evolves*, have claimed to be able to demonstrate the compatibility of “free will” with determinism. Dennett went so far as to state: “freedom is real ...so it can be studied objectively from a no-nonsense, scientific point of view” (2003: 305). Yet, for one thing, I do not understand his work or how the idea of such compatibility can be anything other than a highly convoluted illusion. For another, my meager understanding of Dennett’s work is that he still has not proven the existence of “free will,” only sought to demonstrate that even if we did live in a deterministic universe, it would not

I am not arguing here for the existence or non-existence of “free will” or determinism. I am simply stating that to accept the idea of “free will” is to believe in something that one has never seen, much like believing in some “God” that one has never seen. People may say that they experience “free will” but people say they experience “God” as well. Testimony of experience is not proof.

Flathman’s book began with that paragraph but it did not end there. Much like a spark in the wind, it flew in a particular direction (essentially building a total of four additional layers upon that premise with the highest level consisting in an unimpeded act done virtuously and recognized as such as by one’s community).

Jean Jacques Rousseau set aflight a similar spark when he began with a similar premise: “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”³⁰² Rousseau’s spark flew in another direction. Although Rousseau did not phrase it “Babies are not born in chains,” this was, like Flathman, part of what he meant. Yet, he regarded enslavement as a social construction that manifested both with and without physical chains even arguing that members of the ruling class were in “chains.” Indeed, even the use of money meant that “soon you will be in chains. The word *finance* is a slave’s word.”³⁰³ Yet bonds and bondage were oddly placed in a similar category, meaning roughly “something that one does not want.” He wrote that “children [are] bound to their father only so long as they need him to take care of them. As soon as the need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved.”³⁰⁴

This is interesting for beginning a discussion of “freedom,” because if we recall that Rousseau’s assumption was that children are “born free.” It is interesting to note that a child is to grow up “bound” to their father (not their mother, grandparents, or siblings). Yet the conceptual question here is why should this bond magically disappear when a child is no longer in need of a father? Would not years of such dependency incur a sense of debt and obligation? Whereas that would be the case in many cultures, this was apparently not the case for Rousseau. If the bond were a result of need, that is dependency, then that bond would be far *stronger* at birth than later in childhood. A newborn would be even less “free” than a five-year old. If, on the other hand, a newborn is “free” by virtue of being uncontaminated by social constructions, abstract norms, and laws then the “freedom” exhibited by the newborn is radically different from the “freedom” of a youth no longer “bound to their father.” The construction of “freedom” can only make sense when the meanings of “free” and “bound” shift according to whim. Indeed, the very idea that Rousseau could utter the words that “man is born free” is quite extraordinary when seen in the light of his own behavior: according to his own

be incompatible with “free will.” Ultimately, the “proof” of “free will” hinges in part upon how one defines it.

³⁰² Rousseau [1762] 1987: 17.

³⁰³ Ibid: 197-198.

³⁰⁴ Ibid: 142.

account, Rousseau abandoned his five children at birth.³⁰⁵ Were any of *his* children “born free” as he had successfully encouraged their mother to retain her honor and leave the infant to a likely death at Vincent de Paul’s Foundling Home together with a few thousand other abandoned infants? How could he know to what degree his children were “free” at birth when he did not remain standing there to watch them die? Only by shuffling the deck of meanings behind the word “free” could his sentence make sense either in relation to his own behavior or the rest of his theory. The latter problem is not particular for Rousseau.³⁰⁶ Instead, this is part of the problem of beginning to discuss “freedom.” In order to make a sensical history of ideas about “freedom,” one has to assume that there already *is* a sense there to make and inscribe that assumption back onto the literature as one reads it.

The point is relevant to Flathman’s argument even though he argued against the idea that such a depiction was *sufficient* to describe “freedom.” It is relevant because Flathman agreed with Rousseau that “freedom” could describe the child at all. By framing the conversation in terms of “self-activation” and “impediment,” Flathman, like Rousseau, turn the reader’s gaze away from another possible starting point for looking at the same empirical material. Both of their “sparks,” however distinct they may have been, flew in the opposite direction of a focus on dependency. Yet an equally strong (or stronger) case could be made that the child cannot in any way be described as “free” because a newborn is completely dependent, vulnerable, and incapable of self-sufficiency. Such a stance bypasses the question of “freedom” (unimpeded) or “unfreedom” (impeded) and focuses immediately on the responsibilities of those who brought the child into the world as well as the responsibilities that the child in turn is born into receiving and which express themselves in time.³⁰⁷

Yet by focusing on the question of impediments (the same starting point as Hobbes in regard to “freedom”) one is led to believe in two assumptions from the very beginning: (1) This unit labeled “human” is independent at birth and it is useful to speak of it as such, and (2) that the presence or non-presence of obstacles ought to be a central value in describing the condition of that unit. The former assumption carries an entire ideological package along with it yet it is usefully disguised. By assuming that a human being is an independent unit from the very beginning yet without leaving room for doubt, one can more easily avoid engaging in the argument about whether or not this is the case. It *becomes* true (or seems that way) as long as the reader continues to read the long list of subsequent arguments that build upon the first.

In the latter case, the implication is that rather than speaking about nourishment or basic needs, one ought to begin with a conversation about unimpeded movement.

³⁰⁵ See Kessen 1978 for a discussion of the matter.

³⁰⁶ Although, the other issue of abandoned children would be a problem for other elite European thinkers as well. When John Locke or Thomas Hobbes wanted to portray uncivilized cultures as cruel and callous, the presence of somebody like Rousseau would hardly aid the case for European “civilization.”

³⁰⁷ It ought to be self-evident, in light of Rousseau’s less than stellar career as a father, why he in particular would *not* want to begin the conversation here.

In doing so, this premise leads to the assumption that it is as useful to speak of “freedom” as a value as it would be to create a value called “he’s no longer punching me in the head.” That is, a more natural response to the phenomena of constraint or head-punching is not the philosophical idea of constraint/head-punching or lack of it, but the more direct question of its *justification* and how to get it to stop — not whether it is happening or not. By labeling a normal condition (absence of impediment) and giving it a name as a something to be aspired toward, one grants it a special status that has become special precisely because it is no longer normal.

For a privileged white male academic with plenty of access to nourishment to be discussing the idea of whether a starving person is “free” or not is a bit like grinding live hamsters into a meat grinder while wondering if animals can feel pain. The two acts, living a privileged life and unemotionally discussing the suffering of other people, are intimately entwined.³⁰⁸ The locations where such questions can be entertained are heavily guarded precisely because the ability to even ask such questions is an act of violence. Yet this is the result of beginning the question of social organization with infants and starting a discussion about violence by speaking of “impediment.”³⁰⁹ As James Cone wrote about white theologians who had ignored social struggle in their theological musings: because they “were not politically threatened in America, they did not include politics in their theological point of departure.”³¹⁰

An alternative perspective that could be offered, and one that is quite obscured by the focus on impediments and constraint, is that the most overriding description of the condition of a newborn is one of inherent dependency, including a need for and connection to mothers, fathers, and other adults. It is not uncommon for this type of perspective to dominate in the stories told by people in non-European cultures (or any woman who has given birth for that matter). Yet the stories told in male-dominant European scholarship on “freedom” repeat the idea again and again that we are “born free” without being able to explain how this is so. Nor are we told why this is a more useful way of speaking about an infant or why the matter of impediment and constraint is a better question to ask in the long run than ultimate matters of dependencies, bonds, and justifications of violence.

³⁰⁸ The difference, of course, between hamster-grinding and academic discourse is that the diffusion of responsibility entails that one need never pick up a gun in order to participate in violent acts. As long as one agrees to pay taxes then somebody else can be paid to administer such things as the death penalty, prison industry, and military occupations.

³⁰⁹ This departure from the obvious would seem to suggest that the move might be serving other ends. As Eric MacGilvray wrote, “The association of freedom with the absence of constraint may seem to account for the special potency of appeals to freedom, because it is always tactically useful when the aims of a cause can be expressed in terms of the removal of an identifiable obstacle” (2011: 6).

³¹⁰ Cone 1999: 47.

Mythical “Freedom”

Now we are in a position to begin discussing the seventh type of “freedom” which I refer to as “mythical.” Unlike the others, it has no particular space and it has no particular conversation that revolves around it. Instead, mythical “freedom” permeates all of the conversations primarily in three distinct ways. First, all discussions on “freedom” are rooted in a mythical faith in “free will,” as discussed above, which has nonetheless taken on air of “objectivity” and scientific reliability despite the lack of evidence. Second, the complexity and variations of the meanings of “freedom” provide it with an aura of God-like complexity —too profound for the human mind to truly comprehend. Third, this mystified concept that nobody can really explain and scholars can never agree on has been attributed central status in society and is used to mobilize people to kill and die “for their country” much as belief in “God” has been used to similarly mobilize people in other contexts. Indeed, the biggest statue in the United States is the one that has welcomed immigrants arriving in New York for more than a century: The Statue of Liberty. For this reason, “freedom” in its mythic condition cannot have a conversation around it because it is not meant to be defined. It is, like the word “God” in “God bless America,” never defined. No U.S. President can say “God bless America” and thereafter proceed to explain exactly who or what that “God” is. The power of the word resides in its perpetual state of ambiguity. Through ambiguity each listener can inscribe their own meaning into the word and feel personally moved. The more that the word is defined, the more people lose interest in joining along. The same goes for “freedom” in its mythic state. Noticing this tendency to sacralize an ambiguous “freedom,” retired colonel and political scientist Andrew Bacevich wrote:

Freedom is the altar at which Americans worship, whatever their normal religious persuasion. “No one sings odes to liberty as the final end of life with greater fervor than Americans,” the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once observed. Yet even as they celebrate freedom, Americans exempt the object of their veneration from critical examination. In our public discourse, freedom is not so much a word or even a value as an incantation, its very mention enough to stifle doubt and terminate all debate. [I] suggest that this heedless worship of freedom has been a mixed blessing. In our pursuit of freedom, we have accrued obligations and piled up debts that we are increasingly hard-pressed to meet.³¹¹

The mythic realm is different from all of the others. Mythic discourses on “freedom” can be seen in, for example, propaganda efforts, songwriting, or poetry. While the other discourses aim to articulate a specific vision of “freedom” in a conceptual or pragmatic sense, mythic discourses tend to necessarily obfuscate conceptual definitions, pragmatic implications, and the connection between them. As early as 1884, Max Stirner called

³¹¹ Bacevich 2008: 5-6.

“liberty” a “spook” and assessed that “liberalism is a religion because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts ‘man’ to the same extent as any other religion does its God or idol, because it makes what is mine into something otherworldly.”³¹² Jean-Luc Nancy cited Hegel with approval: “No idea is so generally recognized as indefinite, ambiguous, and open to the greatest misconceptions ... as the idea of Freedom...” and surmised that “Perhaps it will not be possible to preserve the very name and concept of freedom.”³¹³ Yet, Nancy also stated that, “If there were not something like ‘freedom,’ we would not speak of it” and “‘God’ becomes the name of a necessary freedom...”³¹⁴ Nancy’s wavering as to the usefulness of “freedom” and conclusion that, despite ambiguities, it was indeed something profound. Yet, “freedom” for Nancy was not just profound but may even refer that which is most profound: “Freedom perhaps designates nothing more and nothing less than existence itself.”³¹⁵

While scholars may integrate mythical senses of “freedom” into their discussions about “freedom,” perhaps the most influential usages of mythical “freedom” are those that are presented to children. The children’s history book cited in the prologue is a good example and worth repeating here:

In our America we are free. Boys and girls and men and women can go to the Sunday Schools or churches they like best. All over the world boys and girls would like to be as free as we are in America. We must remember that freedom is a very wonderful thing. And we must do our best to protect our country, and the happiness we enjoy as good Americans.

The only contextualized “freedom” mentioned here was the ability to choose which church people want to go to (choosing *no* church is not mentioned as an option). Yet the following sentence seemed to obscure that meaning: “*All over the world boys and girls would like to be as free as we are in America.*” One would be straining the argument to insist that the author intended readers to believe that boys and girls all over the world were primarily concerned about choosing which church to attend. The next sentence clarified the real point: “*We must remember that freedom is a very wonderful thing.*” That is the mythical meaning. It does not matter so much *what* is means as long as we agree that it is wonderful. Then comes the set-up: “*And we must do our best to protect our country, and the happiness we enjoy as good Americans.*” If we are to be “good” (and who does not want that?) we must be willing to “protect our country” which, of course, is thinly disguised child-level war propaganda. By the time a child has grown up, such messages will have been heard so many times that they will be part of the narrative air that one breathes as a citizen. Hearing a call to take up arms to “protect our country”

³¹² Stirner [1884] 1995: 158.

³¹³ Nancy 1993: 1, 9.

³¹⁴ Ibid 8, 11.

³¹⁵ Ibid 14.

will hopefully not only make sense to the listener but also tug at those unconscious strings. Thus, “freedom” can become a rhetorical device to organize mass violence.

The functional ambiguity of “freedom” means that there are various uses of the term. “Freedom” appears in two primary senses: contextualized and decontextualized. Only the latter is “unique.” Yet this is a qualified form of “unique” and only meaningful in a trivial sense. That is, the *function* of decontextualized “freedom” is often nearly identical to that of other similarly decontextualized or ambiguous words such as “God,” “nation,” “equality,” or [insert group identification here]. It can serve to mobilize emotional support for a particular group of people (or, for that matter, for a particular individual or cult of individualism).

At the same time, the mythical usage of “freedom” can enable public figures to speak of “freedom” for indigenous peoples and working class people and “freedom” for colonialists and elites as if it were the same thing. The question of the violence of perpetual occupation and its justification becomes therefore so obscured that it does not really enter the conversation all while radically different constituencies can imagine that it might be speaking to them.

In this seemingly mutual agreement to both deify “freedom” and avoid a clear definition, the faith of the followers of “freedom” find a double-edged sword. As David Sehat wrote in *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*:

[These myths] are *civic myths* that politicians, legal theorists, and cultural critics draw upon to advance their aims. ...At their best they are inclusive, offering a means by which the many kinds of people who live in the United States can be understood to be part of the American polity. At their worst they are tools to justify exclusion and oppression.³¹⁶

We see this mystified type of “freedom” (perhaps more properly designated *Freedom*) arise in a number of contexts and sometimes in unexpected places such as American food when, for example, French fries became Freedom Fries in 2003 (or, to a lesser degree, when sauerkraut became Liberty Cabbage in 1918). Sensing a despotic current in the cult of “freedom,” Kahlil Gibran wrote:

At the city gate and by your fireside I have seen you prostrate yourself and worship your own freedom, even as slaves humble themselves before a tyrant and praise him though he slays them. ...I have seen the freest among you wear their freedom as a yoke and a handcuff. ...In truth that which you call freedom is the strongest of these chains, though its links glitter in the sun and dazzle your eyes. And what is it but fragments of your own self you would discard that you may become free?³¹⁷

What is it then that might cause this unspoken compact between people and politicians, between grassroots activists and celebrated leaders, between the listeners of moving speech and the speakers? Why a speaker would not want to define a term is no great

³¹⁶ Sehat 2011: 7.

³¹⁷ Gibran 1989: 47-48.

secret. As suggested before, one is better equipped to move an audience in one direction when the map is not laid out in detail. Definitions are suited for science —not for great speeches. Why listeners would not want to have such a key term defined could in part be due to the romance between followers and leaders. Asking a person who has inspired you to define their terms is a bit like asking a lover exactly what they mean by “I love you” before simply responding “I love you too” in return. Some listeners may actually want to ask but are unable to gain access to publically ask the question or answer it. It is likely however that there are other motives as well. Perhaps some listeners do not want the term defined because a definition would imply a loss of something that the listener owns precisely because it is hidden from the speaker’s view.

Now, this section has aimed to clarify that there are different conversations of “freedom” but also that these conversations are interwoven and made convoluted by shifting meanings and functional ambiguity. The use of mythical “freedom” in particular can make it extremely difficult to parse out exactly what an author meant because a mythical connotation can, even to a small degree, imply that a clear and precise meaning of the author’s use of the term is not always or not thoroughly pursued by the author. As such, this overview will only crudely present some general themes without delving deeply into any particular thinker nor attempting to impose a categorical structure on “true” meanings of the term.

Histories of “Freedom” and “Unfreedom”

Dominant White Histories of “Freedom”³¹⁸

“Freedom,” in the English language, is inherited from the Germanic *freiheit* while its sister term liberty developed from the Latin *libertas* (similar to the Greek *eleutheria*).³¹⁹ In the Roman context, liberty was “a legacy bequeathed by the founders of Rome to the Roman people; their “freedom” was tied to the beginning their forefathers had established.” Though it may sound counterintuitive, liberty in Rome “implied

³¹⁸ As it stands, the color line and creation of the “white race” were established during the same period as “freedom” began to take hold in Europe as a central value and, significantly, often by the same thinkers (Hobbes, Kant, etc.). The history of whiteness is thereby entwined with the history of “freedom.” The whiteness of the writers in the anthology *Freedom* by Carter et al is merely a contemporary manifestation of a very long tradition of tying whiteness to “freedom.” As such, it seemed reasonable to clarify this brief overview by labeling it “white histories” even if I am aware that the term may not be universally welcomed.

³¹⁹ According to David Hackett Fischer in *Liberty and Freedom*, the oldest word comparable to “freedom” is the Sumerian *ama-ar-gi* from 2300 B.C. implied “going home to mother” (2005: 5).

inequality”³²⁰ and this may have a simple explanation: “freedom” was born through its opposite: enslavement. As Max Pohlenz wrote:

The conception of freedom implies its antithesis. Free men only exist where there are unfree men. The awareness of freedom could only arise in a place where men lived together with others who were not independent but had a master over them whom they served and who controlled their lives. We speak nowadays of free and unfree men, and so did the ancient Greeks. But historically it was the existence of the unfree, the slaves, that first gave the others the feeling that they themselves were free.³²¹

In fact, Roman *libertas* was nothing humans were inherently born with but instead referred to privileges granted by Roman power. In Greece, the closest things to rights were “authorized concessions.”³²²

“Freedom” (*freiheit*) has a different history and different implications. The etymology is rooted in the Indo-European *priya/friya/riya* which meant “dear” or “beloved” and has also given us the word “friend”: “Free meant someone who was joined to a tribe of free people by ties of kinship and rights of belonging.”³²³ Here equality was integral to the very definition of “freedom.” David Hackett Fischer provided an example of the Viking era Icelandic *Thing* and *Althing* where “free” men organized themselves in a form of decentralized federation. In such cases, rule (and “freedom”) was determined not by monarch but by law.

It is apparent, according to Fischer’s view, that “the original meanings of freedom and liberty were not merely different but opposed. Liberty meant separation. Freedom implied connection.”³²⁴ As he noted, English is the only European language to retain both terms in common speech. North European languages have “freedom” but not “liberty,” while the romance languages have “liberty” but not “freedom.”³²⁵ Yet regardless of which term one uses, both of them (in different ways) were originally tied to obligations, responsibilities, inequality, or equality.

³²⁰ Fischer 2005: 7.

³²¹ Pohlenz 1966: 3. Aristotle termed enslaved people “living property” (*Politics* I. 3, p. 1253b, 32). Orlando Patterson (1991) has maintained that not only did “freedom” being through enslavement, it never become disentangled from it.

³²² Fischer 2005: 8. Nonetheless, according to Fischer, both the Greek and Roman words also implied separation, independence, and autonomy. These are the meanings that he attributed to liberty throughout his book.

³²³ Ibid 59. Throughout literature on “freedom” one sees the golden rule of writing definitions broken again and again: “Do not use a word in its own definition.”

³²⁴ Fischer (2005: 5).

³²⁵ This does not mean however that theorists have necessarily taken advantage of this two-word privilege. Many (such as Isaiah Berlin) have simply used the terms interchangeably.

Similarly, the development of “freedom” within Christian traditions was traditionally tied to servitude and obedience as virtues. “Freedom” had no meaning without them. Orlando Patterson made the claim that Christianity was “the first, and only, world religion that placed freedom-spiritual freedom, redemption – at the very center of its theology.”³²⁶ It was, like all “freedom” tied to an “unfreedom”:

The essence of that freedom is righteousness, power, and glory, and mankind can experience this only by means of enslavement to God, that is, by becoming exactly what a slave is to his master: a living surrogate, so completely at one with him that he has no separate identity.³²⁷

This was, for Patterson, not a practice that makes sense in social terms but only in spiritual terms because the master is not human but God. The Christian “freedom” that Patterson read in Saint Paul was one in which each believer in Christ (in contrast to pagan Roman citizen) could partake in the ultimate sovereign freedom of God (in contrast to Caesar). As Patterson interpreted this relationship, it was, at its core, a quest of self-discovery:

Until the end of days, then, mankind must constantly struggle, fight an inward battle. What mankind has discovered, upon its partial reconciliation... is the startling truth that the home it seeks, the God in identity with whom it hopes to find perfect peace and freedom, resides within the innermost self. Enslavement is sin, it now turns out, is self-estrangement, which is the same thing as God-estrangement.³²⁸

As Saint Paul had written, “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all,” Luther wrote 1,500 years later, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”³²⁹ Kristin Johnston Largen interprets this to mean that “freedom” for Luther entails an ethical imperative:

That is the irony: true freedom results in true “servitude.” Freedom, true Christian freedom, does not result in perks or privileges for oneself. Instead, it leads to the willing—and even joyful—acceptance of responsibility, inconvenience, and encumbrance for the sake of the neighbor who needs me. ...In Christ we are free; in the neighbor, we are servants.³³⁰

³²⁶ Patterson, *Freedom* (1991, xvi).

³²⁷ *Ibid* 341.

³²⁸ *Ibid* 343.

³²⁹ Johnston Largen 2013: 234, 235.

³³⁰ *Ibid* 236; Although the celebration of servitude seen in Paul and Luther has become a little more than a prominent minority current within contemporary conversations, it still remains and by the time the British colonies were taking shape in the United States, they were the dominant perspectives.

Writing about 100 years after Luther, Thomas Hobbes changed the theme from “servitude” to “security.” Rather than emphasizing obedience to God and service to one’s neighbors, Hobbes encouraged each citizen to devote their obedience to the state for the sake of security. After he had articulated his conception of the “state of nature,” other highly influential philosophers of “freedom” followed suit but tweaked the idea to suit their own particular ideological message. John Locke’s version of the “state of nature” added the idea that *property* was inherent in human society and implicit in the state of nature but without a state there was no way to secure it. Locke’s addition of property entailed a dual addition of “freedom” (for some) and “unfreedom” (for others).³³¹ Interestingly, Locke also included *people* as a form of property, not in his writings but in his practice. He had personally invested in the capturing of Africans, enslaving them, and transporting them the U.S. where many died along the way.³³²

In contrast to Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau romanticized the “state of nature” but in a paternalistic manner and therefore did not consider “primitive” stateless societies to be in any way models for European societies. Rather than eliminate the state, Rousseau emphasized the ability of the state to incorporate and manifest a *collective* “freedom.” As people were to find their “freedom” in the state, it would therefore make sense, if a person were to fail to comply with the popular will, for such a person to be “forced to be free.” As such, the “unfreedom” of the state was, to some degree, celebrated by Rousseau.

Immanuel Kant, who popularized the term “autonomy,” located the source of “freedom” in rationality and mental autonomy. For Kant, this also meant binding “freedom” to “unfreedom” such as duty and an obligation to do what is right.³³³ Furthermore, Kant’s *a priori* principles for a lawful civil state included “The *equality* of each with all others as a *subject*” (*Die Gleichheit* desselben mit jedem Anderen, als *Untertan*).³³⁴ Across the seas, a similar concern for duty and equality in relationship to “freedom” was shared a generation prior to Kant by William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. He stated “liberty without obedience is confusion, and obedience without liberty is slavery.”³³⁵ Having been jailed for arranging a Quaker meeting in

³³¹ See G. A. Cohen 1979.

³³² For a detailed discussion of speculations on how to resolve the obvious contradiction of Locke’s involvement in the trade of humans as “property,” see Glausser 1990.

³³³ For Kant, according to Flathman, the “opposite [of freedom] is not unfreedom but being determined” (1987: 26). That is, an authentic self is an autonomous self that independently responds to the imperatives of Reason over desire or irrational compulsions. The idea of “immoral freedom” would make no sense to Kant.

³³⁴ Halldenius 2001: 36. Of course, as noted, Kant did not believe that this equality included everyone. People of color, women, and workers who did not own property were excluded.

³³⁵ Soderlund 1983: 122.

England, he had come to put his obedience to the test: God or state. For Penn and many others the self-evident response was God.

Yet these views were gradually giving way to a new priority on Reason as expressed by Kant. G. F. W. Hegel, a half-generation behind Kant shared the view that there was a single rational truth that social relations would align with once people were enlightened enough to understand this rationality. What Hegel referred to as “negative freedom” was “the freedom of the void.”³³⁶ This meant the unity of the self with all existence. Hegel critiqued this view when it is taken alone but regarded it as a necessary component in a complete “freedom” that bound the determined nature of people’s particularities with the universality of the universe. What is particularly interesting here is that that which Hegel referred to as “negative freedom” seemed to be drawn from “Hinduism” which is one of the two examples he provided (the other being the French revolution). The problem with exclusively “negative freedom” was that it led to “the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to any social order and the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins.”³³⁷ Nonetheless, there was significant value to be found there:

In this element of the will is rooted my ability to free myself from everything, abandon every aim, abstract from everything. Man alone can sacrifice everything, his life included; he can commit suicide. ...Man is the pure thought of himself, and only in thinking is he this power to give himself universality, i.e. to extinguish all particularity, all determinacy. This negative freedom, or freedom as the Understanding conceives it, is one-sided; but a one-sided view always contains one essential factor and is not to be discarded. But the Understanding is defective in exalting a single one-sided factor to be the sole and the supreme one.

In history this form of freedom is a frequent phenomenon. Among the Hindus, for instance, the highest life is held to be persisted in the bare knowledge of one’s simple identity with oneself, fixation in this empty space of one’s inner life, as light remains colourless in pure vision, and the sacrifice of every activity in life, every aim, and every project. In this way man becomes Brahma; there is no longer any distinction between the finite man and Brahma. In this universality every difference has disappeared.³³⁸

So when Hegel wrote that the “will was free,” he did not mean “free will” in the sense we commonly think. For Hegel, “will” and “freedom” were bound together. Each necessitated the other. There was, nonetheless, only one way to be “free.” Drawing in part from Spinoza, only the infinite and the indeterminate was “real.” To be “free” was to be bound to the infinite.

³³⁶ Hegel in Carter et al [1821] 2007: 21.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid 24.

Arbitrariness implies that the content is made mine not by the nature of my will but by chance. Thus I am dependent on this content, and this is the contradiction lying in arbitrariness. The man in the street thinks he is free if it is open to him to act as he pleases but his very arbitrariness implies that he is not free. ...When great artists complete a masterpiece, we may speak of its inevitability, which means that the artist's idiosyncrasy has completely disappeared and no mannerism is detectable in it. ...But the worse the artist is, the more we see in his work the artist, his singularity, his arbitrariness. ...if you keep firmly in view that the content of his willing is a given one, then he is determined thereby and in that respect at all events is free no longer.³³⁹

In other words, to be in accordance with the inevitable and only way of being was to be "free." One could liken Hegel's example of an artist to a dance. The universe provides a single song. Each person can choose to dance in rhythm to the song and be a part of the harmonious whole or they can be "unfree" and out of step.³⁴⁰

Some members of the British colonists spoke a very different language about "liberty." Sustaining peace between faith communities, maintaining obedience to God, or Reason were not the most critical issue on the agenda of social organization. "Liberty" itself had seemed to be its way to becoming a new "God." Five years after the birth of Hegel and more than fifty after the death of Penn, on the 23rd of March, 1775 at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, there was a gathering of white men intensely discussing "freedom." The Second Virginia Convention had assembled. White lawyer, property-owner, enslaver, and soon-to-be governor of Virginia, Patrick Henry (see Fig. 19), famously declared to the assembly: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" That an enslaver could utter these words without a person in the room snickering in disbelief at the gall of it all (at least not that we know of) is testimony to the degree in which white supremacy was (and was to become) thoroughly ingrained in conceptions of "freedom."

³³⁹ Ibid 25.

³⁴⁰ All of this is my own personal reading of Hegel's conception(s) of "freedom." For a rather different reading, see Matarrese 2007.

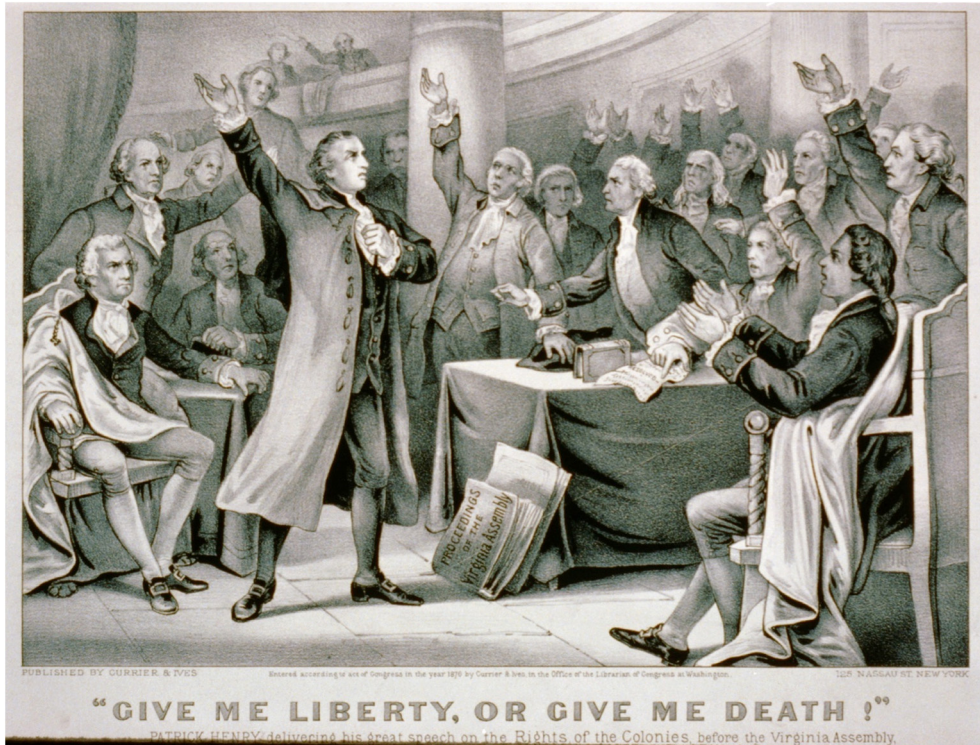


Fig. 19
The lawyer and enslaver Patrick Henry delivered his famous speech before an audience of white male property-owners in 1775.

Similar to Founding Fathers as Patrick Henry, John Stuart Mill crafted a vision of “freedom” contra tyranny while overlooking colonial domination. In beginning his highly influential essay *On Liberty* (1859), Mill positioned “Liberty” contra “Authority” (as opposed to, for example, “Slavery” or “Foreign Rule”). “Freedom” was becoming more of an individual concern. Describing the colonial rebels such as Patrick Henry, Mill wrote, “The aim, therefore, of patriots was to set limits to the power which the ruler should be suffered to exercise over the community; and this limitation was what they meant by liberty.”³⁴¹ This “liberty” was achieved through two strategies: (1) a recognition of rights, “liberties,” or immunities which, if breached, would grant legitimacy to revolution and (2) the establishment of constitutional checks. Mill morphed this conception of group “freedom” into one that was increasingly centered on the individual: “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is

³⁴¹ Mill [1859] 1955: 2.

sovereign.”³⁴² Echoes of Hobbes and the fear of anarchy remained but the state was to have security as a minimalist function.³⁴³ Mill’s maxim essentially reverted the Golden Rule of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” into a Silver Rule “Do not do unto others that which you would not want done unto you.” Couched in the language of “liberty,” this would appear to be a novel concept: “The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”³⁴⁴

This view could be reconciled with his own position as colonialist employee in India under the auspices of British East India Company for whom he worked 35 years. Indeed, Mill explicitly stated explicitly:

Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.³⁴⁵

Thus, as with Patrick Henry who could demand a “liberty” for himself which he would not grant to others, the “liberty” that Mill insisted upon for European individuals could just as well be exchanged for tyranny and domination over people of color.

Dominant Conversations about “Freedom” Today

Philosopher Mortimer Adler, along with a host of other scholars, constructed a typology of “freedoms” after reviewing most of the dominant canon. The typology was an attempt to be more descriptive than normative (an unusual feature in broad studies about “freedom”).³⁴⁶ The work was *The Idea of Freedom Volumes I and II* (1958, 1961). These two large volumes (more than 600 pages each) oddly enough have gathered relatively little attention within the literature on freedom —far overshadowed by Isaiah Berlin’s brief article on “Two Concepts of Liberty.”³⁴⁷ Adler gathered at least enough

³⁴² Ibid 14.

³⁴³ Mill: “...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (1955: 13).

³⁴⁴ Ibid 18.

³⁴⁵ Ibid 14-15.

³⁴⁶ Although, in this category one might add both Felix Oppenheim (1961) and Christian Bay’s (1965) rebuttal in regard to the relationship between ideology and theoretical work on “freedom.”

³⁴⁷ A notable exception to this is Westcott (1988) whose psychological research on “freedom” began with and concluded with a typology that drew inspiration from Adler’s typology. One reason for the strong preference for Berlin over Adler (aside from the fact that it is far easier to read two dozen pages than 1,200 pages) may be that Berlin’s work was normative and carefully positioned ideologically in the

attention to be critiqued (accurately) by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. for excluding women and cultures of color.³⁴⁸ Adler could argue in his defense that —especially in 1958— no white males included women or people of color in their studies on the philosophy of “freedom.” In any case, after reviewing more than two thousand years of European male conversations about “freedom,” Adler concluded that there were three broad types of conceptions of “freedom” (two of which included sub-categories):

Circumstantial Freedom of Self-Realization

Approximately “freedom” as *ability*, expressed as “*a man is free who is able, under favorable circumstances, to act as he wishes for his own individual good as he sees it*” and associated primarily with thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, F. A. Hayek, Hobbes, Adam Smith, Bertrand Russell, Voltaire, and the Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley. A sub-category is *Political Liberty* which was not broad enough to have attracted any thinker who regarded it as the *only* freedom.

Acquired Freedom of Self-Perfection

Approximately “freedom” as *virtue*, expressed as “*a man is free who is able, through acquired virtue or wisdom, to will or live as he ought in conformity to the moral law or an ideal befitting human nature*” and associated primarily with thinkers such as Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Plato, Kant, and Spinoza. A sub-category is *Collective Freedom* that is associated primarily with thinkers such as Bakunin, Comte, Marx, and Nietzsche.

Natural Freedom of Self-Determination

Approximately “freedom” as *decision, independent will, or natural ability*, expressed as “*a man is free who is able, by a power inherent in human nature, to change his own character creatively by deciding for himself what he shall do or become*” and associated primarily with thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, Aristotle, William James, Lucretius, Adam Smith, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Common to all possible conceptions of “freedom,” stated Adler, is that they all can be expressed as follows: “a man is free who has in himself the ability or power to make what he does his own action and what he achieves as his own property.”³⁴⁹ According to Adler, some thinkers such as Montesquieu, Locke, and Aquinas used all of the categories (except collective freedom) in their theories. At first glance, Adler’s attempt

binary battle of “West” against the “East.” Adler’s work, being an attempt to write about “freedom” in a purely descriptive manner, is less useful for polemics and really only of use to researchers and philosophers.

³⁴⁸ Delgado and Stefancic 1991: 1953, footnote 148.

³⁴⁹ All direct quotes taken from Adler (1961: 16).

at a universal definition might seem to lack an “unfreedom.” Insofar as that might be true, that “freedom” appears virtually indistinguishable from “ability.” Yet, in Volume I, he had already made clear which “unfreedom” lay at the core when he wrote: “no matter how man’s freedom is conceived in detail, he will be conceived to be responsible in whatever way and to whatever extent he is conceived to be free.”³⁵⁰ This is notable because it suggests that after reviewing a couple thousand years of thinking about “freedom” (something that I have not set out to do here), his conclusion was that “freedom” was inseparable from responsibility. Yet, it ought to be noted that responsibility is the “larger” of the two because responsibility is the one that binds social relationships together. Responsibility can exist without a conversation about “freedom” but “freedom” cannot exist without a conversation about responsibility (or some other “unfreedom”). Furthermore, Adler had another “unfreedom” to add in terms of studying “freedom.” He wrote: “we are brought to the realization that the dialectical treatment of a subject like freedom cannot be fully accomplished without a similar treatment of other, intimately connected subjects, such as law.”³⁵¹

In addition to Adler’s three types of “freedom,” one might mention two more: Orlando Patterson and J. L. Hill. Patterson (1999) prominently made a distinction between three different types of “freedom”:

- (1) “Sovereign freedom” (“the power to act as one pleases, regardless of the wishes of others”);
- (2) “Personal freedom,” (“the capacity to do as one pleases, *insofar as one can*”) and;
- (3) “Civic freedom” (“the capacity of adult members of a community to participate in its life and governance”).³⁵²

Each of these could be described in more direct terms as “power” (sovereign “freedom”), “equality in behavior” (personal “freedom”), and “equality in governance” or “self-determination” (civic “freedom”). The implied “unfreedoms” in sovereign “freedom” were inequality and domination; the implied “unfreedoms” in personal “freedoms” were social norms, consideration of others, and negotiated boundaries; and the implied “unfreedoms” in civic “freedom” were law, obedience, and the state.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Adler 1958: 617.

³⁵¹ Adler 1958: 618.

³⁵² Patterson 1991: 4.

³⁵³ More recently, another overview was articulated by Hill (2003) who reviewed American constitutional conceptions of “freedom.” Hill counted five types: (1) “Positive ideal-freedom” (the right to vote and to take part in government; equivalent to Patterson’s “civic freedom” —not to be confused with Berlin’s “positive liberty”); (2) “Negative ideal-freedom” (absence of constraint; same as Berlin’s “negative liberty”); (3) The “progressive ideal,” (an expansion of “negative” liberty to address structural violence such as poverty); (4) “Self-individuating liberalism-freedom” (the right to discover, develop, and

For all their work, Adler and co. did not create nearly as much impact or receive as much attention in their weighty volumes about “freedom” as did a relatively brief essay by Isaiah Berlin. “It Usually Begins With Isaiah Berlin” is the name of a review article that implies the weight that the white historian and philosopher Isaiah Berlin still carries in dominant conversations about the concept of “freedom.”³⁵⁴ In 1958 he gave a lecture at Oxford entitled “Two Concepts of Liberty” wherein he popularized an old theme based on distinctions between “positive” liberty and “negative” liberty.³⁵⁵ The latter is so designated because it referred to an absence of constraint. This type of “negative freedom” was completely different than Hegel’s use of the term.

For Berlin, “freedom” could be compared to darkness which is known by the absence of light. People are “free” when they are not hindered (hence, it is “negative” because it refers to something that is not there, namely constraint). “Positive” liberty, on the other hand, implied the ability to *do* something such as the ability to control oneself (as a people or as a person). People according to this perspective are “free” when they are harmonious and rational.

...there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule. The answer to the question “Who governs me?” is logically distinct from the question “How far does government interfere with me?” It is in this difference that the great contrast between the two concepts of negative and positive liberty, in the end, consists.³⁵⁶

In other words, the desire to “be governed by myself” is “not a desire for the same thing” as the desire for “a free area of action.”³⁵⁷ Neither is without risks and problems but, in the end, Berlin weighed in heavier on the side of “negative liberty.” Behind his arguments were concerns that the logic of “positive” liberty slipped all too easily into a totalitarian state in which the government would provide essential services to its citizenry but also rationally dictate their interests in an authoritarian manner for “the full development of their ‘true’ natures.”³⁵⁸

As noted earlier, Berlin also remarked that “Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture,” which, as Marcuse observed, is a

express one’s core identity, akin to J. S. Mill’s depiction) and;(5) The “homeostatic-communitarian ideal-freedom” (abiding in a network of communal social relations in a broader pluralistic society; that is, a community wherein individuals acquire a sense of responsibility for one another). For yet another list of potential ways to conceive of “freedoms,” see Tim Gray, *Freedom* (1991), wherein Gray adopted MacCallum’s single concept of “freedom” being “*x* is free in relation to *y* to do *z*.” From this Gray conceived seven “freedoms” in two categories: *interpersonal* (four “freedoms” that amounted to varieties of power, options, and/or absence of constraint) and *intrapersonal* (three “freedoms” that amounted to varieties of power and independence).

³⁵⁴ Levy 2006.

³⁵⁵ Berlin did not distinguish between “liberty” and “freedom.”

³⁵⁶ Berlin [1969] 1991: 42.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid* 43.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid* 49.

way of using essentialist language (telling the reader what things *are*) to disguise the underlying ideological message *as* ideology (telling the reader how things *ought* to be). Furthermore, this simple sentence summed up a fundamental assumption in this Aristotelian way of thinking: clear lines not only *could* be distinguished between all of these charged, ambiguous, and highly contested values but they already *had been* drawn and he supposedly knew where those lines were. In particular, Berlin argued here that “liberty” was one of several goods and people had to sometimes exchange one good for the other. He cited Russian critic Belinsky who had said that if others were to be left in chains and poverty then he did not want wealth and preferred to share their fate. Berlin insisted that Belinsky could make this choice but it was not a choice for “liberty,” it was a choice to sacrifice “liberty” for the sake of “justice” or “equality.”

Interestingly, Berlin wrote that “sacrifice is not an increase in what is being sacrificed,” yet went on to later quote Jeremy Bentham approvingly: “Every law is an infraction of liberty—even if such ‘infraction’ leads to an increase in the sum of liberty.”³⁵⁹ Despite such apparent contradictions, Berlin’s arguments changed a generation of conversations about “freedom.”³⁶⁰

On one end of the spectrum, there have been a number of authors who have, in contrast to Berlin, argued for making important distinctions between “liberty” and “freedom” (Dworkin, Halldenius, Pitkin, Williams). Richard Flathman (1987), though he did not distinguish between “liberty” and “freedom,” conceptualized five different senses of “freedom” hierarchically ordered from the most basic (the existence or non-existence of an impediment to an action) to the most complex (the existence of non-existence of impediments in the context of a person whose action is made with the intent to satisfy, and in fact satisfies, the virtuous norms of that person’s community).

Others, such as Phillip Pettit (1997), have argued for a third type of “freedom,” namely non-domination: the principle that one is “unfree” when under the dominion of somebody else even if their authority is not exercised or, in Pettit’s words, “...no one is able to interfere on an arbitrary basis...in the choices of a free person.”³⁶¹ Later Pettit offered a theory of “freedom” that furthermore connected psychological manifestations of “free will” to personal and political “freedom.” The common thread that unified all levels of “freedom” was a “connection to responsibility. ...there is one single theme in all freedom talk—that of fitness for responsibility.”³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Ibid 37, 51.

³⁶⁰ According to GoogleScholar, as of October 2015, Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” and “Four Essays on Liberty” had each been cited more than 4,000 times (which for scholars is a significant sum. According to the same source, those two essays alone garnered about twice as many citations the number of citations of all of Ayn Rand’s books put together).

³⁶¹ Pettit 1997: 271.

³⁶² Pettit 2001: 4-5.

As Swedish human rights scholar Lena Halldenius, building on Pettit, phrased her own work on non-domination, “Liberty consists, not in the absence of actual interference or constraint, but in the absence of vulnerability to such interference and constraint, in other words, the absence of domination.”³⁶³ For this reason, equality (including an “approximation of equality of socioeconomic goods”)³⁶⁴ is a necessity for liberty to be meaningful and, in her work, Halldenius has focused on the question of gender equality, primarily as articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft who argued that the very presence of asymmetrical power relations would imply a violation of “freedom” — not only for the one at the lower end of the hierarchy but even for the one with power: inequality has a corrupting effect on both sides of the power imbalance.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who questioned whether there were even two concepts of “freedom” and if the idea was not really only one (MacCallum, Megone, Nelson). Although the framework seemed to imply two different concepts, the distinction was really one between external impediments and internal impediments and therefore amounted to a single concept. In the triadic formula famously presented by Gerard MacCallum, the single conception of “freedom” could be expressed as that of a relationship between an agent, a constraint, and an end or, in his words, “ x is (is not) free from y to do (not do, become, not become) z .”³⁶⁵ Charles Taylor furthermore critiqued Berlin’s conceptions as mixing apples and oranges: “negative freedom” was based on *opportunity* (available unhindered options whether or not one chooses them) whereas “positive freedom” was based on the actual *exercise* of control over one’s life.³⁶⁶

Berlin’s articulation of “negative freedom,” if nothing else, is useful for understanding conceptions of “freedom” by some of the most dominant voices today: libertarians and neo-liberals. Friedrich Hayek is often credited with being one of the earliest proponents of the minimalist state that defended property rights but little else. Seemingly in tension with the fear of anarchy, Hayek cited Benjamin Franklin (“Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety”) and argued that a society run largely by business provided more “liberty” than a society run by the state:

Who can seriously doubt that the power which a millionaire, who may be my employer, has over me is very much less than that which the smallest bureaucrat possesses who

³⁶³ Halldenius 2001: 22. In contrast to Pettit, she argued that non-domination actually fits under negative conceptions of “liberty.” 2001: 23.

³⁶⁴ Ibid 11.

³⁶⁵ MacCallum 1967: 314.

³⁶⁶ Taylor 1979: 177.

wields the coercive power of the state and on whose discretion it depends how I am allowed to live and work?³⁶⁷

Hayek's conception of "freedom" was drawn from Adam Smith: "each can use his knowledge for his purposes."³⁶⁸ The problem with the state was that it functioned according to cold calculations that would destroy "freedom" at the expense of practical necessities:

Freedom can be preserved only by following principles and is destroyed by following expediency. ...If the choice between freedom and coercion is thus treated as a matter of expediency, freedom is bound to be sacrificed in almost every instance. ...freedom can be preserved only if it is treated as a supreme principle which must not be sacrificed for particular advantages...³⁶⁹

In this spirit, a host of neo-liberals (advocates of privatization of state industries and services) and libertarians have taken the stage within dominant conversations about "freedom" from the anti-Christian, pro-big business Ayn Rand to the pro-Christian, pro-big business Ronald Reagan to the agnostic, pro-free market, anti-big business, anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard.³⁷⁰ Most recently, one could read pro-big business libertarianism in *Freedom Manifesto* (2012) by multi-millionaire Steve Forbes. Here, in the spirit of Reagan, a commitment market economics dominated by big business in opposition to the state was combined with the advocacy of "Judeo-Christian" values:

Freedom does not imply license. A free society and a free market, then, as now, require people who can control their passions—who have the discipline to put aside selfish, present-oriented needs to work toward a better future. In the words of Benjamin Franklin: "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom."³⁷¹

In this way, humans could be "co-creators with God."³⁷² Whereas the "free market" facilitates this, the state hinders it. Government corrupts people's moral compass, provides arbitrary restrictions, controls peoples' lives, and makes them dependent upon its services. Welfare services, in Forbes' mind, actually hurt the poor and working class. In regard to Hillary Clinton's proposal to raise taxes, he retorted: "Taking away money from 'rich people' who are the country's job creators has never been shown to help poor people. ...No system has been more effective than democratic capitalism in producing

³⁶⁷ Hayek [1945] 2001: 33.

³⁶⁸ Hayek 1973: 56

³⁶⁹ Ibid 56-57.

³⁷⁰ Rothbard [1978] 2006.

³⁷¹ Forbes 2012: 91.

³⁷² Ibid 117.

prosperity and lifting people from poverty”³⁷³ Forbes cited work by white economic historian Deirdre McCloskey who stated that the “idea of bourgeois dignity and liberty led to a [worldwide] rise of real income per head in 2010” from roughly \$3 a day in 1800 to more than \$300 a day in those places that have accepted the “Bourgeois Deal.”³⁷⁴ Yet, as noted above, it was not the economy alone that has made success possible. The “Entrepreneurial faith rooted in Judeo-Christian belief” coupled with “Judeo-Christian belief in reason” explains why “Europeans progressed faster and further than other civilizations.”³⁷⁵ Forbes quoted Rodney Stark’s book to support this claim. He also cited Stark’s assertion (cited earlier) in regard to European exceptionalism and the idea that “Freedom is another concept that simply doesn’t exist in many, perhaps most, human cultures.”³⁷⁶ In typical fashion, whiteness remained implicit in the universally beneficent idea of “freedom” within dominant contexts.

This concludes our brief historical overview of “freedom” and “unfreedom” in dominant conversations. As we could see, each advocate of “freedom” was also an advocate of “unfreedom.” Either they advocated servitude and obedience (Luther, Penn, etc.), duty (Kant), responsibility (Adler, etc.), or virtue (Penn, Forbes) and they all, in any case, advocated the state, property, and/or market institutions. That is one way to sum up a broad overview of “uncritical” studies of “freedom.”

For the purposes of this study, however, that is only a necessary survey (and a very crude one at that) that enables another broad overview, that is, what a *critical* study of “freedom” might look like. I have yet to see any such suggestion or call for a critical study of “freedom” and the overview provided here is not intended to provide any in-depth coverage or even a normative statement of what it *ought* to look like, only this is what seems to me so far could fall under such a rubric. This overview, more than the general overview of studies of “freedom,” is provided here in order to orient the reader which scholarly conversations this particular critical study of “freedom” is in dialogue with. What follows now are “white minority” conceptions of “freedom” and thereafter a gradual assessment of how alternative conceptions might be formulated.

³⁷³ Ibid 91-92. That Pine Ridge Lakota reservation in the heartland of the United States remains devastatingly impoverished would be in his mind. In this way, every fault could be credited to the state and every success could be credited to business. Out of curiosity, I decide to look for words such as “racism” and “racist” in *Freedom Manifesto*. Neither appeared in the entire book. Nor did “colonialism” or “colonialist” appear. Only phrases such as “Colonial forebears” and “Colonial America” which would be no less scary than saying “redskins” preceded by “Washington” or “Indians” preceded by “Cleveland.” He did, however deplore President Obama’s comment that Native Americans had been ignored by the state. Yet, rather than critiquing centuries of genocide or displacement, Forbes concern was that most Native Americans had been made “wards of the state”: twenty different agencies and departments manage their health care, day care, and land (2012: 142). Furthermore, Forbes used the word “luck” or “lucky” 7 times. He seemed to indicate that “luck” is real and can generate wealth. Yet on one page 211 he indicated that if a society believes wealth comes from “luck,” it will tax people a lot.

³⁷⁴ Ibid 92

³⁷⁵ Ibid 237.

³⁷⁶ Ibid 85.

White Minority Conceptions of “Freedom”

Interwoven with the dominant white conceptions are white minority conceptions that tend to be present in dominant conversations to some degree —often on the margins. Within white minority positions, one could possibly even discern *dominant* white minority conceptions and *minority* white minority conceptions. The former such as conservatism and communism are prominent minority positions that have succeeded in dominating various state doctrines. Minority white minority positions, such as Anabaptism and anarchism, have only briefly ever attained such stature.

Dominant White Minority Conceptions

John Calvin, the man who had Servetus burned at the stake for heretically suggesting that Jesus was not actually God, was an influential figure for the theological conservatives who colonized New England. He wrote:

Christian freedom, in my opinion, consists of three parts. The first: that the conscience of believers, in seeking assurance of their justification before God, should rise above and advance beyond the law...For ...the law leaves no one righteous. ...The second part, dependent upon the first, is that consciences observe the law, not as if constrained by the necessity of the law, but that freed from the law's yoke they willingly obey God's will. ...those bound by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned tasks for each day by their masters. ...But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their fathers, do not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. ...The third part of Christian freedom lies in this: regarding outward things that are of themselves “indifferent,” we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently. And the knowledge of this freedom is very necessary for us... Today we seem to many to be unreasonable because we stir up discussion over the restricted eating of meat, use of holidays and of vestments and such things, which seem to them vain frivolities. But these matters are not more important than is commonly believed. ...If a man begins to doubt whether he may use linen for sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkins, he will afterward be uncertain also about hemp; finally, doubt will ever arise over tow.freedom ...consists as much in abstaining as in using. ...Nothing is plainer than this rule: that we should use our freedom if it results in the edification of our neighbor, but if it does not help our neighbor, then we should forgo it.³⁷⁷

As historians Mark Noll and Luke Harlow observed “Most New England Puritans came to these shores not to establish religious liberty, but to practice their own form of

³⁷⁷ Calvin 1976: 13-20.

orthodoxy.”³⁷⁸ Yet with conflicting views and practices, something had to be worked out and in 1648, New England Congregationalists signed the Cambridge Platform which organized relations between them such that each congregation would be autonomous in relation to the others. Calvinists today are a vocal minority in the form of neo-Calvinists, such as Gary North an influential figure for some factions of the Tea Party who wrote:

...those using the religious liberty argument say that they are maintaining a society open to all religions, when in fact it will be a society closed to the God of the Bible and His law-order. ... Humanistic law, moreover, is inescapably totalitarian law. ... Our task is to build, step by step, institution by institution, an alternative to humanistic civilization. It will be a decentralized alternative, but it will have a head, Jesus Christ.

North advocates libertarian theocracy and capitalism.³⁷⁹ North’s libertarianism was very much opposed however to anarchism and described Native Americans as “‘American savages,’ which is precisely what most of those demon-worshipping, Negro slave-holding, frequently land-polluting people were...”³⁸⁰

A founding father of conservatism, Jeremy Bentham, wrote in response to the French Declaration of Rights, that it was “Nonsense on Stilts.” He challenged every article in it, accusing the Declaration of fomenting “anarchy.” In response to, for example, Article 3 (“Every man is sole proprietor of his own person: and this property is unalienable”), Bentham wrote “More nonsense, more mischievous nonsense... wrapped under the cover of a silly epigram: as if a man were one thing, the person of the same man another thing: as if this man kept his person when he happened to have one, as he does his watch.”³⁸¹ To the National Convention of France in 1792, he declared:

Emancipate your Colonies. ...To give freedom at the expence of others, is but conquest in disguise. ...You choose your own government, why are not other people to choose theirs? Do you seriously mean to govern the world, and do you call that liberty? What is become of the rights of men? Are you the only men who have rights? Alas! My fellow citizens, have you two measures? ...Is this liberty and equality? Open domination would be a less grievance.³⁸²

Bentham disregarded the idea of “natural rights” as something inherent and instead acknowledged “legal rights” as something that is enforced. The former appeared under

³⁷⁸ Noll and Harlow 2007: 24.

³⁷⁹ See Gary North’s homepage: www.garynorth.com.

³⁸⁰ Irish 2003: 20.

³⁸¹ Bentham [1795] 2002: 390.

³⁸² Ibid [1792]: 291-292.

the guise of neutral description whereas, for Bentham, rights (insofar as the term was useful) were something normative. Similarly, following Bentham in these distinctions, contemporary white scholar Raymond Geuss described “rights as ‘white magic’” when they are used in the sense of an innate characteristic.³⁸³

William Penn, along with other members of the Society of Friends (or Quakers), revealed another key aspect to the struggle for “liberty.” They saw an intrinsic link not only between obedience and “liberty” but also between *language* and “liberty.” As Natalie Spar has written, “Seventeenth-century Quakers in both England and the colonies announced an explicit linguistic project in what they termed the ‘plain language’ or the ‘pure language.’”³⁸⁴ British Quaker Richard Farnworth, for example, had written that “using *thou* for the second person singular was the ‘pure, proper, and single plain language.’”³⁸⁵ The project was, however, about far broader than an arbitrary rearrangement of the second-person pronoun. It also included a rejection of other conventions such as polite greetings, oath-swearing, and conventional polite salutations, and addressing people by their first name.

The Quaker *thou* was the linguistic characteristic on which their opponents focused most. The father of Quakerism, George Fox, argued that *thou* was “the Language of Christ and the holy Men of God both to Superior and Inferior,” thus grounding quotidian language in biblical precedent and reflecting a divinely ordained social equality. Quaker pure language was not simply a theological concept; it was a set of practical alterations to daily speech sustained by theorizing language as an authenticating sign of religious experience and as a tool for political order. ...When he began planning for the founding of Pennsylvania, Penn saw these two parts as linked: a language that could represent authentic religious experience could translate to the political sphere as a social language free from representational opacity and state manipulation. Many of these debates echoed Augustine’s argument that things themselves—or “signifiables”—were preferable to their signs, or words. ...Though other seventeenth-century religious groups also engaged in debates about the inherency of linguistic meaning, Quakers were distinguished from their contemporaries in two important respects: their stated belief in universal freedom of conscience and their argument that words need not be replaced by things, because words were things. ... Merging word and thing was not simply a safeguard against religious hypocrisy. It guarded against what Penn thought of as the dangerous political consequences of arbitrary language—language not restrained by the nature of things themselves. For Penn, arbitrary language was a political menace, threatening the meaning of liberty and resulting in religious persecution.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Hamilton 2013: 84.

³⁸⁴ Spar 2015: 693.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid 694-695, 705.

The “silent” meetings of the Quakers have played a role in this process but not necessarily as scholars have supposed. Whereas previous scholars have argued that the silent meetings indicated an attempt by Quakers to transcend language, Spar contended that, “Quaker language theory did not ...attempt to replace language with things; instead, it hoped to ground language in things—to create a more useful and transparent language rather than to move beyond it.”³⁸⁷ Furthermore, the “silent” meetings are not completely silent and have sometimes been quite loud.³⁸⁸ The point of sitting in a circle in silence is to allow the Inner Light to come forth and speak on its own terms. This relocated each believer from the role of a mere “follower” or “church member” to become a potential medium for *divine* language. These strategies were recognized as a potential threat to power and wealth. Church of England clergyman Francis Fullwood had written:

God grant these [Quakers] may seasonably be suppressed, before they grow too numerous; otherwise such who now quarrel at the honour will hereafter question the wealth of others. . . . In a word, it is suspicious such as now introduce *thou* and *thee* will, if they can, expel *mine* and *thine*, dissolving all propriety into confusion.³⁸⁹

Karl Marx and Engels, building on Hegel and Rousseau, emphasized interdependence, community, and class struggle. Their view of “freedom” could be likened to a republican view based on the self-rule of the working class. Marx wrote that labor in capitalism is alienated from the worker, something external to the person:

[Labor] does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour.³⁹⁰

“Freedom” then is not merely a matter of “political” governance but a matter of being able to govern one’s day-to-day life. Philosophically, “freedom is the knowledge of necessity,” as the quote is often phrased. In Engels’ words: “Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity.”³⁹¹ That is, labor is tied to basic needs and unless people have control over their own lives and awareness of essential priorities they cannot be “free.” Although communism entailed the abolishing of property and egalitarianism it nonetheless supported the industrial development initiated by the ruling class:

³⁸⁷ Ibid 697.

³⁸⁸ I’ve sat in on a number of Quaker meetings myself and can testify to the variation even in present day which is supposedly more quiet than the early days of the Society of Friends.

³⁸⁹ Ibid 693.

³⁹⁰ Marx 1977: 60.

³⁹¹ Mendelson 1979: 71.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. ...It calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. ...The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by the other.³⁹²

In other words, indigenous societies were a thing of the past and the existence of egalitarian societies that did not consist of class antagonism were not even acknowledged in the *Communist Manifesto*. “Freedom” for Communists meant a collective and shared enterprise. Although communists are not always credited with espousing a doctrine of “freedom,” the last lines of the *Communist Manifesto*, without using the words “liberty” or “freedom,” nonetheless made it explicit: “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”³⁹³ Following up on Marxist theories came, amongst others, Mao Zedong.³⁹⁴ In a few excerpts from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* (1972) we can read:

The history of mankind is one of continuous development from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.³⁹⁵

³⁹² Marx and Engels 1969: 47,73.

³⁹³ Ibid 96.

³⁹⁴ Inserting Mao Zedong (previously transliterated as “Tsetung”) in a section devoted to white conceptions of “freedom” may seem out of place. I am open to conceding a mistake. My justification however is as follows: Mao’s ideas were predominantly built upon class struggle as conceived by Marx and Lenin even if he adapted these to emphasize the role of peasants. As such Mao’s critique of property was ideologically referencing—and rooted in—Marxist theory. Mao embraced technological development and seems to have underestimated the centrality of racism to existing social orders. He wrote: “Among the whites in the United States it is only the reactionary ruling circles who oppress the black people. They can in no way represent the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals and other enlightened persons who comprise the overwhelming majority of the white people” (Tsetung 1972: 10). This portrayal seems so naïve in regard to the entrenched nature of racism in the United States that it would be difficult for even many white Marxists in the U.S. to support that idea. Instead, it could qualify as an example of colorblind racism. For these reasons, Mao’s conceptions are here classified as “white” even if he, as a person, did not identify as white or would not be identified as “white” by most people with white-skin privilege.

³⁹⁵ Tsetung 1972: 203.

...to arrest, try and sentence certain counter-revolutionaries, and to deprive landlords of their right to vote and freedom of speech for a specified period of time—all this comes within the scope of our dictatorship.³⁹⁶

Within the ranks of the people, democracy is correlative with centralism and freedom with discipline. They are the two opposites of a single entity, contradictory as well as united, and we should not one-sidedly emphasize one to the denial of the other. Within the ranks of the people, we cannot do without freedom, nor can we do without discipline; we cannot do without democracy nor can we do without centralism. This unity of democracy and centralism, of freedom and discipline, constitutes our democratic centralism.³⁹⁷

The type of “discipline” that Mao intended was clarified as meaning “subordination,” specifically to Communist Party leadership. As the individual would be subordinate to the Communist Party, “the minority is subordinate to the majority,” “lower levels” of the Party to the “higher levels” and everybody subordinate to the Central Committee.³⁹⁸ Subordination, inherently part of “freedom,” here was also tied subjugation of insubordinates who could be labeled “counter-revolutionaries” and thus deprived of rights. It is worth noting that Mao acknowledged “freedom” to be united with its contradiction, forming a single entity. This formulation, rather unusual for white conceptions of “freedom,” is consistent with the idea of unity between the contradictory forces of yin and yang. There is perhaps a tension how between this idea of “freedom” (forever bound to discipline/subordination) and the first “freedom” mentioned which implicitly equated “freedom” with technological development (in agreement with Engels and Marx). In both instances, “freedom” seems to be a sort of “power,” that is, “freedom” within a disciplined hierarchy (“power under/over”) and “freedom” through technology (“power/ability to”). Furthermore, it is worth noting that “freedom” is not emphasized as a positive value in itself for its own sake. According to W. J. F. Jenner, the word used for “freedom” in China, *ziyou*, “still has more bad connotations than good ones. ...implying something like ‘licence,’ doing what you like and to hell with everyone else.”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Ibid 38.

³⁹⁷ Ibid 254.

³⁹⁸ Ibid 255.

³⁹⁹ Jenner 1998: 85.

Minority White Minority Conceptions

For Anabaptists, in general, the state was often rejected for being violent and unjust.⁴⁰⁰ Early movements such as the Anabaptists of Germany took over the city of Münster from 1534 to 1535 and established a Christian commune. Modern-day Amish, Hutterite, Bruderhof, and Mennonites are all theological descendants of the early Anabaptists. Although there is no single view shared by, for example, Mennonites, one example can be provided by Mennonite Carl Friesen who argued that rights-based theories of justice are “incompatible with a robust Christian understanding of justice... because [they] conceive of persons primarily as individuals and minimize the social dimension of human flourishing.”⁴⁰¹ Instead Friesen argued that the vocation of the church is to build community, a political non-state community, which would advocate practices that enable people to “escape the thrall of the state” and “mirror the radical dependency and vulnerability that we share with all of creation.”⁴⁰² “Freedom” in Anabaptist contexts is often found in community and covenant with other Christians with emphasis on non-violence sometimes to the point of refusing to participate in court proceedings.

European anarchism found its first spokesperson in William Godwin, husband of Mary Wollstonecraft. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, famous for the quote “Property is Theft,” is generally credited, however, with clearly articulating an anarchist philosophy and accepting the label “anarchist.” In addition to property being theft, some lesser known propositions about property that Proudhon began with were:

Property is impossible, because it demands Something for Nothing. ...Property is impossible, because wherever it exists Production costs more than it is worth. ...Property is impossible, because with a given capital Production is proportional to labour not to property. ...Property is impossible, because it is Homicide.⁴⁰³

Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, involved in the First International, propounded an anti-church atheist position and articulated a vision of an anarchist federation that was based on egalitarian autonomous parts and the right to secession.⁴⁰⁴ Russian anarchist, scientist, and former prince Piotr Kropotkin challenged social Darwinism in

⁴⁰⁰ For some examples of Anabaptist rejection of the state, see Christoyannopoulos' *Christian Anarchism*, 2011. For related studies on the Amish see Foster 2010; Hostetler 1987; Hurst and McConnell 2010.

⁴⁰¹ Friesen 2014: 23.

⁴⁰² Ibid 34. One of the theorists that Friesen cited approvingly was conservative Catholic Mary Ann Glendon, author of *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse*, where she critiqued “rights talk” for its extreme focus on the individual and its lack of corresponding discourse on responsibility. She cited, for example, the lack of a duty to rescue people in need for both citizens and government officials (see Glendon 1991: 78-89.).

⁴⁰³ Proudhon [1898] 1969: 164, 171, 175, 179.

⁴⁰⁴ See Bakunin 2002.

Mutual Aid (1902) by demonstrating that animals often cooperated together across species lines. All of them agreed that the existence of the state made social life much worse and the abolishing of the state was therefore necessary. As American anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre wrote:

Make no laws whatever concerning speech, and speech will be free; so soon as you make a declaration on paper that speech shall be free, you will have a hundred lawyers proving that “freedom does not mean abuse, nor liberty license”; and they will define and define freedom out of existence. Let the guarantee of free speech be in every man’s determination to use it, and we shall have no need of paper declarations.⁴⁰⁵

According to this logic, if “freedom” is a limited “good” (let’s call it “means of violence” in this case) then the more that one actor acquires, the less there is for others. Once the state has cordoned off its realm, everybody else must negotiate with one another in regard the remaining area. Given these limitations, even in “best” case scenarios, conversations address an exchange of one type of “liberty” for another or one person’s “liberty” against another’s.⁴⁰⁶ Subsequently, many anarchists saw social equality as a perquisite to “freedom.” Bakunin stated explicitly:

I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free, and the freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.⁴⁰⁷

This approach was then diametrically opposed to that of Isaiah Berlin who would later try to separate them from one another. Walter Benjamin (not an anarchist) addressed this type of dilemma peculiar to the state when he discussed violence. Police violence entails not only the enforcement (preservation) of laws but, in practice, it is also the *making* of laws. It has a formless power and an “all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states.”⁴⁰⁸ One cannot discuss “freedom” then without discussing violence according to Benjamin:

⁴⁰⁵ De Cleyre 1909.

⁴⁰⁶ An example of this negotiation over a limited “good,” Eric Mazur told the story of the so-called “Chicken War” in Florida in the early 1990s. On one side of the battle was the minority Santeria community who were practicing the act of animal sacrifice. On the other side was the dominant (at least nominally Christian) community who found the rituals disturbing, unethical, and so forth. The city attempted to resolve the matter by passing a law prohibiting animal sacrifice. Liberty for the dominant community (as well as the chickens and goats) was secured and liberty for the Santeria community (and other religious groups who might be potentially affected) was lost (though the law was later ruled unconstitutional) (Mazur 1999).

⁴⁰⁷ Bakunin [1871] 2002: 237.

⁴⁰⁸ Benjamin 1986: 287.

[A] totally nonviolent resolution of conflict can never lead to a legal contract. For the latter, however peacefully it may have entered into by the parties, leads finally to possible violence. It confers on both parties the right to take recourse to violence in some form against the other, should he break the agreement. Not only that; like the outcome, the origin of every contract also points toward violence.⁴⁰⁹

In the hands of the state then, “freedom” becomes “liberty” (meaning rights) and is therefore bound perpetually to violence and the state’s monopoly thereof. As such, every conversation about “freedom” that presupposes the state becomes simultaneously a conversation about violence. Leo Tolstoy, though he denied the label of “anarchist,” rejected the state absolutely writing:

The time will come and is inevitably coming when all institutions based on force will disappear through their uselessness, stupidity, and even inconvenience becoming obvious to all. ...All we can know is what we who make up mankind ought to do, and not to do. ...we need only each live with all the light that is in us, to bring about at once the promised kingdom of God...⁴¹⁰

Anarchists have developed into a wide variety of forms (anarcha-feminism, anarcho-primitivism, libertarian socialism, anarcho-communism, post-anarchism, etc.). Although some anarchists, notably Noam Chomsky, have advocated strengthening the slightly democratic federal government in order to buttress against very undemocratic corporate powers,⁴¹¹ what anarchists have traditionally shared (Chomsky included) is the view that the state is illegitimate and based on illegitimate violence.⁴¹² As such, anarchists (including those anarchists in Christian traditions) were the only ones engaging in white European conversations about “freedom” who rejected the state and rejected the fear of anarchy that had been used to justify the state. This did not necessarily mean, however, that they allied themselves with indigenous peoples. Most classical anarchists affirmed the so-called Enlightenment, the supremacy of rational thought, and the benevolence of technological advancement. Only in more recent times has there been an effort to “decolonize anarchism.”⁴¹³ On the margins of anarchism one might add Henry David Thoreau who, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson, celebrated a return to nature and the idea of “freedom” as “self-sufficiency” and simple living.⁴¹⁴ In contemporary times, anarchists are found in all walks of life even if their voices are

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid 288.

⁴¹⁰ Tolstoy 2002: 129, 130-131.

⁴¹¹ Soper 1998.

⁴¹² I write “most” here because there tend to be a few self-identifying anarchists who use the term philosophically or spiritually and do not necessarily reject the state as such.

⁴¹³ See Lewis 2012; Ramnath 2011; Robinson 1980.

⁴¹⁴ For Thoreau and anarchism see Wiley 2014; for Thoreau and Marx comparison see Diggins 1972.

excluded from dominant discourses. In contrast to popular conceptions of anarchism being equated with lack of organization, many Quakers in the United States have been organizing anarchistically for centuries.⁴¹⁵ In fact, it could be useful here to distinguish between Faith Community-based Anarchisms and Non-Faith Community-based Anarchisms. The former, in which the dozens of Catholic Worker collectives across the United States could be included, tend to be overlooked when discussing anarchism in general and anarchist theory specifically. In the context of Christian anarchisms, the tendency is to use Jesus as a theoretical and practical model for social organization:

Christian anarchism “is not an attempt to synthesize two systems of thought” that are hopelessly incompatible, but rather “a realization that the premise of anarchism is inherent in Christianity and the message of the Gospels.” ...From this perspective, it is actually the notion of a “Christian state” that, just like “hot ice,” is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. Christian anarchism is not about forcing together two very different systems of thought — it is about pursuing the radical political implications of Christianity to the fullest extent.⁴¹⁶

Non-Faith Community-based Anarchisms depart from Faith-Community variants by rejecting faith traditions and/or community living. That is, the latter tends to apply some sort of tradition as a framework from which to operate and organize. The former tends to use predominantly classical (white) anarchist theorists to imagine social organization. Whereas theoretically, the distinction between Faith Community-based and Non-Faith Community-based may be significant, the praxis may be similar. In one example, anarchist organizer Chris Crass wrote in *Collective Liberation* (2013) about, amongst other things, Food Not Bombs (FNB), the activist group who collects food that would otherwise be thrown away and provides free food services in the city. He articulated three strategies that FNB were applied successfully: Social change as opposed to charity, reclaiming public spaces and struggling for economic justice, and engaging in solidarity work and networking with other activist groups.⁴¹⁷ Such a description could just as well have applied to Catholic Worker collectives.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ See, for example, Auerbach 1983; Bradney 2006; Bradney and Cownie 2000.

⁴¹⁶ Christoyannopoulos 2011: 1. For Daoism and anarchism see Rapp 2012; for Islamic anarchisms see Fiscella 2009, Jean Veneuse 2009 and Jean Veneuse forthcoming; for Zen Buddhism see Warner 2003. For Earth First! and similar eco-activists as a type of Faith Community-based Anarchism, see Taylor 2002.

⁴¹⁷ Also see Amster 2003 on “social control” in anarchist communities.

⁴¹⁸ See, for example, Piehl 1982 and Stock 2012.

Violence, Exclusion, and the “State of Nature”

Exclusion, Violence, and Colorblind Racism

In *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), Iris Marion Young laid out two types of exclusion: external and internal. External types concern “how people are kept outside the process of discussion and decision-making.”⁴¹⁹ This could be by structural means (in which no specific actor or impediment is involved in the hinder) such as poverty, racism, etc. or it could involve actors who withhold information, misinform, or physically prevent participation by the means of barricades. Internal types of exclusion concern “ways that people lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others even when they have access to fora and procedures of decision-making.”⁴²⁰ In other words, internal exclusion, occurs when people gain access to the decision-making process but are excluded from meaningful participation. For example, a woman may be a member of a board at a meeting but if suggestions are ignored when they come from her but praised when similar suggestions come from somebody else, her role is being diminished and she is made invisible.

For the purposes of this thesis, narrative exclusion is relatively simple to assess: the first basic question is whether or not the story of a person or group appears in a narrative in which they are involved or are affected by. To be ignored entirely in contexts where inclusion would be reasonable or reasonably expected is to be invisibilized. It is, in Young’s framework, to be externally excluded.

Yet, when someone is internally included, there are *degrees* of inclusion. If a person or group (designated here as *X*) is included in a story that is being told then the subsequent categories can distinguish variants or degrees of inclusive narrative (ranging from the least inclusive to the most inclusive): (1) *X* is mentioned but not by self-chosen name, (2) *X*’s self-chosen name is mentioned, (3) *X*’s story is told, (4) *X* is quoted briefly, (5) *X* is quoted extensively, (6) *X* is interviewed by author and quoted extensively, (7) *X* is allowed to tell *X*’s own story in own words extensively in article, chapter, film, recording, online/public forum, or book, (8) *X* is engaged once or twice through dialogue in articles, chapters, films, recordings, online or public forums, or books, (9) *X* is engaged routinely by others as equal partner in dialogue through articles, chapters, films, recordings, books, online or public forums, books and/or face-to-face communication. To clarify: *X* is a person *or* group. To use *X* in the form of a person to represent a group is a lower level of inclusion than including multiple voices from a group to speak for themselves. As such, each of the 9 levels could, when speaking about the exclusion/inclusion of groups, be re-formulated to speak of a “dialogue between three or more speakers from a group.” The anthology *Freedom* by Carter et al provides

⁴¹⁹ Young 2000: 55.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

an example of this. The selections that were presented were not just isolated entries. Rather, many of them referenced and were in direct conversation with prior work that was also part of the anthology. In this way, white people were given the highest possible levels of inclusion (7-9) while people of color were given the lowest levels (1-4).⁴²¹

Inclusion at the least-inclusive levels need not indicate *meaningful* inclusion. Just because a voice is not *completely* excluded does not mean that the inclusion is worth anything. To the contrary, disparaging presentations of others while depriving them of their voice can be a means of internal exclusion (in Young's terms). Determining exactly the boundaries between some form of genuine inclusion and internal exclusion is often a qualitative judgment yet, if a person or group is included to level 9 then there remain at least communication lines are ostensibly open as well as potential mechanisms for addressing such questions. Any level less than full and equal inclusion constitutes at least *some* degree of internal exclusion.

Regarding external types of exclusion in material terms, it has been observed that "5 billion of the world's 6.8 billion are living at levels that deprive them of some of their basic needs."⁴²² That single statistic alone has enormous consequences for any conversation that aims toward democratic inclusivity. Where on the scale of engagement and inclusion can one find the vast majority of these people? How can a person participate in "higher level" *conversations* when they are struggling with "basic level" *necessitations*? What do scholarly writings on the topic of "freedom" mean to a single-parent struggling to get by on a full-time job? What *could* they mean unless they first enable that parent to have enough time on their hands to be able to rest, recuperate, catch their breath, and then sit down and read enough literature to know what the texts are even talking about? Until they do that, that person is *de facto* excluded from the those conversations and their particular needs or ideas will at best only appear indirectly through the filter of a scholar who studies them and brings their voice in (albeit on severely unequal terms). That is, the very conversations about inclusivity (their content, parameters, aims, and effectiveness) take place between participants who begin from a point of extreme exclusivity. By and large, tiny elites determine what inclusivity shall mean and how it shall be interpreted or implemented as they set the boundaries for who can or cannot be allowed into "their" conversation. As former attorney general Griffin Bell wrote:

We may be near the point that the Romans reached under Emperor Caligula who, in his arrogance, ordered that all laws were to be posted in small print and high places to better

⁴²¹ The reason for the rating of 1-4 is because the presence of people of color (e.g., Amartya Sen) does not mean that Sen is speaking *as* a person of color or telling his own story as a person of color (and he wasn't). In a narrative sense, the volume was all-white. The presence of a few people of color did not change the actual color of the stories.

⁴²² Powledge 2010: 261.

confuse the populace. ...Everywhere in our land, we see the realities of a bureaucracy out of control.⁴²³

One of the areas where social structure and the language of exclusion has been investigated is that of racism in general and colorblind racism in particular. While overt racism is more obvious and easier to address if, for example, a white supremacist identifies with “white power,” is concerned about the “preservation of their race,” praises Nazi Germany or the KKK, and so on. Colorblind racism however is more difficult to recognize precisely because people who express it deny being racist and even insist that, far from being racist, they are “colorblind.” According to the central thesis of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, the claim or quest of colorblindness is itself a form of racism. He noted that most whites in the U.S. both assert that they themselves are colorblind and aspire to a society outlined by Martin Luther King, Jr. where “people are judged on the content of their character, not by the color of their skin,” *and* most whites also insist that blacks and other minorities are responsible for the “race problem” and that they ought to stop “playing the race card” and simply work hard and forget about the past in order to succeed.⁴²⁴

Part of this may be due to the ignorance on the behalf of whites that, according to studies, blacks pay more for houses or cars than whites at the same time as they have less access to the market, more often receive impolite treatment in stores, and are the subject of racial profiling by police and thereafter subject to a racialized court system. Yet more significantly, Bonilla-Silva argued that this is no coincidence but that colorblind racism is a specific ideology that began to develop in the late 1960s as a means to explain “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.”⁴²⁵ The ideology shields whites from being accused of racism while at the same time performing the essential task of sustaining white privilege.

Bonilla-Silva stated that, in general terms, whites and people of color cannot even agree on the very term “racism” and what it means. As such, whites regard it to be equivalent to prejudice (letting them off the hook) and people of color experience it as systemic and institutionalized. Naturally, a key point in the distinction is that people of color *experience* it whereas whites only hear about it through others (and when they do experience prejudice from people of color, they then label that “racism”). But even social scientists disagree about what “race” means. Some scholars actually reinforce the racial order, according to Bonilla-Silva, by giving lip service to the social constructionist view but then proceeding to describe differences in crime or intelligence along “racial”

⁴²³ Bell 1982: 17.

⁴²⁴ For a discussion about the contrasting “ideology” and “reality” of racial opportunity in the United States see, for example, Wallace 2003.

⁴²⁵ Bonilla-Silva 2010: 2.

lines as if there were a causal link. These types of errors are facilitated by the exclusion of people of color from academia and the vicious cycle is perpetuated.⁴²⁶

Another factor that perpetuates colorblind racism is the psychological tendency to downplay or ignore those attributes in one's own psyche or society that are viewed negatively. Hence, "most people think they're less biased than average."⁴²⁷ In a study about "how prejudiced white Americans" are able to "maintain unprejudiced self-images," Laurie O'Brien et al wrote that "Because social representations of bigotry create downward comparison targets, they are likely to generate contrast effects and to lead individuals to view themselves as less prejudiced."⁴²⁸ This can help explain how European Americans can "see themselves as 'not racist,' as 'good people,' even while they think and act in anti-Black ways."⁴²⁹ O'Brien et al wrote in their conclusion:

At least among White Americans, the primary reaction to media portrayals of racism may be for people to distance themselves from the racists, while patting themselves on the back for their superiority.⁴³⁰

Sociologist Joe Feagin has maintained that racism is so entrenched and rooted in American culture and history that the "white racial frame," the normalization of racial exclusion, is best understood as something that is not just a *part* of U.S. society but actually *constitutive* of it.⁴³¹

The idea that Aristotle and Plato endorsed slavery, or that Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson were white supremacists or that John Locke personally invested in the industry of kidnapping and enslaving human beings, or that philosophers Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmidt were Nazi party members would not come as a surprise to any historian. Each instance would however typically be seen as a separate case and the causes would be more likely attributed to the particular "times" they lived in and the limited choices and knowledge to which they had access.⁴³² Removing the white

⁴²⁶ Similarly, a recent study indicated that when white people were given images that suggested 45% of prisoners were black they were more likely to be worried about crime and more likely to accept harsh punishments than whites who were presented images that suggested blacks constituted "only" 25% of the prison population (Hetey and Eberhardt 2014). This would imply another vicious cycle: the more whites are exposed to the punitive consequences of racial discrimination, the less likely they are to want to change it.

⁴²⁷ Fiske 2010: 7.

⁴²⁸ O'Brien et al 2010: 920.

⁴²⁹ Feagin and Vera 1995: 135.

⁴³⁰ O'Brien et al 2010: 939. For a similar study see Unzueta and Lowery (2008).

⁴³¹ Feagin 2010.

⁴³² To be sure, an engineer who helped build a bridge for colonial forces to transport their troops and weapons did not have to be anything other than "paid." Likewise, a philosopher who had his (these philosophers of "freedom" were men) basic needs taken care of did not need to parade around shouting

racial frame would enable white people to see the patterns that have been so obvious to people on the receiving end of racist structures. According to labor historian and white abolitionist David Roediger asserted in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (1994), “it is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false, it is nothing but oppressive and false.”⁴³³

Academic conversations then appear as they appear today largely because they are limited to a tiny elite whose space for calm, deliberated conversation has been created by the aforementioned inequalities. Being excluded from decision-making processes is a vicious cycle: the less access one has to that process, the less that people who are in that process know and/or care about people who are not allowed access.

Regarding internal types of exclusion, Berit Ås’ list of domination techniques cited above exemplify how those processes can work. Her conception of techniques were largely directed toward person-to-person encounters but they are also applicable to stories and social structures. If we take the example of making a person or group invisible, we can see this in U.S. children’s literature. In an examination of *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature* (2001), Donnarae MacCann concluded that although the Confederacy had lost the military and political war, they won the cultural war observing that

The defeated slavocracy was in many respects a cultural winner. ...Legal emancipation was neutralized in public consciousness by racist tale-telling. And the other institutions that impinged upon children’s lives—schools, churches, libraries, the press—joined in promoting the notion of race hierarchies. Black identity was presented as of less value than European American identity. Blacks were expected to accept a restricted status and role in the American civil community. European American children were expected to keep African Americans in check, in a subservient position.⁴³⁴

The military victory of the North and the Emancipation Proclamation seemed to make the issue of violence against blacks disappear for most whites. As it was, “abolitionists seldom opposed the idea of white superiority,” even in their arguments against

racist epithets. It sufficed to not question the dominant order of the day. It sufficed to *not* leave the Nazi party as a matter of principle, to *not* refuse to invest in the enslavement of people, to *not* refuse to claim ownership of another person, to *not* refuse to extract advantages at the cost of other people. As Charles Mills, wrote, the basic requirement was a “*failure to ask certain questions*, taking for granted as a status quo and base-line the existing color-coded configurations of wealth, poverty, property, and opportunities” (1997: 101). As long as behavior was in alignment with racist practices the point was rather moot whether or not an individual’s beliefs would qualify as “racist” or not. Indeed, the emphasis on individual beliefs and racism is a common means of sidestepping the much more significant underlying questions of *de facto* racist behavior.

⁴³³ Roediger 1994: 13.

⁴³⁴ MacCann 2001: xiii-xiv.

enslavement while both sides of the debate within white children's literature tended overwhelmingly to depict African Americans as "perennial children, as bumbling buffoons, as impassioned brutes, as docile Christians."⁴³⁵ To this MacCann noted, "Unless book historians unreasonably separate the interests of European American and Black children, it is hard to see how the classics that featured Blacks can be viewed as distinguished works."⁴³⁶ So even when a school classroom is inclusive in its constituency and all races are represented, exclusive stories will continue hinder inclusion in the group narratives. Although MacCann's work addressed material from the 1800s, there are more similarities than differences when it comes to race representation for children. Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and Frozen are but a few examples of hugely popular but almost exclusively white films made for an ethnically mixed public.

The model of white supremacy in children's storybooks is notable mostly for its normality. Not only are these types of stories prevalent in the culture that I grew up in, they seem to follow a standard format in dominant conversations about "history." Groups A and B are quantitatively significant amounts of people who live in Z. Group C is quantitatively small but has access to sufficient firepower to render them victors over A and B when they invade Z. Group C becomes divided between C1 and C2 factions and later C1.1, C1.2, C2.1, C2.2, and C3 factions. The story of "history" then focuses on the dramas taking place between the various C factions while groups A and B fade into the background as if they barely existed. Having excluded groups A and B from the one "true" history (without necessarily lying), it will be difficult *even for sympathetic members of group C* to conceive of land right claims for A and B. First, they are a people of the past (probably died out but, if not, then hopefully soon) and secondly, they are so narratively insignificant that even if they are actually groups of real people then it seems inconceivable that they could muster any *real* claims beyond something theoretical and academic. All of this violence is made possible through stories and the art of invisibilizing.

Differences between C1.1 and C2.1 may be striking and they may have notable distinctions in their particular origins, philosophies, strategies, or forms of justification but all C groups share common interests in maintaining the exclusion of groups A and B from the conversation. As Richard Parry wrote in regard to South Africa, "The theory of segregation meant different things" to various European interests in South Africa, "imperialists, international and colonial capitalists, racists, colonials, administrators, philanthropists," but "it unified them in support of a conventional wisdom which justified the transformation of Africans into dehumanized cogs in a violent and exploitative industrial machine."⁴³⁷

Parry's use of the word "violent" in this sense is instructive here. In 1967 Johan Galtung expressed the concept of "structural violence" to conceptualize the type of

⁴³⁵ Ibid 3, xviii.

⁴³⁶ Ibid xvi

⁴³⁷ Parry 1983: 388.

violence that takes place in such contexts through the creation of segregation or poverty. On the surface, there is no particular agent beating or injuring another. Yet violence can be taking place anyway. If, for example, a person dying of tuberculosis could be easily cured but that person is denied access to the cure then that too, according to Galtung, is a form of violence. Yet there need not be any ill will or specific actor involved who is depriving the person of their basic needs. As Galtung wrote, “if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed, regardless of whether there is a clear subject-action-object relation.”⁴³⁸ The fact that the deprivation and inequality is systemic and responsibility is diffused throughout the entire society makes the violence *structural*. The uneven distribution of the power to determine access to resources is therefore a component of structural violence. Poverty, lack of education, lack of access to health care, higher susceptibility to incarceration, and so on are all manifestations of structural violence.

More recently Rob Nixon has built on earlier work by Rachel Carson (regarding pollution) and Johan Galtung’s (structural violence) to conceptualize the idea of “slow violence.”

Similarly, Slavoj Žižek emphasized a distinction between the type of violence that is part of the normalized backdrop of the colonial process (and therefore invisible) and the type that stands apart from that normality such as crime or terror (and is therefore seen and recognized as violence). The former violence, inflicted by states through the police and military, is what Slavoj Žižek referred to as “objective violence.” By objective violence, he meant the types of violence—both structural as well as physical—that have been normalized to the degree that they become the “zero-violence” backdrop upon which all other types of violence are judged. Objective violence is made invisible because it is state-sanctioned. Despite massive coercion or routine killings through assassinations, drone attacks, bombings, police shootings, and deaths in prison, objective violence, according to Žižek, receives significantly less attention than what he referred to as “subjective violence,” that is, the violence of non-state actors such as street crime, guerilla terrorism, or rioting associated with protests. Unlike objective violence, subjective violence is not only visible, it is sensationalized by the media. Describing this type of media bias, Žižek wrote: “The death of a West Bank Palestinian child, not to mention an Israeli or American, is mediatically worth thousands of times more than the death of a nameless Congolese.”⁴³⁹ In this way, the media can organize a sense of urgency, calling media consumers to act. But it is the media frame that determines where the urgency is, who is important enough to be saved, and what an active response might look like. As Žižek further observed:

⁴³⁸ Galtung 1969: 171.

⁴³⁹ Žižek 2008: 3.

Why should Kissinger, when he ordered the carpet bombing of Cambodia that led to the deaths of tens of thousands, be less of a criminal act than those responsible for the Twin Towers collapse? Is it not because we are victims of an “ethical illusion”? The horror of September 11 was presented in detail to the media, but al-Jazeera TV was condemned for showing shots of the results of U.S. bombing in Fallujah and condemned for complicity with the terrorists.⁴⁴⁰

Here, in Žižek’s example, we can see that the presentation of media reports on violence are organized according to a priority scale that radically reduces exposure of massive state violence precisely because that is the (objective) violence that the public is not supposed to notice. Additionally, the plight of the wealthy and white are treated according to an entirely different degree of attention than the plight of working class people of color. In this way, media bias outlines a daily narrative whose boundaries of exclusion are consistent with the structural and cultural boundaries of exclusion.

“Freedom” similarly constructs a frame that is made invisible by its own seemingly self-evident construction. Namely, “freedom” is presumed to be the opposite of “unfreedom.” Therein lies the frame and the ideology. By pointing to a non-event, the gaze is directed away from the event. An illustrative example can be drawn from a culture that, like Europe, had developed a dominant practice of enslavement but, unlike Europe, did not have a word for “freedom.” The culture was China where a person who had been held in bondage and then released was not labeled “free.” Instead, a formerly enslaved person would be referred to as *respectable* (“*liang min*”).⁴⁴¹ If one looks at the matter carefully, it will be apparent that Chinese and European terms are similar in a key sense: both of them obscure the violence of enslavement. In China, the violence of

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁴¹ Jenner 1998: 72. For a socio-historical study of slavery in ancient China that addressed the specific question of enslavement and status, see Yates 2002. It can be noted that enslavement was depicted not as a form of violence but as an act of mercy. Enslavement was framed as an alternative to the death penalty. Hence, the person who was enslaved had been dehumanized either because of their status as an enemy captured in war, a criminal who deserved punishment, or a serf who had failed to pay a debt. Another notable aspect of the enslaved person was that they were *lacked* otherwise ordinary obligations (and rights) in relation to their family. So instead of a physical death penalty, enslavement functioned as a form of social death (Yates 2002: 299). Yet, as physical death can be interpreted as a liberation-release from the confines of the body, social death (recalling Janis Joplin and “freedom” being “just another word for nothing left to lose”) can be a form of liberation-release from certain social obligations. In fact, in an article entitled “Townships, Brigands and a Shared Religion,” Stephen Clark suggested that, “Slaves are the world’s first individuals.” This is because they are “stripped of all honour and all family connections to manage their lonely lives as best they can, influenced by short-term desire and fear. ...stolen from their ‘natural’ setting ...they can be ‘individuals’ in the modern sense. ...Everyone else receives themselves from ancestors, and will hand their achievements on to their posterity. ...Everyone else can be trusted, within ordinary human limits, to keep faith with their community: slaves have no community, not even with other slaves” (Clark 2012: 195).

enslavement was blamed on the victim. Enslavement was associated with disrespectability in a way that recalls that, even today, many women are blamed for being raped and many low-income people are blamed for their economic status.

Although “freedom” does not blame the victim, the ideology of “freedom” nevertheless performed a function for European elites that seems comparable to what *liang min* seemed to do for Chinese elites: it obscured the violence of enslavement and the corresponding quest for justice or reparations.⁴⁴² Over time, as the violence of this language became normalized, a certain form of Stockholm Syndrome developed across the world in which some people violated by others had been conditioned to believe that their language could be trusted, that it was a neutral tool without inherent ideology, and it need not be questioned.

What may have begun as a relatively simple means of distracting victims from demanding justice could over a few thousand years develop into a complex language of domination. In effect, the process by which the descendants of captured Africans were detached from their people’s stories, language, traditions, ethics, and worldviews is a shared process (albeit to a less degree). In other words, all people who have grown up with European languages may suffer a similar fate insofar as a person’s psychological make-up is interwoven with the framework of domination and inclines them to ask for “freedom” rather than “justice.” As languages of domination are integrated into legal apparatus as fundamental assumptions, instinctive reactions toward violation can be depicted as “deviations” from an established “norm.”

The construction of “freedom” as an evaluated good is one example of the type of language constraint, as described by Rosenberg, which channels thinking and social relations into the service of the dominating. Most people, if violated through arbitrary incarceration, kidnapping, or enslavement, would not be satisfied with mere “freedom” but would want some form of *justice* (either through compensation to the victim, punishment of the perpetrator, removal of the threat of repeated violation, or genuine remorse, re-connection, and restitution by the perpetrator). Yet by using “freedom” in the abstract sense as a desirable social value, its intimate dependency upon various “unfreedoms” is obscured. The very conceptualization of terms such as “structural violence” and “slow violence” *as forms of violence that would require justice* are challenges to this long and entrenched legacy of domination.

⁴⁴² That does not mean that the situation in Europe was altogether different than the one in China however. The very portrayal of enslavement in the terms of “slave” (something negative) and “master” (something positive) was not terribly different.

The Nature of the “State of Nature”

Thomas Hobbes was hardly the first one to formulate the idea that a ruler was needed to prevent anarchy. Similar ideas could be found in Ancient China, Greece, and India. More than 900 years prior to Hobbes, early Islamic scholars also dealt with the topic. The earliest Muslims had all acknowledged Muhammad as the head of the community but the next generations following him were challenged. While most Muslims today regard the first four caliphs to be “rightly guided,” there became widespread agreement after the death of Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law Ali that a single ruler was problematic. The assumption was that the absence of a ruler would lead to anarchy, civil war, and division, *fitna*. Indeed, the alternative to a ruler was something they were familiar with: Muslims referred to the period prior to Islam as *Jāhiliyya*, or a state of ignorance and barbarism. The problem, however, was that rulers had a tendency to turn into tyrants which led to rebellions. The general consensus among leading scholars was that tyranny was preferable to anarchy, summed up in the hadith attributed to the Prophet: “Sixty years of tyranny is better than one day’s anarchy.”⁴⁴³ Subsequently, Muslims were expected to obey rulers unless their decrees went explicitly against God’s law. There were, it seemed, only two choices: anarchic civil war or submission to tyranny. Yet, as white historian Patricia Crone has noted, “the anarchists proposed a third solution.”⁴⁴⁴ These reluctant anarchists, namely the Najdiyya and some of the Mu‘tazilites, did not view the state as inherently bad, only an unnecessary burden. The former were concerned with intellectual autonomy and the latter were concerned with political participation. Al-Aṣamm, one of the Mu‘tazlites, argued in favor of scrapping the idea of a single ruler and decentralizing authority. As Crone stated, “what al-Aṣamm was grappling with was clearly the concept of federation.”⁴⁴⁵ A later Mu‘tazilite scholar, ‘Abbād ibn Sulaymān, declared that it would never be possible to have a single ruler again and that some form of anarchism would be necessary.

The idea that governance was a fallible human institution was articulated by al-Aṣamm: “Min mu ‘amalāt al-nās.”⁴⁴⁶ This could be understood as a form of “secular” ideology about 800 years prior to John Locke’s distinction between “religion” and “politics.”

During most of those 800 years, Muslims were ruling what is modern-day Spain and Portugal. They lost power in 1492, the same year that Columbus arrived in what was to be designated “the Americas.” The new rulers (who identified as “Christian”) expelled all Jewish and Muslim Hispanics from the country. Suddenly, a wave of

⁴⁴³ Ayoob 2008: 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Crone 2000: 12.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid 18.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid 15. According to my Arabic colleague Osama Shomar, this could be translated roughly as “from people’s interactions” but it is also very similar to “from people’s imagination.”

150,000 to 400,000 European refugees were fleeing tyranny at home to seek refuge in Africa and Turkey.⁴⁴⁷

A little more than a century later Britain joined the European colonialist occupation of the Americas and quickly became among the most successful. A couple of decades after Jamestown was founded in 1607, Thomas Hobbes wrote his famous works that conceived of the state as a sort of social contract between people and the sovereign state (the monarch). Around the same time that Hobbes was writing, European elites were gathering to form a peace treaty in Westphalia in 1648 after decades of war had ravaged Northern Europe. This treaty built upon another treaty established a century earlier in Augsburg with the principle of *cuius region, eius religio* (“the one who rules a region determines is religion”). In the era of wars, this was as close to the idea of “religious freedom” they had come. Residents in any given region had to either move or accept the ruler’s decrees. It was applicable only to Lutherans and Catholics. Anyone else (such as Calvinists and Anabaptists, to say nothing of Eastern Orthodox or Muslims) did not have the right to determine the religion of the region. The Peace of Westphalia opened the door to Calvinists (but no one else). What has come to be referred to as Westphalian sovereignty or the Westphalian state began there. It amounted to monarchs dividing up territory among themselves, agreeing on the boundaries, and conceiving of this agreement between dictators as “international law.”⁴⁴⁸

In this context, Hobbes created a fantasy scenario that involved two simplistic alternatives: either one lives in a stateless society in which people are all subject to a constant war of all-against-all (a life that is “nasty, brutish and short” as his famous phrasing goes) *or* people band together in this social contract and agree to allow the state to rule them for the sake of a minimal level of security. While the “liberty” of non-impediment would be granted equally, social equality was a source of strife:

⁴⁴⁷ Kamen 1988. These figures, if translated into proportion of population growth since then, would dwarf the number of Syrian refugees currently entering Europe. Roxanne Lynn Doty has written in regard to the “double-writing” by advocates of statecraft wherein some forms of migration depicted as necessary and legitimate while others are depicted as “illegal” and problematic. In Doty’s words: “Society is experienced as an a priori historical presence-a self- generating entity. This society is contrasted with extrinsic “other” societies, other nations. However, as noted above, flows are performative, opening up in-between spaces that disrupt the binary oppositions of self/other, inside/outside, domestic/international, and so on. ...Sovereignty and the other foundational concepts it is linked to, such as the state and the nation, are always written in the ambiguous spaces between the pedagogical and the performative, in the spaces of the taken for granted and the actual production of that which is taken for granted” (1996: 179).

⁴⁴⁸ According to Stephen Clark’s view, brigands and thieves who had “internalised a slavish nature, and have nothing to live for but immediate profit” eventually became successful enough to “protect their prey from *other* gangs” constituted “the probable origin of the state.” With this in mind, Clark quipped, “Nobles are brigands with a sense of occasion and good style” (2012: 196).

From this equality of ability arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only, endeavor to destroy or subdue one another.⁴⁴⁹

What Hobbes significantly provided to this emerging world alliance of despots was a secular theology in regard to the origins of the state. As a dystopian Eden, the “state of nature” both explained and sanctioned the reign of tyrants. Although few scholars would agree with all that Hobbes wrote, his conception of the “state of nature” formed the basis for dominant justifications for the state in centuries to come.

To cite a few examples, Fisher Ames, one of the lesser-known Founding Fathers, countered the specter of anarchy implicit in “freedom” by calling for an “ordered liberty.” An “ordered liberty” understood the sanctity of property in contrast to “natural liberty” which did not and led to anarchy.⁴⁵⁰ In regard to the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, Theodore Roosevelt drew upon the concept and referred to an “orderly liberty” as “Americans” proudly shouldered the “white man’s burden” in 1904: “Some wars have meant the triumph of order over anarchy and licentiousness masquerading as liberty; ...but this victorious war of ours meant the triumph of both liberty and order, the triumph of orderly liberty...”⁴⁵¹ To this Woodrow Wilson later added: “In the wrong hands, —in hands unpracticed, undisciplined,—[liberty] is incompatible with government. Discipline must precede it, —if necessary, the discipline of being under masters.”⁴⁵²

Yet, what Hobbes had effectively done in philosophical terms was scuttle the dilemma of “anarchy” from the local level and national levels to the international levels. As Niebuhr wrote about states:

The selfishness of nations is proverbial. It was a dictum of George Washington that nations were not to be trusted beyond their own interest. “No state,” declares a German author, “has ever entered a treaty for any other reason than self interest,” and adds: “A statesman who has any other motive would deserve to be hung.” “In every part of the

⁴⁴⁹ Hobbes XIII: 3/ 1958: 105.

⁴⁵⁰ MacCann, 2001: 236. In the 1800s the phrase “liberty and property” was actually a coded way of saying of “liberty and slavery” in reference to the claims of fugitives as property that Northern states did not always respect. Abolitionists countered with the phrase “liberty and humanity.” Curiously, if “property” were equivalent to enslavement, it ought to have disappeared when chattel enslavement did. Yet, as in a shell game, the two were only equated when it was suitable to euphemize the act of enslaving. Few would have convincingly argued that “liberty and slavery” or “liberty and terror” would be a great sales pitch for their idea even if that was precisely what they meant.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, 237.

⁴⁵² *Ibid*.

world,” said Professor Edward Dickey, “where British interests are at stake, I am in favor of advancing these interests even at the cost of war. The only qualification I admit is that the country we desire to annex or take under our protection should be calculated to confer a tangible advantage upon the British Empire.”⁴⁵³

So “anarchy” in the Hobbesian sense does not disappear, it is just scuttled out of sight for elites and countries that benefit from global “anarchy.” Rather than deny this obvious fact, dominant currents within political science and international relations (neo-liberals and neo-realists alike) accept that the international political system is characterized by anarchy, but this scuttling of the problem is justified because somehow “states are unlike individuals, and are more capable of forming an anarchical society.”⁴⁵⁴ As such, the fear of “anarchy” at the local and national level was transformed with Hobbes to an embrace of “anarchy” at an international level.

The fear of local and national anarchy thereby helped provide European elites with ideological ammunition for two simultaneous fronts in colonialist wars: battles of domination over white working classes and battles of occupation against all people of color whereby the quiet acquiescence of the former would be rewarded with plots stolen from the latter. Significantly, it also helped to deflect other possibly central questions (to those most susceptible to doubt such as white workers) such as “Why are we being ruled by robber-barons and dictators?,” “Why must we occupy another people’s land in order to prosper?,” “How can we live peacefully without any state?,” or “Is it even possible for the ruler of a state to be considered a Christian?” The first of those questions did arise quite strongly over time but in a very limited sense. Through the American Revolution of 1776⁴⁵⁵ and subsequent shifts, only gradually were the parameters of inclusivity extended from white, male land-owners to ostensibly include all adult citizens.

The idea that many stateless societies across the world could have lived in more or less egalitarian fashion and relatively peacefully for thousands of years without standing armies, police, or prisons was not an alternative for him. His philosophy and his simplistic dichotomy was, however, a very useful way of ensuring that only two alternatives were to be available to European masses and eventually people all across the world: a chaotic, fearsome, and primitive anarchy (which nobody wanted at all) or submission to the civilized state (which nobody, including Hobbes apparently, really wanted but regarded it as preferable to anarchy). As Gary Snyder wrote:

⁴⁵³ Ibid 84.

⁴⁵⁴ Bull 1977: 48.

⁴⁵⁵ There is justification for declaring the “American Revolution” a “civil war” as it was not intended to overthrow the king but, as a state wishing to secede from a union, the aim of the war was to acquire self-determination and sovereignty for the colonies.

The line of thought that is signified by the names of Descartes, Newton, Hobbes (saying that life in a primary society is “nasty, brutish, and short” —all of them city-dwellers) was a profound rejection of the organic world. ...These thinkers were as hysterical about “chaos” as their predecessors, the witch-hunt prosecutors of only a century before, were about “witches.” ...Instead of making the world safer for humankind, the foolish tinkering with the powers of life and death by the occidental scientist-engineer-ruler puts the whole planet on the brink of degradation.⁴⁵⁶

Thus, the irony has been that in fearing anarchy, the world system that rose in the wake of Hobbes’ ideas ushered in a new era of uncertainty, insecurity, and global precarity. Alongside this development arose a new vocabulary of ambiguity wherein the *security* (read: coercion) provided by the monarch became a necessary *abridgement* to “freedom” in order to *have* “freedom.” Anarchic “freedom” without security was useless. “Freedom” in popular parlance could therefore eventually become inextricably bound to the monopoly on mass violence of the state which was ascribed “necessity” even if in technical philosophical discourse it would be recognized that the coercion of the state removed some “freedom” in order to sustain other “freedom.” The second maneuver inherent in Hobbes’ story was the primordial stirrings of racism that soon took European elites by storm.

Although Hobbes’ “nasty, brutish, and short” remark has been well-cited, it has been less frequently noted that on the very next page, he clarified who was to serve as the prototypical image for such brutishness: “For the savage people in many places of America ...have no government at all, and live at this day in that brutish manner...”⁴⁵⁷ Subsequently, within one and the same work (*Leviathan*), early foundational conceptions of both “race” and “freedom” could be found. Hobbes was responsible for inventing neither one, but his work enabled both developments to evolve as they did and they did so —as in his work— intimately entwined. Indigenous anarchy could serve as both a threat to European commoners and colonialists as well as a mark of superiority and justification for both why Europeans had to suffer under a monarch and why colonialism was justifiable.⁴⁵⁸ In the words of political science scholar Patrick Moloney:

Savage anarchy became seen as the only alternative to, the very outside of, civilized states. By adopting such a definition, a vast array of effective forms of social organization was

⁴⁵⁶ Snyder 1990: 20.

⁴⁵⁷ Hobbes 1958:108.

⁴⁵⁸ As has been noted, the objectification and domination of “Nature” preceded the domination of indigenous peoples: “Indeed, well before the emergence of the nation as a dominant fantasy space where people realised their being, it is domesticated nature that has historically been the ultimate Thing for so many people, generating the key narratives that have driven the never ending dreams of, and attempts at, ‘overcoming nature’ that are so integral to the ‘civilising process’” (Hage 2000: 166-167).

erased. The social structures and institutions that savage societies did possess were deemed to be “natural,” and thus pre-political. Living by war and plunder, they were judged to be like pirates and outlaws. As a consequence, primitive societies never ranked as nations worthy of full recognition in the international arena.⁴⁵⁹

Thus, the functional societies of indigenous peoples became, with the brush of a pen, erased from history and magically transformed into a hideous anarchy that all civilized peoples could agree to reject. Not only did indigenous peoples have nothing to say in regard to “freedom,” their stateless societies were necessarily regarded as the very antithesis to it.

Better Angels in the State of Nature?

The further away that a person is located from the central nodes of academia in economic, geographic, cultural, racial, gender, ableness, and linguistic terms, the less power that person will have to influence academic discourse and the less likely that person will be to enter the arena for conversations about “freedom.” As little impact and influence a working class person in an American ghetto has to participate or influence that conversation, even less can be expected of a peasant class person in Malaysia. Exclusion is not merely a matter of “in” or “out” but of gradation, scale, context, and degree.⁴⁶⁰

One way to understand the mechanisms by which exclusion takes place and is considered acceptable is how words such as violence are defined. The linguist Steven Pinker wrote a highly praised volume entitled *Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) in which he set out to demonstrate through a veritable mountain of statistics and charts that, despite popular assumptions about an increase in violence, the actual *per capita* rate of violence has steadily decreased since 1945 and is far less than it ever was in hunter and gatherer societies.⁴⁶¹ In other words, Pinker (overtly) defended Thomas

⁴⁵⁹ Moloney 2011: 202.

⁴⁶⁰ For a non-either/or, non-Aristotelian approach to understanding how people process concepts and categories in gradient fashion based on prototypes, see Rosch 1973.

⁴⁶¹ The *Guardian* wrote that *Better Angels* was “A brilliant mind-altering book” and Bill Gates said that it was “One of the most important books” that he had ever read. In an interesting twist, Michael Shermer, author of *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies—How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths*, was so enthused about Pinker’s work when he wrote a review in *The American Scholar* that he mentioned the example of climate change without even recognizing that it undermined the theme that he was supporting: “Again—and it bears repeating—violence is on the decline, with occasional bumps along the way. Think of global warming. Yes, some years are cooler, but the overall trend is that of a warming Earth. The analogy applies to violence of all kinds. Compared with 500 or 1,000 years ago, a greater percentage of people in more places more of the time are safer,

Hobbes and Hobbes' contention that the "state of nature" was far less desirable than life in within nation-states which, according to Pinker, have become less and less violent thanks to the "civilizing process" (signifying the increased power of the state in a term borrowed from Norbert Elias). One reviewer, Elizabeth Kolbert, mockingly paraphrased Pinker's message: "The savages, it turns out, really were savage!"⁴⁶² Just as with Hobbes, this basic premise is a racist one even if Pinker's racism was colorblind.

It is not that Pinker is completely wrong. It is certainly true that heightened social sensibilities to nuances in violence such as increased opposition to animal cruelty and the death penalty, laws against sexual harassment and public discussion about bullying as well as the sensationalism of violence by the media incline people to believe that some types of violence are more common than they actually are. It is also possible that the per capita rate of homicide *has* decreased over time—I don't know. But even if Pinker has assessed these matters accurately, his analysis and fundamental assumptions indicate that his study was steered ideologically.

Although one could critique his conclusions in a number of ways, the key point here is how Pinker defined (or rather did not define) violence.⁴⁶³ Although Pinker addressed some forms of violence that do not involve direct physical harm (such as racism, sexism, and homophobia) he excluded other forms of violence (such as incarceration, poverty, and toxic waste). His lack of a clear definition of violence facilitated his ability to cherry-pick that which he termed violence and that which he did not.⁴⁶⁴ Another reviewer, Tobias Kelly, remarked, "For a history of violence, Pinker's definition of violence is very unhistorical."⁴⁶⁵

In any case, the bulk of his work and message related to war and killings. By defining violence primarily in terms of physical harm, death, and homicide, he made it much easier to state his case. In order to do so, he had to ignore the stances of scholars

healthier, wealthier, and freer today" (2011: 117). The image it recalls is that of a very pleased oceanic cartographer admiring a map of the North Atlantic and being lulled to sleep ...on the Titanic.

⁴⁶² Kolbert 2011. She noted that there was not even an entry for "colonialism" in the massive index to *Better Angels*.

⁴⁶³ For an overview of some critiques against *Better Angels of Our Nature*, see Aronson (2013). For other critiques, Lee (2014), John Gray, "Steven Pinker is Wrong about Violence and War." *The Guardian*, 13 March 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/13/john-gray-steven-pinker-wrong-violence-war-declining> (Accessed 7 September 2015), and Nassim Taleb's "The 'Long Peace' is a Statistical Illusion." <http://www.fooledbyrandomness.com/longpeace.pdf> (Accessed 7 September 2015). For a response to Taleb by Pinker, see Steven Pinker, "Fooled by Belligerence: Comments on Nassim Taleb's 'The Long Peace is a Statistical Illusion.'" http://stevenpinker.com/files/comments_on_taleb_by_s_pinker.pdf (Accessed 10 April 2015).

⁴⁶⁴ Sometimes Pinker even cherry-picked in the same area. In regard to animals, for example, he regarded the animal rights movement and legislation protecting animals from torture as a decrease in violence, yet compared to hunter-gatherer cultures wherein animals lived in the wild and were hunted, the very development of vivisection and factory farms would constitute a massive *de facto* increase in violence toward animals.

⁴⁶⁵ Kelly 2013: 26.

such as Galtung and Nixon who argued that, for example, poverty and pollution are forms of structural and slow violence respectively. Another form of violence neglected by Pinker was incarceration.

Since 1980 alone the incarceration rate in the United States has increased seven-fold. Hunter-gatherer societies did not even have prisons—much less police, private security forces, standing armies, mental institutions, toxic waste, and the potential for destroying a large portion of humanity almost instantaneously via nuclear weapons—all of which *increased* with the “civilizing process.” So the experiences of those who have been subject to heightened violence have been excluded from this narrative by the simple exercise of Pinker arbitrarily defining “violence” in the way that he did.

Pinker’s story is hardly unusual. It is essentially the basic story that justifies not only the nation-state but the history of colonialism during which it developed. Furthermore, such a narrative does not only exclude, to varying degrees, the voices and experiences of the majority of the planet who are subject to structural violence (such as the 5 billion people whose basic needs are not met), it particularly discriminates against the voices and experiences of the colonized. After all, even physical violence is more nuanced than Pinker’s charts indicated. The question is not just about the rate of violence but also the consequences of violence, its location, who is perpetrating it, and who is on the receiving end.

If a dominant group were to spend years attacking a smaller group until the smaller group was gradually exterminated, then by virtue of the diminishing numbers of members of the smaller group, one could say that violence gradually decreased. This is essentially the logic of genocide. Indeed, this is an approximation of what happened in the United States where internal wars decreased in the territorial United States as local populations and cultural diversities were gradually exterminated.⁴⁶⁶

Similarly, whatever violence hunters and gatherers incurred upon one another in Congo prior to colonialism, it could hardly have held a candle to the onslaught of Belgian colonialism beginning in 1885. It has been estimated that under the reign of the Belgian monarch Leopold II, 6-10 million Congolese were killed due to famine, disease, and Belgian terrorism.⁴⁶⁷ European access to precious resources (ivory, rubber,

⁴⁶⁶ For a map of the gradual occupation of Native territory by the colonial forces of the United States between 1784 and 1972, see Sam Hilliard and Dan Irwin’s map entitled *Indian Land Cessions*, Southern Illinois University Cartographic Laboratory, 1972. Alternately, see the maps as a moving gif file: http://www.alternet.org/files/story_images/native-american-land__0.gif It ought to be noted, however, that these maps begin in 1784 and therefore do not show the territory ceded or the tribes exterminated by European colonists prior to the founding of the United States.

⁴⁶⁷ For a discussion of the Belgian genocide of people in the Congo, see Weisbord 2003. One recent observer wrote that he “was baffled that—given the enormous death toll—no one had written a book on the Congo holocaust in English for a general audience in nearly a century” (Hochschild 2000). For a more recent attempt to cull a nuanced historical description of violence in the Congo during Leopold II and the available sources, see Roes 2010.

lumber, and eventually diamonds) was deemed paramount. This pattern of Northern Europeans engaging in mass-profiteering at the expense of African peoples' lives may have originated in colonialism but it has continued through today (where precious resources now include tin, gold, tantalum, and tungsten).⁴⁶⁸ Proportionally little media attention has focused on the millions who have died during the Congo's civil wars of the past twenty years but corporations have continued to extract the Congo's resources and, indirectly, fund the warring.⁴⁶⁹ Thus, the violence incurred upon North Europeans by the Congolese is miniscule compared to the massive violence incurred upon the Congolese (directly or indirectly) by North Europeans.

In this way, even if Pinker's statistics could be relied upon, they would not reveal who has most often been on the receiving end of that violence and who was perpetuating it even to the point of genocide. They would not reveal that the decrease in violence has corresponded with a similar decrease in cultural diversity. Of the more than 6,000 languages that exist today, at least 50 percent are expected to be gone within less than a hundred years and less than a tenth of them appear to be secure.⁴⁷⁰ Combined with the presence of structural violence, one can then assert that some types of violence are not only increasing, but they are affecting some people and entire at-risk societies (particularly those of indigenous peoples) far greater than dominant European peoples and societies.

As it is, Pinker's "civilizing process" has also coincided with mass destruction of eco-systems, depletion/pollution of vital resources, and, according to broad consensus of scientists, has led to a global warming crisis that can first bring extreme weather conditions and later threaten vast portions of the global population alongside countless animal species. It would seem that only the comfortable life of an academic could conclude that violence has decreased when many indigenous peoples who are facing extermination and bearing the brunt of climate change wonder when the violence against them is ever going to end.

Toward Alter/Native Conversations

It is possible to take issue with existing conversations about "freedom" in a number of ways: in terms of the conversation, the content, the structure of dialogue, or the concept itself. For example, their exclusive nature of the conversations can be critiqued without

⁴⁶⁸ Tantalum and tungsten are used in modern electronic devices such as cellphones.

⁴⁶⁹ According to legal scholar Harry Gobrecht, the fighting in the Congo "is funded in large part by the control, sale, taxation, and exportation of so called 'conflict minerals.' Armed groups, rebels, and the national military alike, control over 50% of the mining sites in eastern D.R. Congo" (2011: 413). For a similar discussion on the legal implications of electronic industry commerce in Congo, see Blake 2014.

⁴⁷⁰ See Mark Abley, *Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages*, 2005.

necessarily critiquing the concept itself or the content may be critiqued without regard for matters of exclusion.

The focus here, however, shall regard the different critiques to be intertwined and inseparable. The very act of discussing “freedom” without discussing racism is inherently problematic. Similarly, critiques that merely seek to provide a more colorful version of existing conversations misses the point about which types of “freedom” have been and are being fundamentally excluded. Nonetheless, it can be helpful to take a look at a general outline of critiques of “freedom” before exploring a few of them. In general, I see (very broadly) six categories of existing critiques based on the following (often overlapping) approaches:

- (1) *Empirical charges of inconsistency between ideal and practice.* Of particular interest here are historical studies that trace the idea of “freedom” in relation to social circumstances. Specifically, it has been pointed out that conceptions of “freedom” were dependent upon slavery and elitism.⁴⁷¹
- (2) *Theoretical charges of paradox.* The claims made here tend to point out some sort of non-empirical inconsistency inherent within “freedom” as an abstract concept. This could, for example, be in terms of the relationship between “freedom” and “property,”⁴⁷² the relationship between “freedom” and “necessity,”⁴⁷³ or the denial of “free will.”⁴⁷⁴
- (3) *Claims of Non-European “freedoms.”* This can take various forms such as appeals to pre-colonial “freedom”⁴⁷⁵ or Eastern, rather than Western, conceptions.⁴⁷⁶ In response to Patterson’s claim that “freedom” was an exclusively European concept with no parallel in pre-colonial non-European languages, Kelly and Reid (1998) responded with *Asian Freedoms*, an anthology dedicated to bringing Eastern voices into the existing framework for conversations about “freedom.”
- (4) *Alternative meanings, new typologies, or critical qualifications to fix “freedom.”* This refers to works that repair “gaps” or insufficiencies in our understanding of “freedom” as it is with at least some level of *critical* approach.⁴⁷⁷ Without any degree of critical approach, this category could more or less encompass all

⁴⁷¹ Mattei and Nader 2008; Morgan 1995; Patterson 1991, Pohlenz 1966; Raaflaub 2004; Rozbicki 2010.

⁴⁷² Cohen 1979.

⁴⁷³ McFarland 1996.

⁴⁷⁴ Honderich 1973.

⁴⁷⁵ Johansen 1982; Grinde and Johansen 1991.

⁴⁷⁶ Harvery 2007; Repetti 2014.

⁴⁷⁷ For example, Alford 2005; Bauman 1988; Boym 2010; Charvet 1981; Schwarz 2004.

writing about “freedom” that has aimed to do little more than review, organize, interpret, or tweak previous work.

- (5) *Critiques of the state and property as such.* The entire anarchist tradition fits within this category from Bakunin and De Cleyre to Chomsky and CrimethInc. In particular, one might note the work of anarchist people of color, both as a group (APOC) and specific thinkers⁴⁷⁸ but one could also include non-anarchists who shift focus toward questions of violence,⁴⁷⁹ asymmetrical power relations⁴⁸⁰ or the racism of the so-called Enlightenment.⁴⁸¹ One could also place here work that has critically examined “freedom” as ideology.⁴⁸²
- (6) *Anti-colonialist critiques.* From Frantz Fanon (1961) to Cedric Robinson (1980), from Drucilla Cornell (2008) to Ratna Kapur (2014) there has been a wide range of critiques toward dominant conceptions of “freedom” as articulated through colonial doctrine and practice. Native American critiques have occurred since colonialism began and root themselves upon conceptually distinct premises that demand a complete restructuring of conversations about “freedom.”⁴⁸³ Without specifying “freedom” as a particular construct, many anti-colonial critiques focus on the illegitimacy, cultural bias, or oppressive foundation of colonial orders as such. Sometimes it is enough to simply bring in the stories of those who have been excluded.⁴⁸⁴ Decolonial critiques of prisons⁴⁸⁵ could be comparable to abolitionist movements of the 1800s.⁴⁸⁶ These approaches collectively amount to a tremendously underappreciated perspective within conversations about “freedom.”

As yet, there is no available overview of critiques of “freedom” nor is there even an imagined field or specific discipline from which to sketch such an overview. Subsequently, what follows here is a crude makeshift outline rather than anything that could be considered thorough and exhaustive.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁷⁸ Ervin 1994; Mbah and Igariwey 1997.

⁴⁷⁹ Benjamin 1986.

⁴⁸⁰ Wollstonecraft 1792.

⁴⁸¹ Eze 1997; Mills 1997.

⁴⁸² Bergmann 1977; MacGilvray 2007; Primus 2011; Stirner 1884; Stivers 2008.

⁴⁸³ Barsh 1986 and 1988; Boldt and Long 1984; Cave 2011; Deloria 1969 and 1985; Irwin 1997; Minges 2001; Krakoff 2014; Russell 2001.

⁴⁸⁴ Elsada 2011; Mann 2013.

⁴⁸⁵ Davis 2003 and 2012.

⁴⁸⁶ Douglass 1845.

⁴⁸⁷ The closest thing to an overview that I have seen is a discussion of the views of Theodor Adorno and Emmanuel Levinas by Eric Nelson entitled “Against Liberty: Adorno, Levinas and the Pathologies of

Starting New Conversations about “Freedom”

Some of the most fundamental critiques come from indigenous perspectives because critique is levied not only at the content or the consequences of “freedom,” but the very form of communication (regarding “freedom” or any other topic). Oral traditions adhere to in a structural sense that which De Cleyre advocated in a theoretical sense: a rejection of written law. Native American organizer and thinker Russell Means put forth a critique against *writing as such* because “The process itself epitomizes the European concept of ‘legitimate’ thinking; what is written has an importance that is denied the spoken.”⁴⁸⁸ Cultures and traditions that reject writing are then at a disadvantage when being dominated by cultural systems where writing is essential. Then there is the naming process. Who may introduce themselves in their own language? Can one even prefer to Oglala, Brulé, Diné, Miccosukee, and so on, or is one being subjected to blanket European-derived categories such as “American Indian” or “indigenous peoples”? Then, with improper names, entire languages, peoples, traditions, and diversities are compressed and funneled through conceptual. According to Means, the entire system of Western “science” from Locke to Descartes to Adam Smith helped convert segments of holistic human existence into abstract *code*. It is this code that permeates global societies. Mysterious complexity became replaced with a “logical sequence: one, two, three, Answer!” This obsession with answers and order arrived at through analysis (the breaking down of systems into smaller pieces) has resulted in a tradition of temporary solutions.

This is what has come to be termed “efficiency” in the European mind. Whatever is mechanical is perfect; whatever seems to work at the moment –that is, proves the mechanical model to be the right one– is considered correct, even when it is clearly untrue.⁴⁸⁹

Means see this ultimately as a conflict between *being* (a spiritual proposition) and *gaining* (a material act). This leads to great atrocities that have to be masked as virtues. For example, Means states, the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” referred to human victims so the interpretational trick was to convert those one wanted to kill into non-humans. Similarly, terms such as “progress” and “development” were used to mask environmental destruction while “freedom” and “victory” masked butchery.

Freedom” (2012). Nelson stated that for Locke “liberty as free consent is contrasted with while remaining bound to coercion. Locke’s conception of liberty validates, to varying degrees, war, slavery, colonialism and the appropriation of others’ collective common property – such as the land of the Native Americans – in order to make it usefully and individually one’s own” (2012: 64).

⁴⁸⁸ Means 1991: 71.

⁴⁸⁹ 1991: 73.

According to Means, these tactics of re-naming happen throughout the mechanical process: “the mountain becomes gravel, and the lake becomes coolant for a factory, and the people are rounded up for processing through the indoctrination mills Europeans like to call schools.”⁴⁹⁰ Even Marxists and anarchists have faith in industry and its underlying premises, said Means.⁴⁹¹ In contrast, he posed a Lakota way: to be in harmony with all relations of Mother Earth. Such a way would be centered more on respect and limits than “freedom.”

Yet this type of way could not be formulated by simply reimagining “freedom,” rather it constituted a fundamentally different way of looking at the world. Huston Smith recounted the story of the Onondaga boy Oren Lyons was fishing with his uncle on a lake when the uncle asked him who he was:

“Why, I’m your nephew, of course.” His uncle rejected the answer and repeated his question. Successively, the nephew ventured that he was Oren Lyons, an Onandagan, a human being, a young man, all to no avail. When his uncle had reduced him to silence and he asked to be informed as to who he was, his uncle said, “Do you see that bluff over there? Oren you *are* that bluff. And that giant pine on the other shore? Oren you are that pine. And this water that supports our boat? You are this water.”⁴⁹²

Many American Indian views in this respect are in conversation with Asian Indian views. Karl Potter discussed how the various paths for Asian Indian philosophers were designed “to combat the constriction of habitual thinking by pushing the seeker out of his usual ruts.”⁴⁹³ This is particularly visible in Zen Buddhism. Where one can hear assertions such as, for example, “Do you want to know what my body is? My body is the same as the whole earth. Do you want to know what my mind is? My mind is the same as space itself.”⁴⁹⁴ This identification of self with the whole of existence has very direct implications for any conversation about “freedom.” As Thomas Cleary wrote, “According to Zen teaching, the quest for freedom itself has the power to bind, whether it be acted out in psychological, political, or religious terms.”⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ 1991: 74.

⁴⁹¹ This observation is in line with Cedric Robinson’s critique that European anarchists were not actually envisioning a new society but merely “rearranging the ideas of that bourgeois society” (1980: 215). As H. L. T. Quan put it: “despite its claim of heresy, anarchism in the West remains faithful and obedient to the ontologies and life-worlds that gave birth to it” (2013: 125). Robinson’s discussion of anarchism in *Terms of Order* (1980) seems to have been largely overlooked by anarchists and scholars of anarchism until Quan (2013).

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Potter 1991: 41.

⁴⁹⁴ Ssu-hsin cited in Cleary 1999: 58.

⁴⁹⁵ Cleary 1989: 80-81.

A Tale of Two “Freedoms”

Thus, with very different conceptual starting points about human identity, communication, nature, being, and boundaries, one set of peoples were occupied and overrun by another set of peoples. This is the legacy of colonialism that birthed the stratification of wealth and power that we live in today. This era introduced an entirely different development of “freedom” as those who theorized about it in European languages were doing so as “beneficiaries of aggression” —as Native American scholar Jack D. Forbes has described those who do not directly exploit but consent to it.

Forbes has used the Cree term *wétiko* to describe a collective mental condition that Columbus brought with him from Europe. This condition, a form of “psychosis” according to Forbes, was characterized by a scrupulous ability to thrive at the cost of others.

Human beings of all colors are seized or ensnared in debts, and are forced to live out their brief lives as slaves or serfs. ... The “cult of aggression and violence” reigns supreme, and the prisons and insane asylums are full to bursting.

Imperialism, colonialism, torture, enslavement, conquest, brutality, lying, cheating, secret police, greed, rape, terrorism—they are only words until we are touched by them. Then they are no longer words, but become a vicious reality that overwhelms, consumes and changes our lives forever.

This is the disease, then, with which I hope to deal —the disease of aggression against other living things and, more precisely, the disease of the consuming of other creatures’ lives and possessions. I call it *cannibalism* ... But whatever we call it, this disease, this *wétiko* (cannibal psychosis), is the greatest epidemic sickness known to man. The rape of a woman, the rape of a land, and the rape of a people, they are all the same. And they are the same as the rape of the earth, the rape of the rivers, the rape of the forest, the rape of the air, the rape of the animals. Brutality knows no boundaries. Greed knows no limits. Perversions knows no borders. Arrogance knows no frontiers. Deceit knows no edges. These characteristics all tend to push towards an extreme, always moving forward once the initial infection sets in.⁴⁹⁶

As Forbes articulated it, the *wétiko* psychosis sapped its hosts of their will for independence and produced mass conformity. At the same time, it hindered those infected with the disease from being able to see that they had been infected. Destruction and cannibalism became an imperative. Cannibalism, for Forbes, entailed “the consuming of another’s life for one’s own private purpose or profit.”⁴⁹⁷ Self-consumption of the planet and other people were of no concern.

⁴⁹⁶ Forbes 2008: ix.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid viii. Similarly, James Perkinson wrote that “Wealth is accumulated through *eating* the work of others” (2004: 617).

Significantly, the traits that Forbes listed as characterizing this psychosis involved complete disregard for *boundaries, limits, borders, frontiers, and edges*. In contrast, equal respect for all members and non-coercion was something that characterized truly “free, democratic, non-imperialistic societies,” by which he meant Native American communities. As an example, he cited testimony from Gene Weltfish, a European American anthropologist who had worked with the Pawnee:

They were a well-disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. ... Time after time I tried to find a case of orders given, and there were none. Gradually, I began to realize that democracy is a very personal thing which, like Charity, begins at home. Basically it means not being coerced and having no need to coerce anyone else. The Pawnee learned this way of living in the earliest beginning of his life.⁴⁹⁸

These conceptions of “freedom” then turned on values such as non-coercion, respect for one another, and respect for boundaries. In the words of Vine Deloria, “I would say one alternative to forcing nature to tell us its secrets is to observe nature and adjust to its larger rhythms.”⁴⁹⁹

On the surface, such ideas seem to be compatible with the basic ingredients of “freedom” within dominant European conceptions. Yet Native conceptions and European conceptions referred to completely different social systems as starting points for conversations. One of them depended upon perpetual expansion, property management, and technological advantage acquired through constant scientific development while the other depended upon constant negotiation and cooperation with neighbors, shared use of the commons, and perpetual contact with (and adjustment to) the demands of the land. The two societal constructions would seem mutually incompatible. Subsequently, the conceptions of “freedom” that developed within each of these distinct contexts would be, more or less, unrecognizable to the other. As Parra-Wa-Samen of the Yamparika Comanches is recorded to have said:

You said that you wanted to put us upon a reservation, to build us houses and make us medicine lodges. I do not want them. I was born upon the prairie, where the wind blew free and there was nothing to break the light of the sun. I was born where there were no enclosures and where everything drew a free breath. I want to die there and not within walls.

I know every stream and every wood between the Rio Grande and the Arkansas. I have hunted and lived over that country. I lied like my father before me, and, like them, I

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Jensen 2000: 9.

lived happily. When I was at Washington the Great White Father told me that all the Comanche land was ours, and that no one should hinder us in living upon. So why do you ask us to leave the rivers, and the sun, and the wind, and live in houses?⁵⁰⁰

The picture that Parra-Wa-Samen painted here was useful because his depiction of “freedom” and “unfreedom” was so clearly the opposite of European conceptions. Whereas a house would, for a European, be associated with protection and security from the sun and the wind, Parra-Wa-Samen identified the very nature of a house as an *enclosure*, as a form of confinement. Whereas a hospital would seem to be protection from disease, it too was merely another form of constraint placed within a larger constraint—the reservation. To be together with the sun, wind, and rivers and to wander the region without hinder was, in a most self-evident sense what it meant to be “free.” Interestingly enough, this type of “freedom” was acknowledged and validated by Thomas Jefferson who wrote: “I am convinced that those societies [such as the Indians] which live without government enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments.”⁵⁰¹ Yet, just as Jefferson’s personal doubts about enslavement did not hinder him from continuing the act of enslaving people, neither did the tendency for white settlers to admire and/or extol Native peoples inhibit wholesale slaughter, relocation, and deprivation of Native sovereignty by the quickly expanding United States.

As with Parra-Wa-Samen, Native American traditions would often be defended as more “free” than what European societies were offering. Yet the conceptions of “freedom” were not always so contrasting. In at least one prominent, the idea has been proposed that Native Americans and Europeans did share certain conceptions of “freedom” and that the former influenced the latter. In the case of the Iroquois Confederacy, some sort of federal organization did pre-exist the United States. It was recognized in print by Benjamin Franklin and, according to some claims, it even inspired the development of the U.S.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Parra-Wa-Samen (Ten Bears) in Brown 2009: 274.

⁵⁰¹ Jacobs 1991: 519.

⁵⁰² Benjamin Franklin admirably acknowledged that “the councils of the savages proceeded with better order than the British Parliament” but, as René Jacobs noted, the Founding Fathers failed to provide the rights for European women that had been granted under the Iroquois to Native women (1991: 518, 507-516). Franklin furthermore admired the fact that the Iroquois granted personal property rights for a person’s private necessities such as their temporary cabin, clothes, and bow but that “all Property superfluous to such Purposes is the property of the Public” (518). In 1988, both Houses of Congress passed resolutions that acknowledged “the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution” (Jensen 1990: 297). Eric Jensen has argued that no such proof actually exists for a “direct link” between the Law of Peace and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. At the same time, his argument that *no* link exists rests largely on the idea that Natives were regarded as “savages” or threats and *ipso facto* could not serve as models. Franklin’s own quotes however (which Jensen accepted as valid) have demonstrated that the two stances (savage *and* model)

Between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s, the United States pursued a policy of “termination” in relation to the sovereignty of Native American tribes. The aim was to end the special relationship between the government and indigenous peoples and thereby assimilate them into white-dominated American society. After the war with the Axis powers, the man chosen to carry out this plan was Dillon S. Myer, who had previously served as director of the program for Japanese-American detention camp program.⁵⁰³ At one gathering of Native Americans in which Myer asked the question, “What can we do to Americanize the Indian?,” he evoked the following response by an Native elder:

You will forgive me if I tell you that my people were Americans for thousands of years before your people were. The question is not how you can Americanize us but how we can Americanize you. We have been working at that for a long time. Sometimes we are discouraged at the results, but we will keep trying.

And the first thing we want to teach you is that, in the American way of life, each man has respect for his brother’s vision. Because each of us respected his brother’s dream, we enjoyed freedom here in America while you people were busy killing and enslaving each other across the water.

The relatives you left behind ...are still trying to kill each other and enslave each other because they have not learned there that freedom is built on my respect for my brother’s vision and his respect for mine. We have a hard trail ahead of us in trying to Americanize you and your white brothers. But we are not afraid of hard trails.⁵⁰⁴

Even if reservation territory has long been a fact and unhindered access to wilderness has long been banned, the dichotomy that was so obvious to Parra-Wa-Samen 200 years ago remains apparent to many indigenous peoples today.

“Freedom” as Tied to Racism

According to white historian Edmund Morgan, the first people to be subjected to newly developing practices of confinement in the guise of “civilization” were white Europeans. He documented in *American Slavery —American Freedom* how the development of labor extracted from enslavement grew from a context of burgeoning incarceration and the ideological use of “houses of correction” by elites to mobilize cheap labor from poor

were, in theory at least, not mutually exclusive. For more on the Iroquois Confederacy, see Grinde and Johansen (1991).

⁵⁰³ Williams 1986: 221.

⁵⁰⁴ Williams 1986: 222.

people in general and the begging class in particular. Elites were telling one another that poor people would rather starve than work and therefore it was in everybody's best interests to jail them or force them to work.

English poor were depicted as "vicious, idle, dissolute," addicted to "Laziness, Drunkenness," and "Vice," desperately in need of "houses of correction."⁵⁰⁵ As Morgan pointed out, "...Imprisonment, instead of being a temporary matter, preliminary to trial, became the mode of extracting work from the criminal, the insane, and the poor alike. ...Work was the proper cure for all, and it could best be administered by incarceration."⁵⁰⁶ In the spirit, workhouses for the poor were constructed where even children would be put to labor in order to "get them so used to it at an early age that when they grew older they would be unable to think of anything else."⁵⁰⁷

Extracting cheap labor, indoctrinating working classes, and defusing potential for resistance were therefore major incentives for incarceration. Enslavement filled the purpose of cheap labor —especially for white elites in Virginia who did not have to capture anybody but only had to *purchase* them. The problem that soon developed was that a class of people with nothing left to lose were prime candidates for insurrection. This was made explicit by Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 that, while targeting Natives, succeeded in uniting blacks and whites in revolt. In Morgan's words, "The answer to the problem, obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt."⁵⁰⁸ Racialized legislation gave perks to white servants and lumped Natives, blacks, and brown people in a single stigmatized category.⁵⁰⁹ Code words had begun to be used so that when legislation banned Africans from striking "*any* christian," the clear implication was that a *real* "christian" was European. As such, it allowed white servants

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid 320.

⁵⁰⁶ Morgan 1995: 321.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid 322. Some even thought that the appropriate age to begin child labor was four years old. John Locke preferred that children enter the work force at age three (Ibid).

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid 328. Early legislation in Virginia vacillated in regard to race and treatment of Natives. In 1670, it was declared Natives would not be enslaved, then in 1676, it was declared that Natives could be enslaved but for limited times in contrast to captured Africans who arrived by ship and were to be enslaved for life—even if they had become Christians. As there had been confusion as to exactly which Indians were permissible to enslave or wage war against, the ruling of Virginia's assembly 1676 attempted to clarify: "The assembly gave its definition of enemy Indians: any who left their towns without English permission" (Ibid 263).

⁵⁰⁹ Virginia legislation of 1682 regarded "black, red, and intermediate shades of brown as interchangeable." Both Africans and Natives were regarded by white ruling class Virginians as "basically uncivil, unchristian, and, above all, unwhite" (Ibid 329).

to bully Africans without fear of retaliation, placing the servants at some level on a par with the elite enslaving class.⁵¹⁰

One of the great benefits of enslavement to ruling class elites was not just the cheap labor that was extracted directly from captured Africans and Natives but from the development of compliance and complicity in white servant and working classes as well as white owners of small farms. Such compliance served as a critical buffer zone between the elite rich and the most marginalized and poor. As long as non-elite whites could be counted on to guard the gates of “freedom,” class inequality in the form of legally constructed race-barriers could be sustained. This resolved another problem for elites: the problem of fluidity and class transition. As long as whites were being enslaved, the boundaries between “free” and “unfree” were more fluid. According to European historian Alice Rio:

This much is clear: a sharp division of persons between free and unfree was not applicable in practice even according to our earliest evidence, despite contemporary laws sometimes referring to it as a principle; nor is it likely that there ever was a time in either Antiquity or the Middle Ages in which this opposition was actually applicable in reality. ...this was not a caste society, ...a single blanket condition which could be characterized as either ‘slavery’ or ‘serfdom’ is nowhere to be found, and ...what we do find is a multiplicity of status and a multitude of grey areas, giving unfree people few rights rather than no rights.⁵¹¹

By adding race to the mix, a permanent identifiable underclass was able to be manufactured and sustained. The solution was magical in two important senses. First, applying creative Biblical interpretation of the “Curse of Ham”⁵¹² and magical incantations about the “blackness” of a person’s heart to signify evil, the very skin of human beings could be re-cast “as a cursed object” as James Perkinson has observed.⁵¹³ In this way, Perkinson maintained, “early European race discourse can ...be imagined as the mobilization of a curse” such that “racial discourse itself ...is the witchcraft practice.”⁵¹⁴ This type of magical thinking liberated racism from demands to be justified by logic or science (yet race biology in Linné, Kant, and others later attempted to justify the magical thinking of racism even in scientific terms).

⁵¹⁰ Ibid 331. White servants and “freemen” were still a servant class but with perks. In 1676, white “freemen” without land were granted the right to vote and while Africans could be dismembered and punished in public without clothes on but elite enslavers were forbidden to “whip a Christian white servant naked” (Ibid).

⁵¹¹ Rio 2006: 38.

⁵¹² Gossett 1965: 5. For an extensive treatment of the “Curse of Ham” in Abrahamic traditions, see Goldenberg 2003.

⁵¹³ Perkinson 2004: 620.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid 622.

Second, the original “race card” was magical in that it served multiple contradictory functions at once. In providing a visual reference to an entire host of assumptions, it could mean whatever ruling class elites wanted it to mean at any given time. As Timothy Maliqalim Simone put it, “racial identity simultaneously dramatizes, masks, explains, and justifies social differentiation.”⁵¹⁵ Without really *explaining* anything, it satisfied a “‘just one look and you see everything’ approach to human understanding.”⁵¹⁶ All that whites needed to see was that their profiting at the expense of other humans was somehow justified, even natural. As such, there would be no contradiction between espousing “freedom” and enslavement at the same time. As Morgan pointed out:

Racism made it possible for white Virginians to develop a devotion to the equality that English republicans had declared to be the soul of liberty. ...by lumping Indians, mulattoes, and Negroes in a single pariah class, Virginians had paved the way for a similar lumping of small and large planters in a single master class. ...Racism became an essential, if unacknowledged, ingredient of the republican ideology that enabled Virginians to lead the nation.⁵¹⁷

So it is in this type of context that conversations about “social contract” theory are historically located. All social contract theorists developed their ideas after European colonial projects were well underway. Social contract theory, whether of Hobbes or Locke, Rousseau or Rawls, essentially refers to the idea that people agree to submit themselves to the state for their mutual benefit and security. In this way, supposedly scattered individuals become *citizens*. In *The Racial Contract* (1997), philosopher Charles W. Mills argued that prior to the social contract came the “racial contract” that organized both social and conceptual orders:

Racism and racially structured discrimination have not been deviations from the norm; they have *been* the norm, not merely in the sense of de facto statistical distribution patterns but ...in the sense of being formally codified, written down and proclaimed *as such*. From this perspective, the Racial Contract has underwritten the social contract, so that duties, rights, and liberties have routinely been assigned on a racially differentiated basis.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ Simone 1989: 66.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Morgan 1995: 386.

⁵¹⁸ Mills 1997: 93. Inspired by Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* and the general agreement among male philosophers as to the subordination of women, Mills noted that whether it was stated explicitly or implicitly, the idea of a social contract was written for, and has primarily remained applicable for, white people at the expense of all other peoples.

Beginning with the expropriation of land carefully described as “unpeopled,”⁵¹⁹ the approximately 100 million indigenous peoples killed in the Americas “would easily rank as the single greatest act of genocide in human history.”⁵²⁰ From the speedy slaughter of 11,000 black warriors in a single battle by British soldiers armed with machine guns in 1898 to the “slow-motion Holocaust of African slavery” estimated to have claimed 30 to 60 million lives in Africa, the Middle Passage, and the “seasoning” process (even before the lifetimes of enslavement in the Americas); from the millions of Congolese killed by the forces of Belgian King Leopold II⁵²¹ to the immediate annihilation of a couple hundred thousand people by nuclear weapons in Japan, Mills asserted that the lives of people of color have served as the bloody stepping stones for social contracts intended for whites only. Subsequently, “the ideal Kantian (social contract) norm of the infinite value all human life thus has to be rewritten to reflect the actual (Racial Contract) norm of the far greater value of *white* life....”⁵²²

Although colonialism is usually deemed a circumstance of the past, Mills asserted that what ruled previously officially in explicit senses was now made to rule implicitly and unofficially. From employment discrimination to resource allocation; from insiders’ clubs to courtroom bias, the Racial Contract continues today. Yet amidst the clear racial divide and persistence of discrimination and gaping disparities, this period is further characterized by a “*failure to ask certain questions*, taking for granted as a status quo and base-line the existing color-coded configurations of wealth, poverty, property, and opportunities, the pretence that formal, juridical equality is sufficient to remedy inequities created on a foundations of several hundred years of racial privilege....”⁵²³ A notable characteristic of this current period is invisibility. Invisibility marks both the suffering of the colonized and the descendants of the formerly enslaved but also the persistence of white dominance and white power which, by virtue of the antiracist consensus, must condemn racism and the horrors that placed white people in positions of dominance that they currently occupy.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid 49.

⁵²⁰ Ibid 98.

⁵²¹ For a discussion of the Belgian genocide of people in the Congo, see Weisbord 2003. One recent observer wrote that he “was baffled that—given the enormous death toll—no one had written a book on the Congo holocaust in English for a general audience in nearly a century” (Hochschild 2000). For a more recent attempt to cull a nuanced historical description of violence in the Congo during Leopold II and the available sources, see Roes 2010.

⁵²² Mills 1997: 101. Mills divided the Racial Contract into different periods. The first one was characterized by “de jure white supremacy” and expropriation, enslavement, colonialism were all made explicit ad it was equally explicit that democratic “rights” and “freedom” applied to white people. The second period was characterized, however, by writing the Racial Contract out of formal existence: “What characterizes *this* period (which is, of course, the present) is tension between continuing de facto white privilege and this *formal* extension of rights” (1997: 73).

⁵²³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

As noted by black legal scholar Anita Allen, it is this invisibility that has enabled standard American texts on the philosophy of law to describe all humans as rightsholders but feel no compulsion to point out that the historical record is radically different: “The retreat of mainstream normative moral and political theory into an ‘ideal’ theory that ignores race merely rescripts the Racial Contract as the invisible writing between the lines.”⁵²⁴ Similarly, as Mills pointed out, philosophers such as John Rawls and Robert Nozick could write tomes on justice with little or no recognition of U.S. practices of injustice in relation to people of color.

Paradoxically, while white supremacy is officially rejected, the assumption of European and American exceptionalism is nonetheless maintained. The grand ideals of “freedom” and “civilization” are virtually patented by European and white American philosophers. In this way, white people are allowed to claim certain intellectual space for their own without appearing overtly racist. Non-European sectors of the world are merely re-inscribed as special cases and “then disappear from the white contractarian history, subsumed under the general category of risible non-European space...”⁵²⁵ Furthermore, the philosophers who established that intellectual space were, in general, white supremacists themselves (often justified, of course, by supposedly “objective” science). Immanuel Kant, for example, had theorized a color-coded racial hierarchy in which “white” Europeans were, of course, at the top.⁵²⁶ They were ascribed the highest level of “innate talent.” Indeed, Kant had stated that “Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites.”⁵²⁷ After them, the next level was ascribed to Asians who had the capability of integrating into the superior social order created by white people. After the “yellow” race came the “black” race who, at the peak of their potential, could aspire toward the position of servitude. Thereafter, at the bottom, Kant located

⁵²⁴ Mills’ paraphrase of Allen, 1997: 77.

⁵²⁵ 1997: 74-75.

⁵²⁶ In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze’s words: “Enlightenment philosophy was instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race. The numerous writings by Hume, Kant, and Hegel played a strong role in articulating Europe’s sense not only of its cultural but also *racial* superiority. In their writings, as the essays collected here reveal, “reason” and “civilization” became almost synonymous with “white” people and northern Europe, while unreason and savagery were conveniently located among the non-whites, the “black,” the “red,” the “yellow,” outside Europe” (1997: 5). Carl von Linné, the Swedish botanist helped initiate conceptions of race biology in 1735 when he described in presumably non-partisan scientific terms that the “European” as “Fair, sanguine, ...gentle, acute, inventive. [and]... *Governed* by laws” while the “Black” is “phlegmatic, relaxed ...crafty, indolent, negligent [and]... *Governed* by caprice” (Ibid 13). More than a century later, Albert de Gobineau’s *The Inequality of Human Races* (1854) articulated “the conviction that the racial question over-shadows all other problems of history” (1999: xii). According to Gobineau, proof of the inferiority of people of color could be found the fact that they failed to recognize European superiority (Ibid 106).

⁵²⁷ From Kant’s *Physical Geography*, Eze (1997: 58).

the “red” race who were considered hopeless (and therefore, by implication, ripe for extermination).⁵²⁸ As Mills pointed out in regard to Kant:

...the embarrassing fact for the white West (which doubtless explains its concealment) is that their most important moral theorist of the past three hundred years is also the foundational theorist in the modern period of the division between *Herrenvolk* and *Untermenschen*, persons and subpersons, upon which Nazi theory would later draw. Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father.⁵²⁹

Although most Europeans today refute racism, “the Racial Contract is *continually being rewritten* to create different forms of the racial polity.”⁵³⁰ Social orders divided according to racial lines have by now become so ingrained that the racism of the structures and even historical writings tend to completely bypass white readers. As Mills continued:

The fish does not see the water, and whites do not see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move. As Toni Morrison points out, there are contexts in which claiming racelessness is itself a racial act.⁵³¹

This water that surrounds the fish that remains self-evident for whites is in part crafted by what is *not* said just as it is crafted by what *is* said. In the context of widespread devastation of indigenous traditions and peoples, in the face of ongoing torture and enslavement of fellow beings, all it takes is silence to contribute to and perpetuate such systems of domination. This silence is a key ingredient in the type of colorblind racism that Mills referred to here. A fundamental assumption underlying colorblind racism is that one can be neutral in a status quo that is severely biased.⁵³² Even the very advocacy

⁵²⁸ Mills 1997: 71. It might be noted that this hierarchy of “races” roughly described the hierarchy of the global order that was to develop with whites dominating the planet, Asian countries such as Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, and India (along with South America and Middle-Eastern nations) placing second and African and Caribbean nations falling into last place among the states. Smaller groups of indigenous peoples and stateless traditions across the world are the most vulnerable to state persecution and remain the most susceptible to extermination.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid* 72, emphasis in original.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid*. Mills pointed out that even Rousseau, who has typically been posited as someone sympathetic to the “noble savage” (a phrase that is often incorrectly attributed to Rousseau), failed to describe indigenous peoples in equal terms. The only cultures Rousseau referred to as “savage” were nonwhites. Europeans were only depicted as savage in the form of feral children raised by wolves (whose child-rearing practices were compared to those of black people). Apparently, Mills added, “Europeans are so intrinsically civilized that it takes upbringing by animals to turn *them* into savages” (*Ibid* 68).

⁵³¹ *Ibid* 76.

⁵³² Yet whereas the injustices of racial hierarchies would become less apparent to whites, the meaning of European “freedom” was all-too apparent for those living outside of the forts. From 1778, the United

of “rights” becomes problematic in this light. As Ratna Kapur wrote about “human rights”: “They are based on the liberal humanist claim that we are steadily moving from a primitive era to a more civilised moment in our existence.”⁵³³ The linear projection in time and history relegates stateless societies to a distant and forgettable past even while the language of “rights” is purportedly neutral.

It is in this sense that the very idea of separating “freedom” from “race” today becomes ideological and ahistorical. As novelist Toni Morrison wrote, “Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and the mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular land-scape for a writer.”⁵³⁴ Witnessing those combined agendas simultaneously is a key conceptual factor that distinguishes colonized perspectives from the colonized.

The segregation and exclusion of people of color in general and indigenous peoples specifically further enables the disparities of wealth and power established during colonialism to continue and expand. Aimé Césaire discussed how the stories of the colonizers and the colonized diverged in their interpretations of the violence that transpired.

I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict... Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, wishiness, brainless elites, degraded masses. ...colonization = ‘thingification.’ ...They throw facts at my head, statistics, mileages of roads, canals, and railroad tracks. *I* am talking about thousands of men sacrificed to the Congo-Océan. I am talking about those, as I write this, are digging the harbor of Abidjan by hand. I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life –from life, from the dance, from wisdom. I am talking about the millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkys. They dazzle me with the tonnage of cotton or cocoa that has been exported, the acreage that has been planted with olive trees or grapevines. *I* am talking about natural *economies* that have been disrupted—harmonious and viable *economies* adapted to the indigenous population –about food crops destroyed, malnutrition introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries, about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials.

States territory would expand on an average of 342 square kilometers *every day* for the next 70 years. The phenomenon was hardly localized to the U.S. According to Michael Krauss, more than half of the 6,000 languages that existed in 1900 across the world were gone by the year 2000 with 80% of the remaining languages spoken only by small groups of elders (Cox 2000: 4). In response to the question of innocent passivity in light of these atrocities, Howard Zinn titled one of his books *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*.

⁵³³ Kapur 2014: 27.

⁵³⁴ MacCann 2005: 186.

...colonialist Europe has grafted modern abuse onto ancient injustice, hateful racism onto old inequality.⁵³⁵

Edward Said has famously critiqued the construction of Orientalism in European scholarship and how people associated with Islam or the Middle East—whether from the coast of Morocco or the heart of Pakistan— have been both exoticized and demonized. The stories told in European-language contexts have been repeated in so many domains (sociology, political science, cultural studies, etc.) and in regard to so many aspects (military, science, theology, etc.) that people who are labeled as or identify as Muslims cannot act without being caught in the web of the projections implicit in the stereotypes of those stories. This is done, in colorblind fashion, without acknowledging the interests and cultural context of the supposedly “objective” scholarship where “the general liberal consensus that “true” knowledge is fundamentally nonpolitical (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not “true” knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.”⁵³⁶ This produces a dynamic of contradiction within European scholarship when the aim is both “objectivity” but the authoritative determinations lack reflection on white history and colonialism.

So even a specialist must deal with the knowledge that Mill, for example, made it clear in *On Liberty* and *Representative Government* that his views there could not be applied to India (he was an India Office functionary for a good deal of his life, after all) because the Indians were civilizationally, if not racially, inferior. The same kind of paradox is to be found in Marx.⁵³⁷

While such instances are typically ignored, excused, or brushed aside (“that was a normal way to think in those times”), they reveal a distinct inability to face head-on one of the most important historical patterns that persists throughout the last few hundred years of white scholarship: racism. Interestingly, according to Said, all English translations of Gramsci excluded a key part of his *Prison Notebooks* where he had originally written,

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory; therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Aimé Césaire 2005: 62, 64.

⁵³⁶ Said 2005: 78.

⁵³⁷ Ibid 81-82.

⁵³⁸ Ibid: 90-91

Said aimed critique at scholars, particularly American Marxist theorists, for neglecting serious attempts to bridge the superstructural aspects of global order (including white racism, colonial orders, orientalism, etc.) and the basic level of studying history and existing texts.⁵³⁹ Without this necessary bridge and without critical self-reflection, white scholarship and white-dominated media has continued to perpetuate an army of stereotypes about the Orient reinforcing already held beliefs and bias. Indeed, there has become a fascination within European-language scholarship to attempt to explain social circumstances in the Middle East according to the particularities of “Islam.” Yet, as the French-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf eloquently put it:

You could read a dozen large times on the history of Islam from its very beginning and you still wouldn't understand what's going on in Algeria. But read 30 pages on colonization and decolonization and then you'll understand quite a lot.⁵⁴⁰

Hussein Rashid has described how this tendency to essentialize Islam and Muslims played out in the wake of the attacks on the newspaper Charlie Hebdo. While ostensibly in response to the cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad, the attacks inevitably were placed in the context of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the violent responses to the Danish cartoons of Muhammad, and the attack on the Benghazi consulate in the wake of the anti-Muslim Youtube video “Innocence of the Muslims.” In doing so, “This narrative sets up an easily understood conflict between Islam and free speech.”⁵⁴¹ The liberal frame that celebrates “free speech” loses sight of European domination and presents an image that “allows Muslims to be constructed as violent a priori.”⁵⁴²

In a state of competition, if free speech is good, then Islam must be bad. ...By questioning the very narrative engendered by the attacks on the workers of CH, we understand the ways in which post-Enlightenment liberal values are, in fact, methods for continued exclusion.

Subsequently, in the guise of inclusivity, neutrality, secularism, and “free speech,” the language of liberalism has evolved to exclude the voices of opposition while positing itself as the natural backdrop which is uncontestable. It is a language without history, context, or culture. Yet, as Rashid pointed out, that language has a very definitive history as experienced by colonized peoples.

⁵³⁹ Ibid 81.

⁵⁴⁰ Maalouf 2001: 66.

⁵⁴¹ Rashid 2015: 5.

⁵⁴² Ibid 8.

It coincides with the rise of empire and colonialism, so that the language of the Enlightenment is forced upon the colonies. In the use of rationalism and civilization, justification is found for violence against the Other, wherever he is found. The idea that Enlightenment ideas are superior and therefore accepted universally ignores the fact that they were spread by force, imposed on populations that had different responses to the modern. ... This construction, of course, absolves the Enlightened state to avoid questions of its constructs policies that create systematic inequality, war, and second-class citizenship.⁵⁴³

Rashid pointed out the ironies of this history including the way that one of the least democratic regimes in the Middle East, the “Wahhabi cult” of Saudi Arabia, was armed and financed by Britain while one of the most stable and democratic governments in the region, the social democratic government under Mossadegh in Iran, was overthrown with the aid of British and American forces in 1953.⁵⁴⁴ Rashid emphasized that the image of Islam as dangerous and authoritarian has fueled the *repression* of “free speech” in France so that women are no longer allowed to wear the coverings of *hijab* or *niqab* in public spaces and when an anti-Islamophobia group in France tried to pay for a public ad campaign that included apparently Muslim figures and the “nous aussi sommes la nation,” (“we too are the nation”), they were prevented from doing so “because it made ‘political demands.’”⁵⁴⁵ On top of these forms of official bias against Muslims, Rashid viewed the cartoons as “bullying the disenfranchised.”⁵⁴⁶ In the wake of the attacks, however, French assaults on “free speech” were promptly ignored or downplayed while the attacks were presented as yet more “proof” of the biased narrative’s veracity. This was the familiar narrative replaying itself (“Enlightenment ideals are under attack by the uncivilized horde”). Yet, Rashid argued, what was really happening was that the discussion about “free speech” conflated “the right to say whatever one chooses with the license to do so.” The sanctity of “free speech” did not manifest within a vacuum, he insisted.

Any discussion of rights involves a discussion of citizenship. No individual rights is constructed as absolute in a community. The French motto of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* recognizes this relationship between the individual and the state. Such a negotiation is not only accepted, but expected. However, for Muslim citizens of France, to engage in this negotiation is to betray the state. Only one of the statements of the motto are under discussion now: *liberté*. The other two are left by the wayside, because they would create uneasy questions about how universal liberal values truly are.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴³ Rashid 2015: 6-8.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid 6.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid 7.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid 2015: 8.

According to Rashid, “liberty” had no meaning without “equality” and “fraternity.” To single out “liberty” at the expense of the other two was not only to betray those shared and interconnected values, it was to raise unsettling questions about who may or may not be allowed to participate in public conversations ...as *equals*. The move is hardly unique to “freedom,” “liberty” or “rights.”

Critical race theories have long pointed out the fluidity of “race” which could mean different things in different times according to which interests any defensible definition might serve. Even after the construction of the “white race” in the 1700s, there was no consensus that it was determined by skin color. Nor was there agreement that the lines of “whiteness” would be drawn *around* Europe rather than *within* it. The Irish, who were not generally accepted as “white” until after the Civil War, are a case in point.⁵⁴⁸

The instability of the concept of race stretches far back in human histories. Denise Buell, in *Why This New Race?* (2005), discussed how even as far back as the early Christians, the idea of “race” was a term that was ascribed fixity and stability but was useful precisely because of its fluidity. So rather than an anomaly, the functional ambiguity and fluidity of “freedom” would more likely be bound to the functional ambiguity and fluidity of “race” and “man” whose meanings were enmeshed throughout American histories. For example, the meaning of Thomas Jefferson’s declaration that “all men are created equal” was qualified by his implicit claim to both mean what he said *and* claim to own human beings as property. He certainly did not advocate for suffrage rights for women and blacks. Subsequently, the meanings of “liberty,” “equality,” and “rights” in the United States could not be, from its founding, disentangled from the wordplay that sent the reader’s eyes in one direction while less savory but more plausible meanings could scurry across the table in another direction. Now you see it, now you don’t.

The fluid meanings of “race” and “man” (not to mention “equal”) could enable “men” to refer to “all people,” “all males,” “all white males,” “all white humans,” “all white male Christian property owners,” and so on depending upon who was reading it, who was speaking it, in which era, in which context, and to what ends.

Nonetheless, whites in the United States typically regard “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.”⁵⁴⁹ All of this has enabled conversations of “freedom” to remain exclusive at the cost of people of color while attributing the responsibility for the exclusion to the failure of nonwhites to take full advantage of the opportunities that “freedom” has provided. Returning to Morgan, we can recall that “freedom” was bound to racism at the dawn of the colonial project that would eventually become the United States wherein “Racism became an essential, if unacknowledged, ingredient” in the cause of “freedom.”

⁵⁴⁸ See, for example, Ignatiev 1995.

⁵⁴⁹ Bonilla-Silva 2001: 2. For a discussion about the contrasting “ideology” and “reality” of racial opportunity in the United States see, for example, Wallace 2003.

It is important to remember here in regard to Morgan's remarks that racism was essential even when it was not acknowledged as such. Yet, thanks to the work of John Locke in regard to the necessity of property, racism could be argued as central to conversations about "freedom" by re-naming enslaved persons to be "property" rather than "persons" and thereby framing a defense of enslavement as a defense of property rights.⁵⁵⁰

Exploring Theoretical Cracks in the Liberty Bell

Now, bearing in mind the racial nature of dominant conversations of "freedom," and cognizant of the white racial frame that normally disguises the parameters of debate, we are better equipped to proceed with an overview of some critical views of "freedom" as a concept.

First, the harshest conclusion, that "freedom" ought to be abolished as a concept, is never explicitly advocated by anybody. There are, however, a number of scholars who came close to that stance. For example, in *Myths of Freedom* (1998), Stephen Gardner wrote that "...the myth of freedom is, to use Nietzsche's expression where it is most appropriate, ...a 'slave morality.'"⁵⁵¹ Gardner continued by stating that, "Freedom' ...is the democratic myth *par excellence*, the last great myth in a world supposedly devoted to the destruction of myth."⁵⁵² With his emphasis on a psychological approach, Gardner argued that, "So-called freedom of the imagination is really an imagination of freedom. Passion for infinity is really an obsession with obstacles..."⁵⁵³

Twenty years prior, in 1977, Frithjof Bergmann similarly accused "freedom" of being a form of ruse. He suspected that "the concept of freedom is not a fit instrument for thought ...and too beset by ambiguities... Nothing can be gained by referring it to that more mysterious abstraction."⁵⁵⁴ He argued thusly:

⁵⁵⁰ In fact, the Constitution of the Confederate States made this quite explicit by repeatedly clarifying a stance that was implicit but ambiguous in the U.S. Constitution (emphasis added):

Article I, Section 9.4 No bill of attainder, ex post facto law, or law denying or impairing *the right of property in negro slaves* shall be passed.

Article IV, Section 2.1 The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States; and shall have the right of transit and sojourn in any State of this Confederacy, with their *slaves and other property*; and *the right of property in said slaves* shall not be thereby impaired.

⁵⁵¹ Gardner 1998: 9.

⁵⁵² Ibid 21.

⁵⁵³ Ibid 22.

⁵⁵⁴ Bergmann 1977: 12, 171.

When suburbia or fraternities are the topic, no one needs to be reminded that people in general want “to fit in,” want “to be part of the group,” want “to be accepted,” that there is a herd for every lone wolf. And yet these banalities are barred from other contexts. Virtually every political, philosophical or moral discussion of freedom in the abstract assumes the very opposite: that men demand individuality and freedom, that only measures such as repression and brainwashing can begin to curtail those desires, and that men will rebel if freedom is not granted. We have again the same schizophrenic segregation, and here it is reinforced with semantics. Instead of saying bluntly that people do not want freedom, we say that people need a sense of solidarity and of communion, or at worst that they need to “conform.” Desires contrary to freedom are given other designations, thus preserving the illusion that the appetite for freedom is unqualified and absolute. . . . The idea of freedom has been like a hood that kept the falcon of thought on the leather glove. For it gives the illusion that we have a goal, that it is known, that there is a framework and that all is fairly understood—and so the major questions are not even asked.⁵⁵⁵

Bergmann raised some key points here: (1) “freedom” or “unfreedom” can be arbitrarily acknowledged in situations according to convenience (e.g., fraternities being no threat to “freedom”); (2) “freedom” is assumed to be a universal “good” which everyone desires and yet there is evidence to the contrary; (3) there are related concepts that allow “unfreedoms” to be “given other designations” and this shuffling around of labels implies that “freedom” can function as a shell game; (4) the mystified “freedom” as a “hood” essentially *is* the shell game as it keeps people in the dark and deceives them into believing that there is a specific meaning or “goal” that is bound to the term (see Fig. 18).⁵⁵⁶

According to this line of thinking, it would be the term “freedom” that is “free” (unbounded) rather than those who are subjected to the term. The unboundedness of the term would instead enable those who draft laws or pursue academic studies to apply the term arbitrarily. Even if the inherent ambiguity would similarly allow the public at large to perform the same trick, only the performers who dictate the laws and control the courts have the power to enforce the results.

Following up on this theme we can see work that —without referencing Bergmann— located a very precise example of the shell game in action. While not critiquing “freedom” as such, white legal historian Richard Primus demystified much of the jargon surrounding rights discourse in the U.S. in *The American Language of Rights* (2001). Specifically in regard to the Reconstruction Era following the abolition of slavery he noted a peculiar development in which most anti-slavery Republicans had aimed to abolish slavery but they wanted to do so without conferring equal rights to African Americans. The two issues were very different for them (as they apparently were

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid 6, 13.

⁵⁵⁶ Although it seems that little work has been done in this area, the idea of “freedom” as fulfilling a type of *functional ambiguity* would be worth pursuing.

for Lincoln). So, after the Civil War, many of these politicians began to speak of different types of rights, specifically “political,” “social,” and “civil” rights. Blacks were to have some rights (right to waged labor, etc.) but not others (right to vote or hold office, etc.). Historians have usually treated them as stable categories. Primus saw something else there:

...the typology was in fact dynamic: rights migrated from one category to another. Like coins in a shell game, rights seen at any given time under one category might quickly be gone from that category and appear instead under another heading. Moreover, the migration of rights among categories was not random. ...The tripartite theory of rights was a convenient vehicle for implementing the limited enfranchisement of blacks that their politics supported: rights that were to be extended to black could be called “civil,” a kind of right that attached to everyone, and rights that might still be withheld could be called “political” or “social.” ...The extension of these rights to blacks was piecemeal rather than systemic: one right and then another was extended, and each right was redescribed as “civil” by those who made it available to blacks. Nor was it only “political” rights that became civil in the mouths of those who advanced the rights of blacks: for example, the *Civil Rights Act* of 1875 granted blacks rights that most modern scholarship (and the Act’s contemporary opponents) has classified as not civil but social, like the right to use public transportation and accommodations. Congress did not say, however, that it was making social rights available to blacks. It merely moved the rights that it made available under a different shell, call them civil rights rather than social ones.⁵⁵⁷

The fluidity of “rights,” according to Primus, enabled politicians to control the specific meanings attributed to their terminology in order to satisfy circumstance so much so that, even a century later, scholars could not recognize the flow behind the facade.⁵⁵⁸

This slight of hand and use of coded language has proven so efficient that even when it has been exposed at the highest level of office,⁵⁵⁹ the illusion is sustained. Yet,

⁵⁵⁷ Primus 2001: 156-160.

⁵⁵⁸ While scholars may have tended to overlook such matters, other observers have not. The activist and then-priest Philip Berrigan wrote: “Wealth and privilege, almost synonymous for the West, had a need not only to expand themselves but also to protect their expansion against an increasingly resentful world. To this purpose, a new vocabulary has evolved. The illusions and distortions offered the American consumer have their counterpart in the propaganda offered the world. Both possess the same aim—economic domination which means, essentially, political and cultural domination as well” (1971: 76).

⁵⁵⁹ In 1968, Richard Nixon used coded language when he stated that the “heart of the problem is law-and-order in our schools” in a campaign ad. The code was exposed when he accidentally allowed himself to be recorded: “Yep, this hits it right on the nose, ...it’s all about law-and-order and the damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups out there” (Murakawa 2014: 8). Without recognizing the code as systemic (rather than, say, a personal slip), the entire structural illusion of rights-talk disguised as racism is able to continue unhindered. Clearly, the whole point is that Yet, with the regime so firmly in power, it is not

beyond mere political shenanigans, the ability to organize disparities along racial lines has produced, according to some thinkers, a dichotomy in which even the supposed beneficiaries are losing the game and unable to recognize it.

One of the prominent thinkers that inspired the New Left of the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse, critiqued the “democratic unfreedom” of the West.⁵⁶⁰ Behind the hype of “freedom” lay economic inequality, technological mechanization, and the suppression of utopic thought. Marcuse argued that “outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable” constituted the harsh reality behind the illusory base of popular sovereignty.⁵⁶¹ These people “exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions.”⁵⁶² At the same time, the tool of control is the language of “freedom” which transmits not “orders but information; where it demands not obedience but choice, not submission, but freedom.”⁵⁶³ These tricks are facilitated by the substitution of image for concepts. Through the deft leverage of language games crimes against humanity can become a rational enterprise justified by the right paragraphs in the right spots. Public behavior and thinking can be channeled into “one-dimensional” compliance without so much as a pinprick to alert the listener. In this way, mechanized society homogenizes its own constituency at the expense of the very qualities that supposedly distinguish humans from machines: creativity, compassion, and sensitivity.

Echoing the work of Marcuse, sociologist Richard Stivers claimed in *The Illusion of Freedom and Equality* (2008), “Freedom and equality are now meaningless terms. When the reality of the quality a term signifies contradicts it, then the term loses common meaning and becomes a tool of power.”⁵⁶⁴ Inspired by Jacques Ellul, Stivers argued that power and autonomy had been relocated to the technological system as such. In this context, “freedom” becomes equated with consumer choice⁵⁶⁵ —mere

unlikely that Nixon allowed himself to be recorded (perhaps unconsciously) in order to make it clear to whites where he stood. Some whites would be temporarily outraged but many would be relieved to hear their own views expressed by a presidential candidate. Consciously strategic or not, it may not necessarily have helped him secure victory, but it certainly did not hinder him from winning. The stellar rise of Donald Trump with a vocally xenophobic focus has demonstrated that the “white race card” can still be played today more or less as it has been since the 1600s.

⁵⁶⁰ For a Marcusean analysis of George Lucas films *American Graffiti* and *Star Wars* see Decker 2009.

⁵⁶¹ Marcuse 1964: 256.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.* 103.

⁵⁶⁴ Stivers 2008: 91.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 63; Similarly, in Drucilla Cornell’s words, “Freedom becomes freedom of the consumer to ‘choose’ from an endless array of products. It is an unfettered exercise of the will to partake in the full force of the cash nexus uninhibited that is now celebrated as the victory of democracy” (2008: 2).

“compensation” for the lack of “freedom” in more meaningful ways: “We believe in freedom and equality but we have embraced servitude, homogeneity, and inequality.”⁵⁶⁶

In his book entitled *Freedom* (1988), sociologist Zygmunt Bauman painted a picture of this “servitude, homogeneity, and inequality” in the name of “freedom.” The challenge for ruling classes was, as he framed it, one of creating the illusion of “freedom” in a context where the walls of enclosure had merely been expanded to the point that one could no longer see them. He contrasted Huxley’s mental captivity in *Brave New World* and Orwell’s totalitarian coercion in *1984* with what he regarded as a third and more appropriate metaphor for our existing order: the Abbey of Thélème in the 1500s novel *Gargantua* by François Rabelais. The Abbey was “a place of gracious living; wealth here was *the* moral virtue, happiness was the main commandment, pleasure the purpose of life, taste the major skill, amusement the paramount art, enjoyment the only duty.”⁵⁶⁷ The other most notable feature about Thélème was its high and impenetrable walls. No one inside could ever see where their wealth or amusements are produced.

One does not see the ‘other side’. Neither is one curious to see it: it is the *other* side, after all. We can say that the consumer society took off where *Gargantua* ended. It has elevated the crude rules of the Rabelaisian abbey to sophisticated systemic principles. Society organized around consumer freedom can be thought of as an elaborated version of Thélème. Thick walls are an indispensable part of consumer society; so in their inobtrusiveness for the insiders. If such walls appear in the vision of the consumers, they do so as a canvas for colourful, aesthetically pleasing graffiti. ...Consumers rarely catch a glimpse of the other side. The squalor of inner cities they pass in the comely and plushy interior of their cars. If they ever visit the ‘Third World’, it is for its safaris and massage parlors, not for its sweat shops.⁵⁶⁸

So one major factor that sustains the illusion of a “freedom” without its larger and more numerous corresponding “unfreedoms” is distance. By removing prisons, poverty, enslavement, and dictatorship far away from the sight of those who make decisions, the illusion can be sustained that, if they exist, they exist to a significantly lesser degree than they actually do. Therefore, not seeing them encourages the development of exclusive

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid 94; Anarcho-primitivist philosopher, John Zerzan extended the critique to time itself: “Everything that commentators like Ellul (1964) have said about technology, in fact, applies to time, and more deeply. ...It is autonomous in its overall aspect, like technology; it goes on forever of its own accord. But like division of labor, which stands behind and sets in motion time and technology, it is, after all, a socially learned phenomenon” Zerzan (2002: 21). Even language was problematic for Zerzan which is normalized that it becomes “natural” which, again like water for fish, disguises what surrounds us and indeed appears to *be* us. Yet, like the others, Zerzan too lacked any critique against “freedom” as such. Instead, he expressed support for “life, health, freedom, authenticity” (2002: 164).

⁵⁶⁷ Bauman 1988: 92.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

quarters where one does not *want* to see them because if one were to witness something that conceptually turned one's world upside down, one might be faced with ethical choices that would be painful to make.

In such a context, it becomes difficult to avoid casting interdependent relationships in illusory terms of isolated “individuals,” “states,” and “citizens,” where “rights” and laws can safely organize otherwise complicated ethical quagmires into sealed cans of worms better stored far in the back on the highest shelf. The implications here for “freedom” have been apparent to some: it no longer makes sense—or at least not in the way that most people might presume. Eric Nelson (2012) reviewed work by Theodor Adorno and Emmanuel Levinas stating that “For Adorno, ‘the ideology of freedom and autonomy’ camouflages an ‘actual state of unfreedom and dependence’”⁵⁶⁹ and that, for Levinas, the meaning of “freedom” was made paradoxical through the reality of interdependence and bound to others. This interconnection of people with one another “entails that my freedom is implicated in the fate and freedom of others, and I cannot deny them on behalf of my freedom.”⁵⁷⁰

Seen in this light, discussions about “liberty” are restricted to the distribution of allotments in an economy of cages under the guise of spreading “freedom” (perhaps the shuffling from one cage to another constitutes “freedom of movement”?). Whether it be our “boundedness to the social group” or our bonds to “human bodiliness” (in the words of Rebekah Miles) we can negotiate for bigger, better cages but we cannot pretend that we are not always talking about some form of cage, limitation, boundary, or constraint.⁵⁷¹ This would seem to suffice as groundwork for arguing that the theory of “Liberty” is more crack than “Bell.” Yet, as Nelson put it, “Levinas and Adorno are not of course ‘against liberty’ as such.”⁵⁷² So too was true for all of the above-mentioned authors.

Despite what might have seemed to be relentless rejections of “freedom” as such, they—one after one—recanted their apparent “freedom-atheism” or seemingly critical skepticism of the term itself. Bergmann stated, “None of this is in any sense meant to say that the concept of freedom has been rendered ‘meaningless,’ nor that the word should now be dismissed since it has lost its usefulness.”⁵⁷³ Marcuse and Stivers were profound advocates of “freedom” but felt that it been co-opted and degenerated, and Gardner was actually defending (and ostensibly improving upon) Hobbes.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁶⁹ Nelson 2012: 67.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid 71.

⁵⁷¹ Miles 2001: 65, 68.

⁵⁷² Ibid 78.

⁵⁷³ Bergmann (1977: 175).

⁵⁷⁴ Ironically, in Gardner's assessment, his defense of Hobbes was based on the *opposite* of Pinker's assessment. That is, Gardner suggested that the problem today was the increase in equality and therefore violence has *increased* thus corroborating Hobbes' alignment of inequality with order, and equality with disorder.

This is not to devalue the point of their critiques. Instead, it is to question why they did not sustain that critique or carry it through to its logical conclusions. If Berlin's claim that "everything is what it is; liberty is liberty, and not equality, etc." were true then one ought to be able to find at least one example of a philosopher discussing "freedom" as a serious political concept wherein it was *not* dependent upon some other concept that could be classified as a "non-freedom" or "unfreedom." Although I have searched, I have been unable to do so.

"Non-freedoms," it ought to be noted, would be a more accurate description for terms such as "justice" that are seen as compatible with or complementary to—but distinct from—"freedom." However, I have been unable to find anyone articulate a clear distinction between "non-freedoms" and "unfreedom." Most scholars have not regarded such things "power" or "property" to be hindrances to "freedom." Indeed, power (an ambiguous term in its own right) is often used synonymously with "freedom" (e.g., Patterson's "sovereign freedom") and John Locke, for example, regarded property as an intrinsic aspect of a "free society." Yet power for one person at the expense of another person would imply a greater "freedom" for the empowered person and greater "unfreedom" for the disempowered person. G. A. Cohen, for example, has made the same point about the matter of property writing:

[P]rivate property, like any system of rights, pretty well *is* a particular way of distributing freedom *and unfreedom*. It is necessarily associated with the liberty of private owners to do as they wish with what they own, but it no less necessarily withdraws liberty from those who do not own it.⁵⁷⁵

Similarly, in the words of Felix Oppenheim, "Freedom includes justifiable unfreedom; Unfreedom includes unjustifiable freedom."⁵⁷⁶ With the added qualification of "justifiable," Oppenheim added a layer of subjectivity. Implicitly, Oppenheim seemed to indicate that the distinction between the two is determined by justification precisely because each contains elements of the other. Not only is "freedom" bound to "unfreedom," the distinction between them depends upon subjectively determined justifications. Combined with Cohen's depiction, "property" or "power" then would be characterized as "freedom" or "unfreedom" depending upon who was doing the justifying. For if those with property and power can assert, coerce, or convince others into acknowledging justification then they are "freedom" and if those excluded from power and property assert and defend the stance that they are not justified then they constitute "unfreedom." Berlin's "liberty is liberty" claim then fades into murky relativism which happens to be a major reason for the lack of scholarly consensus about what "freedom" is.

Then, even in cases when a particular "freedom" is agreed upon and justified, the question remains about accepting "justifiable unfreedoms." Not only is "freedom" then

⁵⁷⁵ Cohen 1979: 170.

⁵⁷⁶ Oppenheim 1961: 160.

not an independent concept, it is furthermore a *subordinate* concept that is dependent upon other more essential ideas (such as “responsibility” or “accountability”) in order to provide the semblance of coherency. Again, Oppenheim: “Right also implies unfreedom, but not vice versa. If X has a certain legal right, there is some Y who has a certain legal duty, and who is officially unfree to violate this duty (always assuming that the legal system is on the whole adequately enforced).”⁵⁷⁷

“You’re Still in Prison”

Nonetheless, a certain theme appears when looking at critical views of “freedom” and that is a certain unease with the continued presence of “unfreedom.” The unease is not always as apparent as the readiness to admit that the opposite of “freedom” is necessary for it exist. In the words of Svetlana Boym: “Freedom is only possible under the conditions of human finitude and with concern for boundaries.”⁵⁷⁸ In many cultural contexts, this would make sense and the boundaries would even take precedence over concerns of “freedom.” Yet, in the context of largely Aristotelian traditions, the centrality of “freedom” as a celebrated value made the inevitable embrace of paradox an awkward move. Historically, as we have seen with Paul and much of the early Protestant tradition, the opposite of “freedom” was not just a means to enable “freedom,” but “unfreedom” in the form of servitude was *central* to “freedom.” In her book *Another Freedom*, Boym observed a similar theme in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the House of the Dead* where he discovered a freedom in prison that was “somehow freer than real freedom.”⁵⁷⁹ She further cited his conviction that (as for Luther) “freedom” implied submission: “Understand me: voluntary, completely conscious self-sacrifice imposed by no one, sacrifice of the self for the sake of all, is, in my opinion, a sign of the very highest development of the personality... the highest form of self-mastery, the greatest freedom of one’s own will.”⁵⁸⁰ Boym noted Dostoevsky’s conviction that individualism, even individual liberty itself, is no more than another form of imprisonment. In a similar theme Harold Bloom saw this obsession with individual liberty in the United States as that which Ralph Waldo Emerson called “self-reliance,” and, for Bloom, this has translated into “a dangerous and doom-eager freedom: from nature, time, history, community, other selves.”⁵⁸¹ Two men who attempted to break

⁵⁷⁷ Oppenheim 1961: 138, footnote 35.

⁵⁷⁸ Boym 2010: 4.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid 113.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid 121.

⁵⁸¹ Bloom 1992: 43, 49. For Bloom this was American “Gnosticism,” by which he meant a knowledge of God which turned inward toward individualism rather than outward connecting people to one another. This “free God or God of freedom” signified power —and unrealistically so: “...free of time, unstained

out of this prison by going to prison were brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan. On May 17, 1968, together with seven others, they broke into the offices of the Selective Service (U.S. department responsible for military conscription) in Catonsville, Maryland. They removed the draft records, brought them out to the parking lot, and burned them all with homemade napalm. After going underground, they were eventually arrested and sentenced to prison. Once there, they each wrote journals, Philip's was published first, *Journal of a Priest Revolutionary* (1971), and Daniel's, with a nod to Dostoevsky, titled his prison diary *Lights on in the House of the Dead* (1974).

Although they did not explicitly critique "freedom" conceptually, their actions spoke of another radically different "freedom" in opposition to the system of national independence and rights presumably protected by the state. In his own prison diary, Philip Berrigan quoted Pietro Spina:

Even if you live in the freest country in the world and are lazy, callous, apathetic, irresolute, you are not free, but a slave, though there is no coercion and no oppression. Liberty is something you have to take for your self. It is no good begging it from others.⁵⁸²

Then he followed up this declaration by adding, "It may seem surprising to some that my freedom here is more full and satisfying than any previously experienced."⁵⁸³ This type of "freedom" that Philip Berrigan referred to here is in the same vein as that of Dostoevsky as well as Henry Thoreau who had to be dragged out of jail when he was arrested for civil disobedience. In some sense, it was not terribly far from Paul and Luther's insistence that "freedom" in Jesus implied becoming a servant to all. At the same time, it is also just as distant from dominant conceptions of "freedom" as that of Parra-wa-Samen. After all, he was exclaiming in a very counterintuitive sense that he did not just feel more "free" inside of prison than outside, but that this "freedom" was "more full and satisfying" than "freedom" outside of prison. Yet, if prison cannot be a determinant as to what characterizes a person's status as "free" or "unfree" then what would one have left? It becomes more comprehensible if we return to the idea of "freedom" as a conversation about an economy of cages. In this light, the cage of prison was an easier burden to bear than the cage of conscience.

For his conscience to be still and for him to feel "free," he had to know that he had done all that he could do to oppose injustice. The plight of others were implicated in his own life to such an extent that he was compelled to resist. In the words of his

by mortality" (Ibid 15). According to Bloom, the central American question "What makes us free?" translated in practical terms to a quest for isolation. Bloom's concern has found support in the claim of a current "narcissism epidemic" by psychologists Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell who wrote that, "American culture's focus on self-admiration has caused a flight from reality to the land of grandiose fantasy" (2010: 4).

⁵⁸² Philip Berrigan 1971: 75.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

brother Daniel, “If ‘free men’ make war, it is up to caged men to disclaim war... Our sin is to parrot the state ...or to cherish ...our return to the ‘normalcy’ of the state – which is to say, the society in which murder is the daily round of activity.”⁵⁸⁴ In committing their actions in partnership with, or on behalf of, others (in that case rescuing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men from forced military service), they relieved the shackles of conscience in exchange for the bars of the prison cell.

In the 1980s, the Berrigan brothers co-founded the Plowshare Movement which entailed property damage and non-violent action directed against military bases and other aspects of the military industrial complex. On the surface, significant strides seem to have been made. The carpet-bombing and mass slaughter that took place in Vietnam by U.S. forces has been replaced by drones and more precision bombing which, compared to the 60s and 70s, takes less civilian lives. The draft is gone altogether which means that nobody is directly coerced into joining the U.S. military. Furthermore, U.S. military casualties are so low that soldiers are more likely to die at their own hands than be killed in combat.

At the same time, the U.S. retains about 45% of the entire world’s military expenditures and, in recent years, has killed civilians in Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, and contributed to the destabilization of the Middle East through support for Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, support for numerous dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, support of the Mubarak dictatorship and then the coup d’etat in Egypt, invading Afghanistan in 2001, invading Iraq in 2003, invading Libya in 2011, and supporting the military insurrection in Syria which has now led to more than 200,000 deaths and more than 4 million refugees.

Back home, the situation has declined economically so that many young people feel compelled to turn to the military because they have few alternatives. A sharp rise in home foreclosures between 2005 and 2010 has been accompanied by a similar rise in suicide rate during the same period.⁵⁸⁵ Yet economic hardship in the United States has never struck equally across racial lines. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income (what one earns) of white households in the United States decreased from \$61,733 in 1999 to \$58,270 in 2013. Asian American households had the highest average income at \$67,065.

For black Americans the figure decreased from \$40,131 in 2000 to \$34,598 which meant that the not only do African Americans earn significantly less than European Americans (and approximately half that of Asian Americans) but the income disparity gap between whites and blacks *increased* during that period from blacks earning 65 percent of that of whites to earning 59 percent of white median income.⁵⁸⁶ Even more

⁵⁸⁴ Berrigan 1974: 26-27.

⁵⁸⁵ See Houle and Light 2014 for rise in home foreclosure and suicide rate 2005-2010.

⁵⁸⁶ DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014.

notable is the current disparity in wealth (what one owns) that places European American holdings at *17 times* that of African Americans.⁵⁸⁷

With less economic opportunities available, blacks turn to the military more often than whites. While African Americans constitute approximately 13% of the national population, they comprise more than 20% of the armed forces (with disproportionate representation in the lower ranks). While overrepresented in the military, African Americans are grossly underrepresented in politics. As of this writing, only *2 percent* of U.S. senators are African Americans.⁵⁸⁸ A similar underrepresentation occurs in philosophy departments which philosophy professor Charles W. Mills has described as the “whitest” of the disciplines.

Additionally, African Americans live on the average nearly four years less than European Americans and receive worse health care treatment along the way.⁵⁸⁹ In relation to police brutality, whites are proportionately less likely to be killed by police in relation to minority groups. A recent disclosure by the state of California revealed that African Americans were nearly *five* times as likely to be killed by police as European Americans.⁵⁹⁰ Furthermore, according to a recent study by *The Guardian*, of all those people who are killed by police, blacks are *twice* as likely to be unarmed as whites.⁵⁹¹

Perhaps one of the most serious issues in regard to disparity is that of incarceration. In general, African Americans, and young African American males in particular, have been significantly susceptible to imprisonment. After formal segregation was abolished, a *de facto* segregation quickly morphed into a radical rise in incarceration beginning during the “War on Drugs” of the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Studies have indicated that white youth are more likely to engage in drug crimes than people of color yet it is people of color who are filling the jails, especially in major cities affected by the drug war where, according to Michelle Alexander, “as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives.”⁵⁹² Then, post-incarceration, effects of a criminal record intersect with racism. Angela Davis

⁵⁸⁷ Vornovitsky, Gottschalck, and Smith 2014.

⁵⁸⁸ One of them, Tim Scott (SC), is a Republican whereas most African Americans, like the other one, Cory Booker (NJ), are inclined to vote Democrat. So, in a sense, one could argue that the impact of African American representation in the Senate is canceled out in terms of the number of Senate votes because the Republican senator Tim Scott is not likely to vote according to how most African Americans would vote if they were in his position.

⁵⁸⁹ Masters et al 2014; Fiscella et al 2000; Williams and Wyatt 2014.

⁵⁹⁰ McCarthy, Ciara and Nadja Popovich 2015. The study concluded that the death rate of civilians killed by police was 3.4 for African Americans, 1.2 for Hispanics, and 0.7 for European Americans. As such blacks were nearly three times as likely to be killed as Hispanics.

⁵⁹¹ Swaine et al 2015. They reported that “32% of black people killed by police in 2015 were unarmed, as were 25% of Hispanic and Latino people, compared with 15% of white people killed.”

⁵⁹² Alexander 2011: 7.

mentioned, for example, a sociological study of job applicants in which “white people who had a felony conviction were called back for interviews at the same rate as black people who had the same credentials but had no criminal record.”⁵⁹³

The case of Asian Americans is more complex in part because the category is ambiguous and in part because different Asian Americans have, on the average, different experiences and living standards in the United States according to where their Asian background is located. According to U.S. Census statistics, the Asian American population increased from 3.7 million in 1980 to 11.9 million by 2000. Their growth rate exceeds that of any other racial/ethnic category.⁵⁹⁴ Yet, there is, for example, less research on Asian Americans in prison than on African Americans, European Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics. Finally, while racism is still a very real phenomena in the U.S. for all nonwhites, the dynamics seem to be different for many Asian Americans. Not only are Asian Americans underrepresented in crime statistics, they sometimes even receive better treatment than whites in the court system. According to a study by Johnson and Betsinger “...Asian offenders often, although not always, are treated similarly to or even more leniently than their white counterparts, and they are often sentenced to less severe punishments than black and Hispanic offenders.”⁵⁹⁵ In striking contrast, African Americans who comprise less than a fifth of the country’s national population, constitute as much as *half* of the U.S. prison population.⁵⁹⁶

To some extent, however, the discussion of prisons has disguised other underlying issues of structural racism. As Frederick Douglass posed the question in 1852: “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?”⁵⁹⁷ and was answered with more than a century of silence from white scholars on “freedom.” Malcolm X raised the same point but, in speaking to a black audience, did not need to phrase it as a question when he stated, “all America is a prison.”⁵⁹⁸ By turning the issue to one of self-determination, he could tell his audience, “You’re still in prison. That’s what America means: prison. I think

⁵⁹³ Davis 2012: 143.

⁵⁹⁴ Johnson and Betsinger 2009: 1046.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid: 1079. Vijay Prashad wrote about how sometimes people can make positive remarks about Asian Americans as if generalizing about a “good” race in contrast to “races” is somehow less racist. “Apart from being condescending, such gestures remind me that I am to be the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America. I am to be a weapon in the war against black America” (Cited by Rodríguez 2005: 249). As the hip hop group Public Enemy titled their second release: “It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back.” With each new wave of immigrants to “succeed,” the wages won came on the backs of blacks.

⁵⁹⁶ Smith and Hattery 2010: 392.

⁵⁹⁷ Douglass 1982.

⁵⁹⁸ Colley 2014: 404.

that what you should realize, is that in America there are twenty million black people, all of whom are in prison.”⁵⁹⁹

Yet, whether one adopts such a self-determination perspective or not, there are, in the meantime, prisons as institutions to contend with. Angela Davis has long focused not only on the situation of prisoners but also on the demand for prison abolition.⁶⁰⁰ In her book *The Meaning of Freedom* (2012), she asked:

How does the persistence of historical meanings of racism and its remedies prevent us from recognizing the complex ways in which racism clandestinely structures prevailing institutions, practices, and ideologies in this era of neoliberalism?⁶⁰¹

Citing activists Elizabeth Martínez and Arnolando García, Davis noted that the very idea of “community” has been dismantled in favor of “individual responsibility” which places the burden of welfare upon the poorest members of society.

In contrast to Francis Fukuyama and Dinesh D’Souza who have argued that society has transcended history and racism respectively, she observed that the victories of the civil rights movement have been used to argue that the U.S. has now become a colorblind society, thus delegitimizing accusations of racism. Yet individualizing responsibility has shifted responsibility for criminality to the youth being jailed.

Davis referred to a Pew Center report entitled “One in a Hundred: Behind Bars in America 2008.” The United States has the highest known incarceration rate *and* total number of prisoners in the world—far exceeding countries such as Iran, China, Turkey, Mexico, Russia, and Brazil. While the national average was approximately one in a hundred, for black males between 20 and 34, the figure was roughly one in nine.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. The entire phrase, including the preceding sentence, “Don’t be shocked when I said I was in prison. You’re still in prison” was part of a sample of a Malcolm X speech used in a song by the Beatnigs in 1988 entitled “Malcolm X.” Songs such as this exemplified not only the way that stories continue on in culture but, in a cyborg sense, how a person’s voice and spirit continues on long after their death. Those simple words, many years prior to entering academia, helped shape my understanding of what “freedom” and “prison” could mean.

⁶⁰⁰ See, for example, Davis 2003 and 2012. Robin Kelley called her “one of the world’s leading philosophers of freedom” (Davis 2012: 7). She was not however even mentioned in the study course that I had taken in 2013 at University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid 168.

⁶⁰² These descriptions have sustained themselves across colonial time and space. As Frantz Fanon wrote, in contrast to the well built settler town, the “native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light” (1968: 39). In the United States, “the best of the whites and the best of the Negroes almost never live in anything like close proximity” (Du Bois 1994: 101). The structures are social as well as physical. Studies show that white youth are more likely to engage in drug crimes than people of color yet it is people of color who are filling the jails and “in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives” (Alexander 2011: 7). Davis pointed out

Davis asserted that to equate modern-day prisoners with a form of slavery is not an exaggeration and cited the landmark case of *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* (1871) that declared the prisoner to be “the slave of the state.”⁶⁰³ In fact, the distinction between “slave” and “free” or even what was meant by either term was never clearly established in legal terms.

Referring to W. E. B. DuBois’ work and the period of Reconstruction in the post-Civil War era and African Americans were “emancipated,” Davis wrote:

The enslavers whose activity was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation, and then later by amendment to the Constitution did not surrender so easily to words. It strikes me to be very strange that over the decades we have assumed that it was possible to abolish slavery simply by proclamation, a few words here, and by a clause in the Constitution, when that proclamation and that constitutional amendment never clearly explain how they understand slavery.

So we don’t even clearly know what was supposed to be abolished. Was it chattel slavery? Was it treating human beings as property? ... Was it about coerced labor? ... What about the whole scaffolding of racist ideology that was necessary to keep an entire people enslaved? Did that get abolished? So why do we assume that slavery was abolished?

Slavery was a part of the warp and woof of American life, especially in the South, but also in the North. And words alone were not sufficient to make it go away. If slavery was declared dead, it was simultaneously reincarnated through new institutions, new practices, new ideologies. We can think about the ways in which the institutions of punishment have served as receptacles for these structures and ideologies of enslavement that were translated into terms of freedom—slavery translated into the terms of freedom. ... So when we talk about the relationship between slavery and the prison, we’re also talking about the nature of democracy, or what goes under the rubric of democracy in this country.⁶⁰⁴

Framed in this light, Davis demonstrates that the idea of prison abolition is as central to conceptions of “freedom” today as the abolitionism of the 1800s was to “freedom” back then. Yet, just as “property” was used as a code word to disguise the issue of “freedom/unfreedom” in relation to enslavement, the words “security” and “crime” are used to disguise the issue of “freedom/unfreedom” in relation to prisons today.

how these practices can actually have affected world history: “We wouldn’t have had to deal with the Bush administration over the last seven years had it not been for the case that due to felony disenfranchisement more than 600,000 people could not vote in Florida. In the 2000 election there was only a 537-vote difference. So if a tiny minority of those 600,000 had been able to vote, we might have had an entirely different course of history” (2012: 142-143).

⁶⁰³ Davis 2012: 175.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid 139-140.

Just as the abolition of chattel slavery was “controversial” in its day, the idea of prison abolition in the United States is perhaps even more marginalized. Precisely because of the nature of playing on people’s fears (“we wouldn’t be safe without prisons!”) and the nature of keeping people locked up out of sight (often located in remote rural areas), the issue of prisons remains largely off the radar even if mass incarceration contributes to the very dangers that it supposedly eradicates.

Prisons...conceal the inequalities that they reproduce. The hidden danger of relying on incarceration as the major solution to behaviors that are often the by-products of poverty is that the solution reproduces the very problem it purports to solve. This is how we might begin to understand why the prison population constantly rises, not only in absolute numbers, but proportionately as well. It has nothing to do with the rise in crime statistics. As the rate of crime goes down, prison populations go up. ...If we really want rehabilitation, then we have to start talking about decarceration. How is rehabilitation possible under conditions of total confinement? How is rehabilitation possible when there is no way that people can exercise their freedoms? As a matter of fact, that’s the whole point of the punishment as imprisonment: It deprives you of your rights and liberties. That is why the prison is a peculiarly democratic punishment. It is the quintessential democratic institution, because it provides you with the negation of that upon which the whole concept of bourgeois democracy has developed.”⁶⁰⁵

Her words point to the history of the United States when the British mocked American revolutionaries and their cries for “freedom” while, at the same time, enslaving people. The revolutionaries in fact explicitly used the image of “slavery” as a condition they rejected (for themselves). Yet, just as many white people enmeshed in enslavement had difficulties imagining a life without it, so too do many people today have difficulties imagining life without prisons. One of the problems, according to Davis, is that people often begin by assuming that there is no alternative rather than asking if prisons are ethical. This lack of imagination proves to be a critical constraint on open discussion about prison abolition. Davis wrote

The first step, then, would be to let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system. ...An abolitionist approach ...would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society. In other words, we would not be looking for prisonlike substitutes for the prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather, positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment —demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid 142-143.

physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.⁶⁰⁶

Increasing funding for addiction treatment programs while decriminalizing drugs and sex work would others avenue to pursue. Regarding the need for reparative justice rather than punitive, Davis cited legal scholar Herman Bianchi who wrote that, in this light, a person who has broken the law “is thus no loner an evil-minded man or woman, but simply a debtor, a liable person whose human duty is to take responsibility for his or her acts, and to assume the duty of repair.”⁶⁰⁷ Finally, for Davis, these proposals all intersect with the need to address “racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination” in society at large.⁶⁰⁸ As the problems are interconnected, so too is the need for solutions that interconnect.

Concluding Remarks

In general, the basic critiques against conceptions of “freedom” within dominant conversations generally have fallen into the following categories: Critiques toward one aspect of those conversations (property, “free will,” the state, rights-talk, etc.), critiques toward the exclusive application of the concept (liberating some while enslaving others, building prisons in the name of “freedom,” etc.), critiques that question the conceptual sustainability of “freedom” as such (often with counter-proposals, new definitions, etc.), critiques of the form of communication itself, critiques of the quest for “freedom,” critiques of assumptions about the idea of “personhood” underlying the quest for “freedom,” and critiques of the entire conceptual basis upon which “freedom” is located. One pattern that seems apparent is that while critical European Americans are more quick to point out the logical inconsistencies in “freedom” or to pose an alternative conception, critical African Americans are more prone to challenge the distribution of “freedom” however it is defined. Whereas critical European Americans search for a way to live with their own conscience, critical African Americans demand the means to live as equals. The questions are tied to class as well but as class and race are inextricably bound in U.S. demographics and history, the two are difficult to disentangle.

The last type of critique is, unsurprisingly, the most ignored as it completely rejects not only “freedom” but the entire configuration of concepts that relate to it and sustain it. This would be a type of critique that all other critiques could rest upon — connecting perspectives drawn from Native, African American, Asian, and critical European perspectives. An advantage to this type of critical conversation is that dominant conceptions are placed in a very defensive position and a concession of any

⁶⁰⁶ Davis 2003: 106-107.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid 113-114.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid 108.

argumentative terrain (e.g., the legitimacy of property as such, the legitimacy of occupation, the deprivation of self-determination, the arbitrary exclusive character of conversations about “freedom,” etc.) could potentially upset the entire eco-system that spawned and sustains dominant conceptions of “freedom.”

With that, this crude overview of existing critical analysis of “freedom” draws to a close. What now follows is an outline of an alternative basis for developing conversations of “freedom/unfreedom” based on principles of non-violence and democratic inclusivity.

Beyond the Berlin Wall: Expressing (Un)Freedom

When the so-called Founding Fathers spoke of Freedom, it was a peculiar kind which gave African-Americans the freedom to toil in chains or die, gave women the freedom to toil meekly in the kitchen or face a husband's wrath, gave the poor the freedom of impoverished servitude or death by starvation, and gave Native Americans the freedom of the conquered or the freedom of the grave. Meet the new boss, worse than the old boss.

-Rage Against the Machine⁶⁰⁹

Those who confer a 'motherhood' aura of sanctity on freedom would do well to consider that it comes in a package with heightened social disciplines and controls. It may be that in the East there are freedoms which, in adapting freedom to their own patterns of discipline and control, will ultimately be seen as peculiarly constructive.

- David Kelly and Anthony Reid⁶¹⁰

Having reviewed some alternative views of “freedom” and “unfreedom,” this section consists of a personal theoretical narrative that draws on different researchers and thinkers to produce an outline of concerns that could characterize more inclusive conversations of “freedom” and “unfreedom” or (un)freedom. This theoretical outline shall then be used later to frame discussion about the empirical material of this thesis.

If Isaiah Berlin's legacy on contemporary conversations about “freedom” says much in relation to the perspectives of colonized peoples, it might be that a veritable wall has been built wherein books such as *Freedom* by Carter et al are only the first barrier. Because white-dominant histories permeate academic disciplines, the effect is compound by the fact that *all* of the disciplines are dominated by whites. Berlin acknowledged in the very beginning of “Two Concepts of Liberty,” that the meaning

⁶⁰⁹ Morello et al, “Rage Against the Machine,” *FIRST DAY* 24, 11.

⁶¹⁰ Kelly and Reid 1998: 14.

of “freedom” was “so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.”⁶¹¹ Although his stated aim was “to examine” only two of “the more than two hundred senses of this protean word,” it becomes clear that the effect of his focus was not just to *examine* (i.e., “look at”) but to *define* (i.e., “control”) in a manner akin to a priest who would interpret scripture in order to exclude or marginalize certain interpretations while privileging others. Berlin’s “examination” was, to most observers, clearly an ideological positioning in favor of “negative liberty” but what tends to be less recognized is the ideological construction of the walls around the debate itself, a debate between types of white dominant conceptions and dominant white minority conceptions to the exclusion of others.⁶¹² This type of control builds walls around what definitions can be regarded to be legitimate and which cannot. In the words of white linguist Noam Chomsky (see Fig. 20):

The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum - even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there’s free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate.⁶¹³

Many white people, such as the audience to whom Isaiah Berlin was catering, would not even notice the wall that was being constructed around the spectrum of debate through which they would participate —precisely because so many of the underlying assumptions (including white dominance) would seem so self-evident. This is one reason that many people of color may be both quicker to recognize the problem and placed with a greater burden to make space for their own voice within conversations about “freedom.” Riyad Ahmed Shahjahan wrote about his experiences as a Bangladeshi Canadian taking in course a social theory at a Canadian university in 2001:

I felt my spirit was being squashed as I studied theorists who were not aligned with my own reality. They seemed to analyze a world that was composed of only Europe and North America, where people were white and secular. ...I developed my own course and

⁶¹¹ Berlin [1969] 1991: 33.

⁶¹² Berlin mentioned, in an aside, anarchism. Yet the act of merely *mentioning* an entire school of thought (which he labeled “social movement”) without any elaboration or credence to that school of thought served rather to mark the fringe boundary for what can even be registered as a blip on the radar of discussion (Berlin 1991: 51). Although Berlin described liberalism as “watered-down” anarchism, the gulf between legitimate (“watered-down” anarchism) and clear that As anarchism only constituted a blip, indigenous stateless traditions clearly did not warrant even that much. This is how a wall may be subtly constructed.

⁶¹³ Chomsky 1998: 43.

started to read books by Frantz Fanon, Keiji Nishitani, Yoshiharu Nakagawa, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Edward Said, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Patricia Hill Collins.⁶¹⁴

Borrowing from Marshall McLuhan, Shahjahan raised the point about how the exclusive “medium” of dominant academia limits whatever “message” is produced therein even when the message is anti-colonial.⁶¹⁵ Following the call of George Dei, he emphasized the need for indigenous peoples to be a part of and integrated into academic settings on their terms. In order for genuine exchange to meaningfully take place, it can be, according to Shahjahan, necessary to “rupture the sense of comfort and complacency” in Euro/European American academic settings.⁶¹⁶ Berlin attempted to demonstrate that the logical conclusion of an exclusive and singular rationalism, the result of binding “freedom” to knowledge, would ultimately lead to tyranny in the name of “freedom.”

In turn, Berlin presented a nuanced but simpler “freedom,” an individualist notion in line with John Stuart Mill, less encumbered by the need for such discipline and autocracy. This is the great selling point of “negative liberty,” that it sounds vaguely reminiscent of the Golden Rule and intuitively attractive, so much so that even Sonny Barger, an early leader of Hell’s Angels, could paraphrase Mill and advocate the “freedom for the individual and his right to exercise it in any manner or form that he pleases so long as he doesn’t infringe on the rights of others.”⁶¹⁷

Berlin’s argument was powerfully alluring, in part perhaps, because he was, at least superficially, arguing against the idea of one single truth and the belief that rationalism could lead us to “freedom.” He stirred the pot just enough to give the semblance of disturbing a “sense of comfort and complacency.” He was, after all, apparently challenging positions of Socrates, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Fichte, and Comte. His view was historically an underdog:

...the notion of individual rights was absent from legal conceptions of the Romans and Greeks; this seems to hold equally of the Jewish, Chinese, and all other ancient

⁶¹⁴ Shahjahan 2015: 216.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid 230-231.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid 226.

⁶¹⁷ Barger 2005: 189. Not only is Mill’s maxim reminiscent of the Golden Rule, it amounts to erosion of the so-called Silver Rule found in ancient China, and elsewhere: “Do not do to other what you would not want them to do to you.” The so-called “Platinum Rule,” on the other hand, counters with an even more activist approach than the Golden Rule: “Do to others as they want to be done unto, within reasonable limits.”

civilizations that have since come to light. The domination of this ideal has been the exception rather than the rule, even in the recent history of the West.⁶¹⁸

Here we again read European exceptionalism: nobody except “the West” the grasped the idea of “freedom.” In marginalizing or ignoring possible non-white allies or non-white enemies in the discussion and in affirming unique European claims to “freedom,” he confirmed the whiteness of the conversation (a confirmation that was not unusual for Berlin but was and remains established practice).

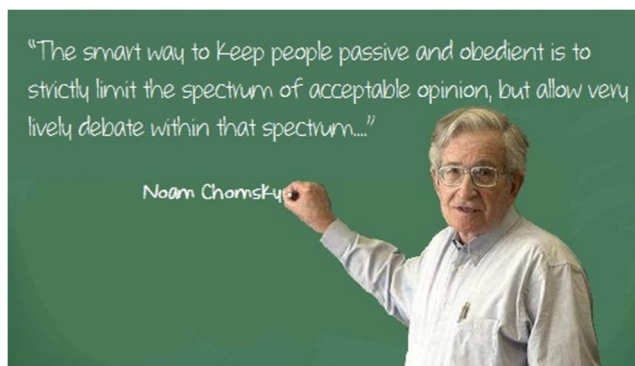


Fig. 20
Noam Chomsky summed up here the dynamics of dominant conversations about “freedom.”

Isaiah Berlin’s legacy then has been one of cementing an institutional mindset of whiteness that was already in place long before he arrived on the scene. Yet Berlin’s great accomplishment in regard to white power has not, to my knowledge, been recognized. By deftly pitting liberal white majority positions against communitarian white minority positions, Berlin magnificently annihilated the rest of the world from consideration. Through the careful placement of significant caveats⁶¹⁹ and subtle switches in nuances⁶²⁰ Berlin critiqued the stance of “positive liberty” with an essentially

⁶¹⁸ Berlin 1991: 41. It could be added that Berlin conflated the idea of “individual rights” here with “freedom,” which are often treated as two different discussions. In a footnote on the same page, Berlin mentioned that “Christian (and Jewish or Muslim) belief in the absolute authority of divine or natural laws, or in the equality of all men in the sight of God, is very different from belief in freedom to live as one prefers.” Again, as with “China,” a foreign source is mentioned but no foreign person or even specific school of thought is mentioned. The Berlin Wall that “freedom” has built around Europe has been as subtle as Berlin’s formulations and as powerful as nearly-all-white anthologies.

⁶¹⁹ E.g., acknowledging a wide variety of meanings attributed to “freedom”; his modest plan to address only two “political” senses, etc.

⁶²⁰ Berlin equated “liberty” with “freedom”; equated “negative liberty” with “individual rights” as well as “freedom *from*,” and equated “positive liberty” with both self-mastery and “freedom *to*.”

strawman argument.⁶²¹ The same tyranny that he feared in “positive liberty” was, as we have seen, exactly the tyranny that Hegel deplored in “negative freedom” (meaning complete sacrifice of self to the whole). In creating a strawman argument, Berlin implicitly rejected Hegel’s synthesis and cast out sacrifice altogether as a component of “freedom.”

Furthermore, Berlin critiqued the assumptions underlying “positive liberty” for being non-demonstrable yet “free will” itself is not demonstrable even while it upholds the principles of contemporary jurisprudence. Furthermore, Berlin presented “negative liberty” as readily demonstrable.⁶²² The question regarding “negative liberty” however in contexts of comparing different political states (the example he chose) is not whether or not oppression can be demonstrated but whether or not “negative liberty” is a useful term to describe it. Instead, rather than apply an awkward concept such as “negative liberty” (a reference to the non-existence of interference that, in Berlin’s conception always implies *some* degree of interference), one might simply refer directly to the matters in question: violence and coercion. A greater degree and frequency of police brutality in a country that legally prohibits public gatherings can be said to constitute greater violence and coercion than a country with no ban on public gatherings and which has a lesser degree and frequency of police brutality. Then it becomes quite clear what is being discussed.

For example, when Berlin wrote about “free area of action,” he was referring to *ability*, and when he wrote of “individual rights,” he was referring to what Mill described as to limitations to “the power which the ruler should be suffered to exercise over the community,” in other words, the *regulation of violence*. So when Berlin wrote “The defence of liberty consists in the ‘negative goal’ of warding off interference,” he packaged enough negatives and double-negatives in a sentence to spin the head of an English teacher a few times around: to defend (fight off an attack) against liberty (the presence of non-interference) entails a “negative goal” of fighting off interference. Simpler ways to say the same thing (depending on which sense he was using “liberty”) might read: “ability implies resistance to obstacles” or, alternately, “might makes rights.” “Freedom” in this case is either about unimpeded movement (ability) or negotiated rights (regulated violence). So the use of the term “liberty/freedom” clouds rather than clarifies.

⁶²¹ He claimed that all proponents of “positive liberty” believed that “all men have one true purpose, and one only that of rational self-direction” and that this rationality necessarily leads to a single universal, harmonious pattern. There is nothing that says that an advocate of “positive liberty” would necessarily state that there is “one true purpose and one only” in life and that this purpose furthermore would be “rational self-direction.” These are Hegelian arguments and, even if adopted by many Marxists, hold no exclusive rights to “positive liberty” which was also a driving force for Patrick Henry and the rest of the Founding Fathers.

⁶²² He offered a quick glance at life in fascist Spain versus the constitutional monarchy of Sweden. Clearly, according to Berlin, a citizen in Sweden had more liberty —there was no need to study the matter.

In doing so, the use of “liberty” cordons off a broad and inclusive conversation that (in daily life) has involved everyone from prisoners to police, from grassroots activists to international NGOs, and (in academic conversation) transformed it into an elite conversation led by white people who have claimed primary access to the topic. As such, the very people who have been most affected by police brutality or most vulnerable to harsh laws have been excluded from the conversation by the Berlin wall of “liberty.”

Berlin’s emphasis on a bifurcation that rooted itself in liberal white majority stances and communitarian white minority positions entrenched conversations about “freedom” further down the rabbit-hole of specialized complexity in a topic that does not demand such specialization in relation to the priorities and needs of people who are affected (directly or indirectly) by those conversations.

First, the rhetorical move of simply stating that “liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice” was subtle, slick, and effective. If “freedom” or “liberty” is *de facto* the most central value applied to organize society and mobilize citizenry, and you want to marginalize related but competing interpretations of “liberty” and “freedom” that ties them to “solidarity” or “equality,” then all you have to do is affirm, in a self-evident matter-of-fact manner,⁶²³ that they are not bound to one another and are, in fact, separate values entirely: if you accept one, then you lose the other. Subsequently, if people prize “freedom” first and foremost (which is what people are told that they want to do) then they will subsequently want to give up a sense of solidarity and they will be willing to sacrifice equality in society for the sake of their “freedom.”

Second, by virtue of being impacted, these people are in some way already part of the conversation (the tail-end) yet their voices are being excluded by increasing degrees of specialization which make popular participation ever more difficult. Berlin’s contribution was to seemingly clarify some confusion about “freedom” yet the predominantly white segment of scholars who devote their time to thinking about “freedom” are no closer to a consensus about “freedom” now than they were in 1958. Instead, the reading list of “important white people to read” has grown longer for whichever person of color or white person who attempts to enter the conversation (such as Shahjahan cited above).

What follows is an outline of some of the main issues that have arisen in regard to challenging dominant conceptions of “freedom.” This coverage is by no means exhaustive nor is that the aim. The purpose is to begin to sketch out what more inclusive conversations of “freedom” would look like. They would address, for example issues of colonialism, racism, massive violence, occupation, deception or manipulation, logical inconsistency, prison and prison abolition and so on. Not only would people of color

⁶²³ When a scholar says such a thing in this self-evident manner, all non-scholars are expected to accept this as a given truth: to question it would be to appear stupid and many people are not willing to take that risk.

have a more self-evident role in such conversations of “freedom,” they would, in many cases, take leading roles on grounds of their expertise gained from experience. For structural purposes, inspiration is drawn here from bell hooks who described “love as a practice of freedom” with three primary traits: a critical eye to the dynamics of domination, working together in community, and an inclusive approach to social justice.⁶²⁴

A principle of democratic inclusivity must inevitably negotiate with the fact that it functions as an aim rather than as a description of an existing state of affairs. As such the quandary is presented for each person engaging in the question as to how one’s own energies are to be spent in pursuit of this aim. This section shall focus on three approaches to conversations about “freedom” that are either marginalized or excluded from dominant conversations (such as those in the spirit of Berlin): (1) critiquing dominant language and terms and asserting one’s own name, voice, and language, (2) working collectively in partnership with those who have less (or no) ability and resources to further their own cause,⁶²⁵ and (3) Challenging the arbitrary structures that create and sustain the inequalities that necessitate solidarity work.

Language and Borders

We have to understand that the world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The hand is more important than the eye. ... The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.

Jacob Bronowski⁶²⁶

When you really understand what hip hop is, you know it’s not a label at all.

Hip Hop activist⁶²⁷

Language relates to borders in at least three ways: (1) Each word, each sentence, each story creates borders around an included reference (articulated) and excluded possibilities (unarticulated potential), (2) There are limits to that which language is even capable of describing, and (3) The limits of language and the specific borders of

⁶²⁴ hooks 1994. The definition of “love” intended by hooks here was borrowed from M. Scott Peck as: “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth” (1994: 247).

⁶²⁵ This can refer to solidarity work across class, gender, race, faith, language, citizenship status, incarceration status, or national boundaries as well as on behalf of or in partnership with children, physically disabled, mentally impaired, animals, plants, etc. It can also refer to shared responsibilities for resources and maintenance of social and ecological balance.

⁶²⁶ Cited in Schiller 1994: 302.

⁶²⁷ Specifically, the speaker was a participant at a women’s-only conclave at the National Hip Hop Political Convention in Newark, New Jersey. June 16 - 19, 2004, cited by Mu’id 2004: 221.

the conceptual configurations that compose any given language system, create invisible borders for what any given individual can or will think. Being raised in language like fish in the sea, it's easy to overlook so much of this and therefore the development of a critical eye toward these aspects in relation to power is a bond between "freedom" and "unfreedom." As bell hooks wrote:

To choose love is to go against the prevailing values of the culture. ...When I looked at my life, searching it for a blueprint that aided me in the process of decolonization, of personal and political self-recovery, I know that it was learning the truth about how systems of domination operate that helped, learning to look both inward and outward with a critical eye. Awareness is central to the process of love as the practice of freedom. Whenever those of us who are members of exploited and oppressed groups dare to critically interrogate our locations, the identities and allegiances that inform how we live our lives, we begin the process of decolonization.⁶²⁸

This critical eye may be particularly important for colonized peoples but colonized peoples are not only the only whose minds have been colonized. The languages of colonialism and domination sink into the very essence of how we perceive the world. John Zerzan cited a Balkan proverb, "A clock is a lock," and praised Rousseau who, "In 1749 ...threw away his watch, a symbolic rejection of modern science and civilization."⁶²⁹ Yet, by mentioning the year (and in Gregorian terms) Zerzan, in the same breath that he critiqued the concept of time, celebrated time as well (and also reaffirmed Christian dominance of that concept). This highlights some of the difficulties of critiquing language from within language. There are no "pure" vantage points from which to even begin. As Zerzan noted, "No vocabulary is available for the abstract explication of time apart from a vocabulary in which time is already presupposed."⁶³⁰ Zerzan continued: "The mathematizing of nature was the basis for the birth of modern rationalism and science in the West. ...Mathematically divisible time is necessary for the conquest of nature, and for even the rudiments of modern technology."⁶³¹ Again, the very fabric of language seamlessly shrouds the distortions that are created by its usage. The Zen master Dōgen stated, "If the slightest dualistic thinking arises, you will lose your Buddha-mind"⁶³² and, in doing so, succumbed to the dynamic that Zerzan did with time: the expression that one's Buddha-mind is an all-or-nothing game is a form of dualism. The idea that even a *slight* amount of dualistic thinking would constitute a great danger seems to belie the *slight* arising of dualistic

⁶²⁸ hooks 1994: 246, 248.

⁶²⁹ Zerzan 2002: 27.

⁶³⁰ Ibid 20.

⁶³¹ Ibid 2002: 24.

⁶³² Ives 2006: 5.

thinking in imagining that there is a sharp binary between dualistic thinking and non-dualistic thinking. Dualism, like time, permeates daily language use. Such ingrained habits and patterns are extremely difficult to see from within a language but become clearer when stepping outside of a language system and previously unseen concepts or distortions are exposed through notable differences between languages. Two strategies that Zen scholars have turned to in order to explain non-duality are simplicity and paradox. As Zen master Linji had said “If you try to grasp Zen in movement, it goes into stillness. If you try to grasp Zen in stillness, it goes into movement.”⁶³³ This means that the “paradox of Zen freedom is that it is present and available, yet somehow elusive when deliberately sought.”⁶³⁴ Regarding simplicity, there is a parable of an encounter between a student and a Zen master:

Student: Master, is there any special way to be disciplined in the Tao?

Zen master: Yes, there is.

Student: What is that?

Zen master: When you're hungry —eat. When you're tired —sleep!⁶³⁵

This points attention toward the most basic necessities of all: being in contact with oneself where no words need mediate. This surpassing of language cuts to the core of identity:

For Buddha, however, the self is a primary wrong notion. Buddha does not speak of the knowledge of any specific entity as the saving knowledge. For him the awareness of the nature of pain and its cause is itself the knowledge which sets man free. Times out of number we are told that the Buddha knows what is pain, how it arises, how it ceases etc. This can only mean that for him knowledge is the self-conscious awareness of the world-process; to realise the inexorability of the Causal Law (*pratītya-samutpāda*) is to stand aside from it. “Freedom is the knowledge of Necessity.” It is an attitude of withdrawal.

⁶³³ Cleary 1989: 9.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid* xvi.

⁶³⁵ Salajan 1974: 58. Other variants are as follows: Lin-chi (Linji): “When hungry, eat your rice; when tired, close your eyes. Folks may laugh at me, but wise men will know what I mean.” (Schiller 1994: 130) and Zen master Yuansou: “In Buddhism there is no place to apply effort. Everything in it is normal—you put on your clothes to keep warm and eat food to stop hunger—that’s all. If you consciously try to think about it, it is not what you think of. If you consciously try to arrange it, it is not what you arrange” (Cleary 1989: 78).

Avidyā is ignorance of the nature of pain etc; it is the natural but unconscious attachment to things.⁶³⁶

In the words of Linji, “If you want to be free, get to know your real self.”⁶³⁷ Knowledge of Self and knowledge of necessity cannot be separated in Zen but are inextricably bound together. In this sense, Zen conceptions far predated Hegel’s ideas that seem to have been inspired consciously or unconsciously from Zen and the Upanishads. At the same time, the concept of necessity as it appeared in Spinoza, Hegel, Marx and Engels seems to have departed from Zen conceptions.⁶³⁸

One of the points that these language concerns raise is how important language is for shaping and articulating social philosophies and movements. Likewise, it underlines the impact when a group of people of stripped of their traditional language and forced to adopt the language of those who dominate them. In an article about language loss, John Hunt Peacock, Jr. discussed the challenge and irony of using Christian texts translated into Dakota as a means of learning and recovering and sustaining the language. These Christian texts had been part of a larger aim to “destroy Dakota oral culture.”⁶³⁹ Yet, here he was, using the same texts to rescue a language spoken by his grandparents but not his parents. Even from such sources, each word of Dakota was good.⁶⁴⁰ I thought of Peacock’s concerns when I read a quote by T. S. Eliot about language:

It is easier to think in a foreign language than it is to feel in it. Therefore no art is more stubbornly national than poetry. ...One of the reasons for learning at least one foreign language well is that we acquire a kind of supplementary personality; one of the reasons for not acquiring a new language *instead* of our own is that most of us do not want to become a different person.⁶⁴¹

In the context of Native America, the implications of Eliot’s words are brutal. If replacing one’s original language makes one a different person, and this is something

⁶³⁶ Murti 2013: 49.

⁶³⁷ Cleary 1989: 6.

⁶³⁸ See, for example, explanations of “necessity” in Crowther 2009 and James 2014.

⁶³⁹ Peacock 2006: 140

⁶⁴⁰ I too have lost the language of my grandparents but my concern is almost the reverse of Peacock’s. I am not attempting to learn their language nor Dakota. I am trying to write a thesis that critiques domination in the language of dominators. Trying to speak English peacefully with no more than these words, splotches of ink on paper, feels like trying to beat a sword into a ploughshare with a toothpick. In the same sense that each and every Dakota word was “good,” each and every word of English feels weighted down by centuries of brutal domination. The weight is not, however, equally distributed — hence, the focus of this dissertation on “freedom.”

⁶⁴¹ Eliot 1961: 8.

that most of us would not want to do, then what would it mean, what would it feel like for thousands upon thousands of one's people gradually being forced to learn a new language and replace one's own? To receive a new identity in the terms of the new language? Is it not a bit ironic that so many European Americans will live and die on land taken from entire peoples without knowing a word of their languages, without even being able to imagine what it would feel like to "become a different person"? And yet, still there is a tendency to speak of the "nation" or the "people" as if there actually was one "people" living as citizens of the United States, as if there were even a basic equality of opportunity in which generations of the population were not forced to "become different people." For European-Americans the first President of the United States was known as "George Washington" whereas for the Seneca he was known as "Town Destroyer."⁶⁴² Even a single word can carry a league of stories and speak of the legions buried and untold.

An example of the pain behind the necessary negotiation of language and imposed stories was told to Howard Thurman by his grandmother who had lived as a slave in the American South:

"During the old days of slavery," she said, "the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. 'Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters . . . , as unto Christ.' Then he would go on to show how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible."⁶⁴³

This is a powerful example of self-assertion in context of complete domination. That is, even when the Divine is invoked, Thurman's grandmother felt confident enough in her relationship to the Divine to relay the information that that particular verse was not worth reading. Jacquelyn Grant viewed this text from both a female and black perspective stating that, "Womanists, must, like Sojourner, 'compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness' in them. To do Womanist Theology, then, we must read and hear the Bible and engage it within the context of our own experience."⁶⁴⁴ This would seem to be the sort of critical eye that hooks referred to: the conscious deliberation and re-organization of language and stories to suit lived experiences.

Journalist Katy Waldman wrote "Language should be a light cast back on the past, not another set of chains."⁶⁴⁵ The first problem however is that some people are borne to bear the chains of the language of the people who annihilated their own language. In fact, does this not even speak of the poverty of the English language that we have no word for the extermination of a people's culture or language? How is that one could, as

⁶⁴² Mills 1997: 28.

⁶⁴³ Grant 1989: 211-212.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid 212.

⁶⁴⁵ Katy Waldman, "Slave or Enslaved Person?" *Slate*, 19 May 2015.

I did, grow up in a country where grave violence was taking place against people around me and yet I never once heard a word like “linguicide” or the equivalent thereof? Likewise, we have words for “slavery,” “genocide,” or “kidnapping,” but we have no word to adequately describe the act of mass-kidnapping and mass-enslavement of Africans that spanned centuries and was accompanied by mass “linguicide” and “culturecide” (another word that doesn’t exist in the English language).⁶⁴⁶ So one problem is an insufficient vocabulary to adequately, proportionately, and sensitively describe actual circumstances and important phenomena.

Another problem, inherent in language itself, is that of the words that already exist. Each word as a sign, points to something else which it itself is not. In doing so, it also distorts that which is being pointed at by highlighting certain aspects of its character or location in a broader system of categorization. Kenneth Burke introduced the notion of *terministic screens*: “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology, it must also be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.”⁶⁴⁷ This may not be much of a problem when the deflection does not interfere with communication or references trivial matters. Yet often the deflection takes place in regard to words of utmost concern precisely because the terms are ambiguous and claimed by various persons with various interests.

Punk rock, for example, seemed to be breaking down some social barriers and challenging arbitrary conventions. An effect of shock value in clothing, for example, exposed arbitrary conventions and norms about clothes. It originally attracted a wide variety of people. As long-time straight-edger and punk roadie Hank Pierce said, “For most of us, we were outsiders —that’s why we came to hardcore.”⁶⁴⁸ Yet, “punk” and even “hardcore” which entailed vibrant underground scenes, soon became associated with particular prototypical images of what “punk” or “hardcore” entailed. These prototypes were accompanied by insiders among the “outsiders,” circles of people who were “more punk” in contrast to those who were “less punk.” Hardcore punk began to become a routine outrage against routines. As King Coffey, of the Austin band Butthole Surfers, said:

I thought bands who played straight-ahead hardcore music missed the whole point. Playing hardcore became like being in a rockabilly band, aping a style that happened years ago. You’re not creating anything original at all. The ritual became r*****d.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Culturecide is, however, the name of a Primal Scream song as well as the name of a plunderphonic prank band.

⁶⁴⁷ Burke 1966: 45.

⁶⁴⁸ Blush 2001: 164.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid 44.

Similarly, Brad Warner wrote that “The punks weren’t real nonconformists—they just had a different standard they thought people should conform to.”⁶⁵⁰ Warner, in addition having been a member of punk band Zero Defex, is a Buddhist monk. Buddhists have been dealing with these questions for millennia. Warner insisted that Buddhism and punk rock had much in common. For one thing, both of them consisted of a basic ethic: Question authority. Warner went on to write,

Question punk authority . . . Question Zen authority. . . . No matter what authority you submit to—your teacher, your government, even Jesus H. Christ or Gautama Buddha himself—that authority is wrong. It’s wrong because the very concept of authority is already a mistake. Deferring to authority is nothing more than a cowardly shirking of personal responsibility. . . . Really tearing down authority means more than just opposing the big government and big business. You need to tear out the very roots of authority. This can never be done through violence of any kind—not ever—because the ultimate authority is your own belief in the very concept of authority. Revolt against *that* first. You need the courage to take responsibility for your own life and your own actions.⁶⁵¹

Re-formulating much of Zen tradition and simultaneously questioning Zen authority along the way, Jiddu Krishnamurti asserted that “thought cannot possibly bring freedom to the mind”⁶⁵² The very physical world of which we are a part and our cognitive apparatus, which is constructed through sensory stimuli, memory, and habits, seems to present barriers to perceiving *anything* without thought. Krishnamurti has, however, insisted that despite these challenges, it is possible.

We are physically stimulated —more and tastier food, drink, television. The whole of modern existence focuses your attention on sex. You are stimulated in every way —by books, by talk, and by an utterly permissive society. . . . Now look out of that window and see those marvelous mountains, freshly washed by last night’s rain, and that extraordinary light of California which exists nowhere else. See the beauty of the light on those hills. You can smell the clean air and the newness of the earth. The more alive you are to it, the more sensitive you are to all this immense, incredible light and beauty, the more you are with it —more your perception is heightened. That is also sensuous, just like seeing a girl. You can’t respond with your senses to the mountain and then cut them off when you see the girl; in this way you divide life, and in this division there is sorrow and conflict. When you divide the mountain-top from the valley, you are in conflict. . . . To understand all this is not to be caught in it, not to depend on it. It means never to deny anything, never to come to the conclusion or to reach any ideological, verbal state, or principle, according to which you try to live. . . . Our bodies have been made dull, just as our minds and hearts have been dulled, by our education, by our

⁶⁵⁰ Warner 2003: 28.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid: 29.

⁶⁵² Krishnamurti 1991: 127, 174.

conformity to the pattern which society has set and which denies the sensitivity of the heart. It sends us to war, destroying all our beauty, tenderness and joy. The observation of all this not verbally or intellectually but actually, makes our body and mind highly sensitive. The body will then demand the right kind of food; then the mind will not be caught in words, in symbols, in platitudes of thought. Then we shall know how to live both in the valley and on the mountain-top; then there will be no contradiction between the two.⁶⁵³

Such challenges to linguistic barriers necessarily redefine violence. Even non-violent ideals regarding the unity of humankind or world peace can be involve nascent violence insofar as they involve beliefs and distinctions:

Do you believe that the sun rises? - it is there to see, you do not have to believe in that. Belief is a form of division and therefore of violence. To be free of violence implies freedom from everything that man has put to another man, belief, dogma, rituals, my country, your country, your god and my god, my opinion, your opinion, my ideal. All those help to divide human beings and therefore breed violence.⁶⁵⁴

The annihilation of division in Krishnamurti's teaching entailed also an annihilation of choice. In contrast both to conceptions of "free will" and depictions of "freedom" that necessitate choice, Krishnamurti regarded choice to belong to the realm of violence:

...to do what one likes or choose what one likes, is still an indication of violence. Where there is choice there is no freedom. Choice implies confusion, not clarity. When you see something very clearly there is no choice, there is only action. It is only a confused mind that chooses. And choice is an indication of the lack of freedom and therefore in choice there is resistance, conflict.⁶⁵⁵

"Freedom," for Krishnamurti (as with many of those millennia-old traditions where members engaged deeply in thoughts about language and language about thoughts), was intimately bound to one's understanding of "self" as universe. He arrived at the same conclusion that Oren Lyons was told by his Onondaga uncle: each person is all that exists. This is repeated in Daoism, in the Upanishads, Zen Buddhism, and many Sufi traditions. Language, in this sense, is often a hinder for people to recognize that we are each constructed from the same shared supply of recycled goods. These recycled

⁶⁵³ Krishnamurti 1996: 94-95.

⁶⁵⁴ Krishnamurti, "On Violence" San Diego State College 3rd Public Talk 7th April 1970. <http://www.krishnamurtiaustralia.org/articles/violence1.htm> Accessed 23 December 2014.

⁶⁵⁵ From a talk in San Diego, 1970: <http://www.jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/beyond-violence/1970-04-07-jiddu-krishnamurti-beyond-violence-the-violence-in-our-lives> (accessed 23 December 2014).

goods are, however, loaded with mystery because we have barely an inkling of what's going on—much less language to describe it. In the words of biologist David Suzuki,

What we know is utterly miniscule compared with everything that remains unknown or is not understood. ...Science is strong on description; we know so little that scientists make discoveries everywhere they look. But each discovery merely reveals the magnitude of our ignorance; far from filling in the picture, these discoveries show us just how much still remains to be learned.⁶⁵⁶

Leonardo da Vinci pointed out that we know more about the movements of the stars millions of mile away than we do about the soil right there under our feet. One teaspoon of forest dirt can contain billion different bacteria divided up into 40 thousand species. We've only formally recognized about a tenth of them. That teaspoon will also contain about "twenty thousand species of fungi which, when stretched out, could extend for 150 kilometres."⁶⁵⁷ This is not to even mention the thousands of protozoa, mites, larvae, nematoda (microscopic roundworms), and earthworms found in healthy soil. And scientists know next to nothing about the bacteria living a mile or two below the earth's surface whose DNA signatures depart radically from that which is found in animals and plants at ground level. As Suzuki wrote in *Sacred Balance*,

Air is not a vacuum or empty space—it's a physical substance that embeds within us all and perfuses through us. It is constantly changing as life and geophysical forces add and subtract constituents to the composition of air, and yet over vast stretches of time the basic composition of air has remained in dynamic equilibrium. The longer each of us lives, the greater the likelihood that we will absorb atoms that were once a part of Joan of Arc and Jesus Christ, of Neanderthal people and woolly mammoths. As we have breathed in our forebears, so our grandchildren will take us in with their breath. We are bound up inseparably with the past and the future by the spirit we share. Every breath is a sacrament, an affirmation of our connection with all other living things, a renewal of our link with our ancestors and a contribution to generations yet to come. Our breath is a part of life's breath, the ocean of air that envelops Earth. Unique in the solar system, air is both the creator and the creation of life itself.⁶⁵⁸

According to a Native South American saying, "To become human, one must make room in oneself for the wonders of the universe"⁶⁵⁹ Or, as Alan Watts put it, we are all "God in disguise."⁶⁶⁰ Watts used the metaphor of waves on the ocean. Each person constitutes a visible crest on a wave but eventually crashes back down into the ocean that the person was never actually separate from (Warner used this exact same metaphor

⁶⁵⁶ Suzuki 2007: 30, 34.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid 120.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid 63.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid 35.

⁶⁶⁰ Watts 1972: 14.

to describe the same principle but he drew a picture of waves and designated them “Moe,” “Larry,” “Curly,” and “You”). These concepts are not exclusively an East vs. West dichotomy even if the idea of oneness would qualify as a minority position at best in dominant European-language traditions and completely excluded from dominant conversations about “freedom.” In a quote attributed to Albert Einstein, we hear:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the universe. A part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is kind of a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affections for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures.⁶⁶¹

This is what Zen masters meant when they would say “If you want to be free, get to know your real self.”⁶⁶² In the phrasing of D. T. Suzuki, this knowledge is not the same as liberation but, like language, merely “points the way from bondage to freedom.”⁶⁶³ Subsequently, Zen developed a tradition of challenging tradition. Zen master Ying-an is reported to have said that “genuine Zen students have no resorts, no fixed creed or religion.”⁶⁶⁴ So with a long tradition of reserving Zen practice to a monastic few, the question arises what the implications of negotiating language or oneness would have on larger social structures.

White Zen scholar Christopher Ives suggested six aspects of Zen that imply certain implications for addressing larger issues of human suffering. Along with non-dualism, non-attachment, and motionlessness (or “doing nothing” as I like to think of it), there is a resistance to substantive approaches to categorization (that is, a resistance to identifying things by their observable features): “In this way Zen challenges the denial, distraction, and numbing seen in complacent acceptance of reigning ideologies, whether consumerism, representation of the United States as innocent and backed by God, or representations of the United States as a satanic force out to destroy Islam.”⁶⁶⁵ While Ives argued that Zen and Buddhism in general has only recently been developing social visions to match their philosophical positions, other have argued that these visions have been implicit for centuries. White scholar Joseph Silverstein wrote in *Asian Freedoms*:

⁶⁶¹ Suzuki 2007: 46.

⁶⁶² Cleary 1989: 6.

⁶⁶³ Suzuki, cited in Schiller 1994: 254.

⁶⁶⁴ Paraphrased by Cleary 1989: 111.

⁶⁶⁵ Ives 2006: 9. Also see Shields 2014 for a discussion of historical examples of socialist and anarchist types of Buddhism 1868-1912. On a related note, Charles Long shared a story of when Alexander the Great advanced into India with his tremendous army and was met by Buddhist monks who asked him with an “enquiring detachment... ‘Who are you? Do you have a home? Why aren’t you home?’” (2004: 89).

Buddhist political thought argues that men lived originally in a state of nature and needed no ruler to regulate their lives because they lived virtuously, respecting the rights of others and fulfilling their own obligations consciously. ...once monarchy was established kings assumed unbridled authority... Obedience to the ruler became a quasi-religious duty. ...Freedom in this system was seen at the village level. Even when the system was under a strong king, his representative had limited powers. He collected taxes, commanded performance of services and adjudicated legal disputes; in most other matters concerning the people's lives, he did not interfere. ...as a result the villagers controlled most of their own affairs. ...In traditional Burma, freedom was implicit in Buddhism and explicitly practiced by Burmans and non-Burmans alike without ever being extracted and claimed as an independent good.⁶⁶⁶

While not necessarily contradicting the point made by Ives that an explicitly Buddhist political philosophy has not been developed, this does imply that the terms of "freedom" have been envisioned (through a state of nature that was opposite of the one depicted by Hobbes) as well as practiced (through local autonomy). Yet somehow, these experiences are not translated into European language conversations about "freedom" or are marginalized. These points bring us to a third problem with language which is that the boundaries that are implied are used to organize in-groups and out-groups by dominant interests. In this way, the inadequacies already mentioned perform their distorting work upon entire groups. As religious studies scholar Charles H. Long wrote,

For the majority culture of this country, blacks have always been signified. By this I mean that they have always been a part of a cultural code whose euphemisms and stereotypes have indicated their meaning within the larger framework of American cultural languages.⁶⁶⁷

Long went on to write that "...no American theology or theology of freedom can come about without dealing with the existence of [the black] community. ... The inordinate fear [that whites in the U.S.] have of minorities is an expression of the fear they have when they contemplate the possibility of seeing themselves as they really are."⁶⁶⁸ In other words, seen from a decolonialist perspective, white liberation with respect to language depends on facing up to and recognizing black people and white racism in the myriad ways that they affect all parties.

In *Learning to be White* (2013), critical race scholar Thandeka (her full name) offered some practical tools to help white people hear what they have been trying to avoid hearing and see that which they have turned away from. Part of the denial has been a guilt complex that has disguised how racism hurts white people. Thandeka

⁶⁶⁶ Silverstein 1998: 190-191.

⁶⁶⁷ Long 1986: 7.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid 135.

regarded racism as a system of violence that persecutes all parties even if the persecution appears differently.⁶⁶⁹ She told the story of Dan, a white Presbyterian minister who joined a fraternity when he was in college in the 1950s and invited a black student to join as well. When national headquarters found out, they demanded that the local charter would be rescinded unless the student was expelled. Dan was elected to inform him. And he did. “I felt so ashamed of what I did,” he told Thandeka, and he cried: “I have carried this burden for forty years. I will carry it to my grave.”⁶⁷⁰

Thandeka did not look at these stories with pity and she certainly wished that they had had more courage (something they often complained that they lacked) yet she did recognize it nonetheless as a form of abuse: “I realized that being white for Dan was not a matter of racist conviction but a matter of survival, not a privilege but a penalty: the pound of flesh exacted for the right to be excluded from the excluded.”⁶⁷¹ In a speech Thandeka gave in 1999, she compared the practice of racism to body mutilation:

Imagine that business and government leaders decreed that all left-handed people must have their left hand amputated. Special police forces and armies are established to find such persons and oversee the procedure. University professors and theologians begin to write tracts to justify this new policy. Soon the right-handed begin to think of themselves as having right-hand privilege. The actual content of this privilege, of course, is negative: it’s the privilege of not having one’s left hand cut off. The privilege, in short, is the avoidance of being tortured by the ruling elite.

To speak of such a privilege — if we must call it that — is not to speak of power but rather of powerlessness in the midst of a pervasive system of abuse— and to admit that the best we can do in the face of injustice is duck and thus avoid being a target.

My point is this. Talk of white skin privilege is talk about the way in which some of the citizens of this country are able to avoid being mutilated—or less metaphorically, having their basic human rights violated.

One of the tasks that he had in her book was to enable whites to recognize this “pervasive system of abuse” which affected all parties. She had noticed in her experience with white people what many of them did not see racism as affecting them. This was one of the problems. So she devised two exercises for the white Americans she encountered who wanted to see how race worked in their lives.

The first exercise was very simple and most whites could perform the task without much difficulty. It was simply to remember the first moment in their life when they learned what it meant to be white. One woman, for example, named Dorothy (a pseudonym) was a poet who told Thandeka that she did not have a white identity. “She

⁶⁶⁹ This summary here shall also borrow from a speech she gave at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1999 on the same topic.

⁶⁷⁰ Thandeka 2013:1

⁶⁷¹ Thandeka 1999.

was simply an American.” Thandeka offered to help her find her whiteness. Through the memory exercise the woman recalled that when Dorothy was five years old, she had lived in Mexico. Although the housekeeper brought her own five-year old daughter to work, Dorothy’s parents had forbidden her to play with the other girl or any Mexican children. In fact, she and her two brothers were forbidden leave their gated yard. True to form, whiteness appeared in the form of a prison for the little child being school in the art of “white privilege.” Then, after finding herself astonished that these intense feelings had not surfaced previously despite much therapeutic work through her poetry, Dorothy looked at Thandeka and said:

“You know, you are the first black I’ve ever felt comfortable with talking about racism.”

I said, “Why is it so easy for you to think of me as a ‘black,’ and yet until a few minutes ago you could not make any sense out of thinking about yourself as a ‘white’? Further, were we really talking about racism? And if so, whose? Your parents’? Yours? That of the five-year-old girl who wanted to be brown?”

Dorothy was silent for a long moment.⁶⁷²

At that point, Dorothy was horrified to realize that if Thandeka was “black” the whole time, then she must have been “white” the whole time but Dorothy censored herself because, as she put it, “I might not like what I hear myself saying.” The conversation ended very quickly.⁶⁷³

Now, that was the first exercise that Thandeka offered white people. It was the easy one. The second one was far more difficult to find any “takers.” Even enthusiastic European Americans who were initially eager to challenge their own whiteness and combat racism almost always found themselves at a loss. The exercise was called the “Race Game” and it had only one rule: Every time the player spoke in a white setting about other European Americans, they were to insert the word “white” before referring to them. For example, “I am going to meet my white friend Linda for lunch and after that I’ll pick up my white kids from school.” The game was to last one week. Until the time she wrote the book, only one person, Douglas, played the game. When he gave her the report about how it went, he sounded as if he had been traumatized:

Every time I decided to play the game with someone new, I felt that I was about to be rejected, that the person would turn away, and that I would be shunned. I felt terrible. ...Before I said it, I’d hesitate as if I were about to stutter, and I don’t even stutter — ever! I am never at a loss for words. But now I couldn’t pronounce the word. I’d made a

⁶⁷² Thandeka 2013: 11-12.

⁶⁷³ The feelings that were aroused in Dorothy were something that Thandeka had come to label “white shame” which occurs when a child is forced (unwillingly) to think of itself as “white” and continues to do so “as a self-protection against racial abuse from its own community” (137).

commitment to play the game so I steeled myself and by sheer force of will I said it: *white*. As soon as I said the word, the other person's face would pickle. Right away, very defensively, I'd say, "Oh, I'm playing the Race Game" and try to explain what it was all about. The other person found an excuse to leave as quickly as possible. Each experience was so awful that for two days I forgot that I was supposed to do it. It was a miserable experience.⁶⁷⁴

Thandeka analyzed this by suggesting that Douglas felt both guilt and shame: guilt for having broken an unspoken "gentlemen's agreement" between European Americans who do not see themselves as racist. He felt shame, she said, because he now faced the feelings that, like Dorothy, he had rejected in order to stay within the whites-only area. The realization clashed with his view of himself. As another example of the uncomfortable choices one is forced to make as a child, she cited "neo-conservative pundit" Norman Podhoretz who explained how he had learned, from his position of growing up Jewish to become a "facsimile WASP" in order to "become eligible for a whole range of the powers and privileges America had to offer."⁶⁷⁵ "Negros" Podhoretz asserted had no chance of becoming a "facsimile WASP" like he did: "I personally was to be rewarded for this repression with a new and better life in the future, but how many of my friends paid an even higher price and were given only gall in return."⁶⁷⁶ Even one interviewee, Wallace, who had told her about how he had been repeatedly harassed by police for entering African American sections of town or hanging with African American friends would, at the end of the day, return to his home in the all-white suburb where he grew up. The process of learning to comply with such racial divisions is gradual. Thandeka wrote:

In the face of adult silence to racial abuse, the child learns to silence and then deny its own resonant feelings toward racially proscribed others. ... The child thus learns, 'layer by layer,' to stay away from the nonwhite zones of its own desires. The internal nonwhite zone is the killing fields of desire, the place where impulses to community with person beyond the pale are slaughtered.⁶⁷⁷

Because of this lose-lose scenario, Thandeka placed the racial indoctrination of children into the category of child abuse.⁶⁷⁸ Yet this abuse is so embedded with dominant

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid 14.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid 29.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid 31.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid 24.

⁶⁷⁸ This made me wonder what the United States would look with such a definition in regard to their policies of child protective services? How many European American children would have to be removed from their parents due to such "abuse"? Would it at least be more justified than the forced removal of

cultural discourse that many people take it for granted as if abuse were natural. She cited Martha Nussbaum's claim that racial categories are fixed: one "cannot in fact change one's race."⁶⁷⁹ To the contrary, Thandeka noted, anthropologists and biologists agree that racial categories are arbitrary and observed the irony of Nussbaum claiming to be "Jewish" when Jews have been classed in the same category as blacks.⁶⁸⁰

These negotiations of language thus have addressed several challenges worth reviewing briefly. (1) There are questions of a lack of words (and stories) to match actual experience; (2) The distortion that words (and stories) create amplifies difficulties in matching cognition with experience. Language is severely restricted in its potential for describing the world and experience. It is therefore bound to mystery and fluidity yet distorts mystery with the illusion of clarity and mislabels uncertainty with the semblance of certainty; (3) To act of "free will," to choose, in light of these problems was, for Krishnamurti, an act of violence because the act of choosing entails comparison and the use of implicitly distorting and violent categories. The act of choosing is furthermore a betrayal of the type of "freedom" that is bound and strapped to an inescapable acknowledgment of oneself as oneness, as One wherein behavior is not dependent upon choice; (4) The social realities of domination have created additional layers of violence through the use of dominating categories such as "race" which are invisibilized by those who seemingly benefit from those categories. Thandeka discussed "privilege" as a questionable term in relation to dynamics of violence that injure all parties (albeit differently and to different degrees). This raises the same question in relation to "rights" and the violence that accompanies the systemic articulation and organization of rights distribution.

Native American children who were relocated from their families to boarding schools and force-fed ideologies that were racially excluded the cultures they came from?

⁶⁷⁹ Nussbaum cited by Thandeka (2013: 124); Original quote drawn from Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 (92).

⁶⁸⁰ What, I would add, would Nussbaum make of Zephaniah the Hebrew Cushite (Sadler 2005)? Thandeka cited the work of anthropologist Jared Diamond who named three anthropological procedures of classifying race that would be "equally valid" to the conceptions based on skin tone alone. Of the three alternatives Italians and Swedes would be classified together with black Africans in two of them (but separate from one another: Italians with most African blacks and Swedes with either the Fulani in Nigeria or Xhosas in South Africa) and, in the third, classified together in a category that included Swedes, Italians, New Guineans, and American Indians.⁶⁸⁰ While the categories were fluid, they were nonetheless ascribed fixity (as Nussbaum did). Instead, as Thandeka observed, "racial classification systems are tautologies." They are what they are because we say they are what they are.

Relationship and Bonds

Returning to hooks, we hear that “Choosing love we also choose to live in community, and that means that we do not have to change by ourselves.”⁶⁸¹ This act in itself is a form of resistance against ideologies that attempt to isolate people and place the weight of the world upon the shoulders of each person and, thereby, in the end, upon nobody. Thus, for hooks, the act of entering community is an act based not primarily upon looking to receive but upon devotion. It is, in part, through these acts of devotion we learn love: “A love ethic emphasizes the importance of service to others. ...Service strengthens our capacity to know compassion and deepens our insight. ...In part, we learn to love by giving service.”⁶⁸²

In community it becomes easier to recognize “self” as manifest in relationship. James Cone recalled that Martin Luther King, Jr. “believed deeply that all ‘life is interrelated.’ No person or nation can be free or at peace without everyone being free and at peace.” After citing Cone and King, Anthony Pinn continued: “Somehow, and in some way,’ King proclaims, ‘we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will all perish together.... We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”⁶⁸³ It is this type of community that Pinn stated as the “organizing principle of humanist religion.” Not restricted to relationships to living beings, “it is a more expansive framework. In part, the scope of this sense of community is worked out over against the sense of God as restraint found in the biblical story of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel.”⁶⁸⁴

In *What is African American Religion?* (2011) Pinn cited a narrative by James Baldwin and referred to how the character, John Grimes, found himself inextricably connected to the “tortured souls” of history who had been subjected to the “most cruel lash” of the whip, to dungeons, to rape, to families torn asunder, to flesh set on fire, to lynchings in the night, to unspeakable terrors that wail without end: “he was in their company, and they would swallow up his soul. The stripes they had endured would scar his back, their punishment would be his, their portion his, his their humiliation, anguish, chains, their dungeon his, their death his.”⁶⁸⁵ This torture, this agony, was his salvation. In recognizing his history, John Grimes, a fictionalized version of James Baldwin himself, was now, in Pinn’s words’, “free to develop a more complex and liberated consciousness.”⁶⁸⁶ Baldwin furthermore made an interesting note in relation to the existential implications of this awareness: “from time set free, but bound now in

⁶⁸¹ hooks 1994: 248.

⁶⁸² Ibid 249.

⁶⁸³ Pinn 2012: 35.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid 7.

⁶⁸⁵ Pinn 2011: 68.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid 69.

eternity.”⁶⁸⁷ Acknowledgement of fundamental interdependence is not then a walk in the park but a profound sensitivity to and cognizance of immense suffering. And, yet, it is a form of liberation nonetheless in acknowledgment of its boundedness. It was precisely the lack of this type of recognition that enabled Patterson to characterize stereotypical “Germans” as “free” under Nazi rule.

A century prior, the socialist, Universalist turned Unitarian, and founder of Hopedale Community, Adin Ballou, articulated a vision of interdependence that both highlighted existing connections between people as well as emphasized that the knowledge of connection is accompanied by responsibility. According to this perspective, we cannot extricate ourselves from the plight of others nor can we hide behind the anonymity of the state and market in order to ethically separate ourselves from decisions that are being made on our behalf. Ballou insisted that when others perform acts on our behalf (that we, for example, pay for through taxes or commerce), it is ethically equivalent to having performed those actions ourselves: “what [a man] does through others he really does himself.”⁶⁸⁸ As such, people are responsible for what governments do in their name:

If a political compact [...] requires, authorizes, provides for, or tolerates war, bloodshed, capital punishment, slavery, or any kind of absolute injury, offensive or defensive, the man who swears, affirms or otherwise pledges himself, to support such a compact [...] is just as responsible for every act of injury done in strict conformity thereto, as if he himself personally committed it.⁶⁸⁹

The implications of this are somewhat mind-boggling. If one were to imagine every animal locked up and killed, every guard beating a prisoner, every person who was killed because of national borders, every missile shot from a drone or fighter plane that lands in a person’s living room tearing apart the lives in that community, the ethical burdens simply of registering or acknowledging these actions, to say nothing of doing something about them, would be tremendous and life-changing.

If we accepted the ethical impact of each purchase in which we own responsibility for the low wages required to manufacture our goods, the long hours that workers were subjected to, the massive round of lay-offs that the distribution company engaged in two years prior, the ecological ramifications of all the energy usage that was required to create, produce, store, transport, deliver, and service each purchase, it would be again be more than a mind to handle just to buy a pack of chewing gum, to say nothing of a cell phone, computer, or car. As Hornborg suggested, our current system of economics necessitates a vast ignorance about what we are actually doing in order to sustain our behavior. Ethical reasoning is scuttled to those whose calculated cost-efficient mentality has enabled them to lay off workers who desperately need jobs, incarcerate animals

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid 67.

⁶⁸⁸ Cited in Christoyannopoulos (2011: 45).

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid; Original source: Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance*, chap. 1, para. 53.

whose entire lives play out inside of a cage, or tear down forests and animal habitats in order to reap profits from “development.” John Zerzan shared an example of this type of conversation today during an interview conducted by Derrick Jensen:

I was having a discussion about technological society with a few friends, and some of them were saying, “Well, we’ve got to have phones. We can’t do away without them.” And another friend responded, “Are you going to down in the mines [to retrieve the necessary minerals to make the phones]? Are you going to do that?” Because our whole lifestyles is predicated on someone having to slave his or her life away, or rather millions and millions of someones. I wouldn’t go down there unless you put a gun to my head. And of course some people do have guns to their heads, because they don’t have as much flexibility as you or I do so far as surviving. But those of us who don’t have guns to our heads need to be aware of the bargains we make in order to live the way we do.⁶⁹⁰

This intimate web of connection to the actions of others would not only connect people ethically to political and economic transactions but it would also connect people’s stories by recognizing that one group’s stories are somehow interwoven with the stories of others (even if often silently or remotely so). The stories that are told and shared within one group would carry the ethical impact of exclusion even if one did not engage in the act of exclusion oneself.

The implications then that follow from interdependence are not particularly compatible with world views that depict human beings as isolated individuals but they do fit well with many Native traditions which tend to conceive of human identity as enmeshed in social and natural orders. In *Ubuntu and the Law* (2012), an anthology edited by Drucilla Cornell and Nyoko Muvangua, the example of *ubuntu* is examined. Through the famous phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* means (“a person is a person by or through other people”) *ubuntu* has been described as “a philosophical concept forming the basis of relationships” and “a traditional politico-ideological concept referring to socio-political action”⁶⁹¹ as well as the “communality and the interdependence of the members of a community” and the idea that “every individual is an extension of others.”⁶⁹² Rather than diminish individuality or responsibility, the authors argue, *ubuntu* enables both of them *through* ethical relationship.

We can understand then, that our ethical relationship to others is inseparable from how we are both embedded and supported by a community that is not outside each one of us, but is inscribed in us. The inscription of the other also calls the individual out of himself or herself back towards the ancestors, forwards towards the community, and further towards relations of mutual support for the potential of each one of us.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹⁰ Zerzan 2002: 82.

⁶⁹¹ Mabogo More, cited by Cornell and Muvangua (2012: 6).

⁶⁹² Justice Langa, cited by Cornell and Muvangua (2012: 4).

⁶⁹³ Cornell and Muvangua (2012: 5).

This inscription entails that rather than being born free, people enter reciprocal “obligations from the time they are born.” They wrote that “*uBuntu* ...does not conceive of a social bond as one that precedes through an imagined social contract [but] is both the Africa principles of transcendence for the individual, and the law of the social bond.” In these social relations of interdependence, there is no conception of an isolated individual. To transcend the limitations of individual-based ontologies would be to “develop such a connection to otherness... precisely because we are ethically intertwined with others and therefore they are in a profound sense part of ourselves.”⁶⁹⁴

If connections between people are recognized as critical then it would become impossible to completely disentangle one group’s “freedom” from another group’s “unfreedom.” As Frances E. W. Harper said in her speech, “Woman’s Political Future” in 1893, “I know that no nation can gain its full measure of enlightenment and happiness if one-half of it is free and the other half is fettered. China compressed the feet of her women and thereby retarded the steps of her men.”⁶⁹⁵ In *A Brief History of Justice*, David Johnston shared a story that expressed how this entanglement is implicit even in social relationships with strangers. In an experiment in which people performed a task and shared the pay with a “co-worker” located somewhere else (a computer but they didn’t know that). When they were given \$2 of the \$3 total, they felt bad. When they were given \$1, they felt worse. They felt best when both parties received equal pay (\$1.50). In contrast to theories that suggest people seek maximum gain when possible, this study suggested that people did not do so because they did not want to be “beneficiaries of unfairness.”⁶⁹⁶ Similar studies have been done with infants suggesting that there is an innate desire for fairness.

This tendency toward fairness can however be distorted or squelched as people are conditioned to ignore the suffering of others or care less about “public affairs.” In transgressing the law on behalf of (or in partnership with) others for the sake of justice and fairness, Philip Berrigan discovered how such a world view seemed nearly incomprehensible to people who had acclimated to conditions of social inequality and acceptance for the violence of the status quo. Berrigan discussed the paradox of how people tend to view the lawyer-client relationship. He insisted that it is far from a doctor-patient or driver-mechanic relationship. The lawyer is not there to fix a problem for the client when the client has committed an act of civil disobedience and solidarity. If anything, it was Berrigan’s mission to help the lawyer and liberate him from his

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid 4.

⁶⁹⁵ Guy-Sheftall 1995: 42.

⁶⁹⁶ Johnston (2011: 10); His sources for this and similar studies: Austin, G. and Walster, E. “Participants Reaction to ‘Equity with the World.’” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (1974): 528-548; Lerner, Melvin J. “The Justice Motive in Human Relations and the Economic Model of Man: A Radical Analysis of Facts and Fictions.” In *Cooperation and Helping Behavior: Theories and Research*. Edited by Valerian J. Derlega and Janusz Grzlak, 249-278. New York: Academic Press, 1982.

condition of chronic insensitivity. To do so, he had to attempt to explain how it could be that he could make the choices that he does at such great personal expense.

This is partly because when a man goes to jail on behalf of people (including himself), personal burdens have lost significance, while universal burdens have increased in importance. Or because the “I” has grown to mean less, and the “we” more. Or because one has sensed “the inner order” of things, craving further familiarity with it. But this is an order which legality and lawyers can seldom understand and almost never defend.⁶⁹⁷

Philip Berrigan’s concerns could be understood as a personal sense of moral obligation but also as an intellectual appreciation for the implications of connections between people, the interdependence of social relationships expressed by Ballou. Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer expressed a conception of interconnectedness in somewhat different terms:

I never been hung up in all of my work in just fighting for the black. I’ve never been hung up in that because I know that a lot of black people have given their lives. But I also know that it was people like Andy Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney that gave their lives in the state of Mississippi so that we might all have a better chance. And when they died, they didn’t just die for me, they died for you because your freedom is shackled in chains to mine. And until I am free you are not free either. And if you think you are free, you drive down to Mississippi with your Wisconsin license plate and you will see what I am talking about. These are the kinds of changes that we have to have.

Acknowledgment of interconnection can therefore turn dominant conceptions of “freedom” on its head. Unlike Mills’ and Berlin’s separation of individual “freedom” from collective and global injustice, this view presents an assertion that we are not “free” to live in a world without great disparity and unequal distribution of power and resources—we are only “free” to struggle toward that goal. Some have even argued that we are only “free” *when* we struggle for such things. Yet, however much we may be enriched by our commitments, made joyous by our labor, or find our better selves in sacrifice and imprisonment for the sake of a better world, it is not *just* “freedom” if that is the word for it. It is also something most people would recognize as “unfree.” *Commitment* to others in relationship and community in the spirit of *service* entails *obligation* and *boundedness* even if it is framed as a recognition of a boundedness that already existed.

⁶⁹⁷ Philip Berrigan (1971: 112-113); Philip Berrigan made it clear that from his perspective, lawyers who defended plowshare activists were not doing their part for the cause of justice. Instead, the lawyers were being served by the activists who shared their witness with one and all.

In order to illustrate one concrete example of how people organized together in community in order to both increase their collective power and share the burdens of addressing their needs in the face of difficult circumstances including lack of education, poverty, and racism, we can look at an interfaith, inter-class, inter-cultural group in San Antonio, Texas named Community Organized for Public Service (COPS).⁶⁹⁸ As white sociologist Mark Warren wrote about the IAF and COPS in *Dry Bones Rattling*,

If these groups were simply religious advocates for the poor, they would not be very remarkable. America is full of advocacy groups... We lack not advocacy groups but organizations in which people themselves actively participate in democracy. What makes the Texas IAF distinctive is its ability to engage hundreds of community leaders in active political participation and mobilize thousands of supporters to address the needs of their families and communities. Moreover, in contrast to the racial segregation of American community and political life, the network strives to bring together leaders from Mexican American, African American, and Anglo communities of a variety of faiths and economic circumstances to find common ground for action. ...COPS created a hybrid organizational form. Its members were institutions, that is, churches. But the organization was not a coalition, composed of institutional representatives. Its leadership was drawn broadly from the membership of those institutions, and leaders to take action for the needs of their own particular neighborhoods at the same time as the organization could also act with a single will, as something more than the sum of its parts.⁶⁹⁹

In 1976, COPS allied with local environmentalists to help organize enough votes at the city council to block the construction of a shopping mall over the Edwards Aquifer (San Antonio's only source of drinking water). In 1977, they organized enough voters in the city to put Hispanics and an African American on the city council eliminating the majority Anglo domination that had reigned until then (even though Anglos constituted less than a half of the population). Over the years, they have secured hundreds of millions of dollars of public funding to fill local needs from infrastructure and draining systems to educational needs. This was enabled in part precisely because COPS had organized a broad base of participants and developed leadership from people, particularly Hispanics and women, who worked as nurses, secretaries or homemakers. Through COPS many of them developed public speaking skills and came to engage their voices in institutions (both church and local governance) that had previously excluded them.

⁶⁹⁸ It is difficult for me to read or write the acronym COPS without wondering why they chose those initials and the implications it can have for many people who read it in light of potentially negative experiences with police. In any case, COPS is affiliate with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) which was founded by Saul Alinsky in 1940 to facilitate community organizing projects between various faith and civic organizations. Today it has 65 affiliates across the world of which COPS is one.

⁶⁹⁹ Warren 2001: 4, 52.

The example of these organizers in San Antonio sheds new light on Thandeka's expression that the very separation of people from one another in segregated and disparate regions of race and class is a form of "unfreedom."⁷⁰⁰ That is, people (especially working people) of all races are not only victimized as individuals but also as collectives who are hindered from being empowered and enriched by collaborating with others. The same thing could be argued in terms of separation by distance (Bauman's Abbey and Zerzan's mine) or separation from nature. As Janet Morrison said, "You've got to have the relationship with somebody to understand that what hurts you hurts me. If you don't have a relationship with people, it doesn't hurt as much."⁷⁰¹ When certain classes of people are flying airplanes while many others wish they had a functioning bicycle and while countless urbanites lose touch with the contours and crevices of landscapes and habitats upon which they depend, all parties lose. Collective subjugation becomes a result of these constructs of separation.

David Suzuki has seen this as a critical downward development: "The current generation of children are some of the most disconnected from nature ever in our history. . . . when direct experience with nature is limited, so is our emotional connection to the places that ultimately sustain us."⁷⁰² This disconnection has consequences both for security and survival as well as whatever conceptions of "freedom" and "unfreedom" might be used to describe our increasingly precarious futures.

In *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (2010), sociologists John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York point out that before the rise of industrial capitalism the amount of nitrogen removed from the atmosphere was 0 tons per year. According to Johan Rockström of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the boundary to avoid irreversible degradation to earth's eco-system is 35 million tons per year. At the time of the book's writing, the amount of nitrogen removed from the atmosphere for human use per year was 121 million tons. It is in this context that we are presented with paradoxes such as the Jevons Paradox (rising efficiency in coal use has been shown to lead to *more* coal consumption) and the Paperless Office Paradox (the spread of computers and digital storage was sold with the idea of saving paper but has merely led to an *increase* in paper consumption).⁷⁰³ To an outside observer, this pattern might seem alarmingly and call for a need to press the brakes.

⁷⁰⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, "unfreedom" is intended to be (like "freedom") quite ambiguous. In general, it shall refer to those things typically regarded to be constraints on "freedom" such as violence, constraint, coercion, limitations, boundaries, bondage, obligations, responsibilities, control, borders, obstacles, hinders, submission, obedience, burdens, and so on. At the same time, in accordance with the general critique against "freedom" as a fictive construction, "unfreedom" too is regarded to be incoherent when assumed to be an independent concept. It is therefore both ambiguous and bound to the concept of "freedom."

⁷⁰¹ Cited in Warren 2010: 55.

⁷⁰² Suzuki 2007: 45.

⁷⁰³ See Foster et al 2010: 184-191.

However, in *The Power of the Machine* (2001), anthropologist Alf Hornborg argued that such paradoxes are inherent in the systemic logic of machine-based capitalism. The illusion that one can keep extracting more and more from less and less is built into the logic of cheap labor and colonialism. Machine technology's foundation is rooted not in know-how or expertise but in terms of global unequal exchange. That is, the Second Law of Thermodynamics requires that energy be dissipated in its transfer, thus creating entropy as a by-product of any natural or technical process of creation. In Hornborg's words it means that "any local accretion of order can occur only at the expense of the total sum of order in the universe."⁷⁰⁴ In Western society however, machine technology is typically produced to provide services for a market of consumers whose understanding of technology is that of increasing opportunities (growth) without consideration for the material, labor, and ecological costs required to produce it. The dislocation of resource extraction and production from the spheres of consumption and use perpetuate a cultural illusion that the machines that seemingly do work for us *appear to* diminish the amount of labor required to accomplish various tasks and goals. The material dynamics are more complicated however than the smooth screen of a cell phone or gears of a bulldozer would imply:

Whereas the productive potential of traditional trade goods was defined by local value systems and subject to negotiation, technology renders the productive potential of fossil fuels a locally unnegotiable aspect of reality. Yet—and this is my main point here – this unnegotiable “material” appearance is a cultural illusion, for the technology itself is contingent on the rates at which products can be exchanged for fuels and raw materials—that is, on world market prices. World market prices, of course, are as negotiable and social constructed as any local evaluations. It is by having been removed from the local and personal level and delegated to the global and impersonal that market evaluations—and the technologies that they make possible—have assumed the appearance of natural law. “Growth” is not something that technology generates in a purely material sense, but a consequence of how industrial prices are evaluated in relation to fuel and raw materials. Growth and technology are thus not primarily material parameters but sociocultural constructions.⁷⁰⁵

In other words, what *appears* to be growth in the global “center” is really a reallocation of energy and resources from one sector to another, from the have-nots (whose lands, minerals, and labor are explicitly underpriced) to the haves (who have determined the terms of trade in their own favor). Thus, there is no “growth” inasmuch as there is expropriation and exploitation. So in this light, the expansion of *Homo colossus* is not only devastating a shared eco-system, it is (we are) also unfolding along colonialist pathways, devouring resources according to historically unequal asymmetrical relationships that began more than 500 years ago.

⁷⁰⁴ Hornborg 2001: 123.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid 13.

As responsibility is diffused throughout global networks of transaction, corporations, state sovereignty, and so on, the relationship between each person and each person's responsibility to address shared burdens is extremely ambiguous. Referring to white sociologist Marcel Mauss, white anthropologist Michael Jackson wrote:

two incommensurable notions of value are always at play in any exchange —the first involving the strict calculation of determinate values, the second involving elusive moral values (Mauss's "spiritual matter") such as rightness, fair play, and justice. Another way of making this point is to say that all exchange involves a continual struggle to give, claim, or redistribute some scarce and elusive existential good—such as recognition, love, humanity, happiness, voice, power, presence, honour, or dignity—whose value is incalculable. ...It is this ambiguity that makes fairness, justice, and equity so difficult to attain.⁷⁰⁶

Ecological systems, whether social, emotional, or material, are prime examples of contexts in which the exchange of these values are incalculable. That is, the ethical principle articulated by Ballou is impossible to resolve in a mathematical fashion. This is perhaps why sustainable societies throughout history have placed more emphasis on duty, obligation, service, loyalty, respect, community, and cooperation rather than systematic coercion, individualism, and "freedom."

What we have seen here then is that there are articulations of "freedom" entwined with "unfreedom"—that is, (un)freedom— that (1) begin with commitment to service in community as channels toward a broader self-awareness, (2) view relationship in terms of interdependence, (3) acknowledge responsibility for actions done on one's behalf, and/or (4) are faced with the shared burdens that are incalculable.

These are difficult channels for those trapped within the Abbey to be exposed to. As Nazi German citizens woke up from Patterson's "freedom" in 1945 to a devastated war-torn country under the occupation of foreign troops, the awakening denizens of the Abbey to the world outside or even to inequalities and asymmetrical power relationships within the Abbey can be painful, even brutal. Yet the pain and brutality of waking up to atrocities committed on one's behalf is precisely an expression of the "freedom/unfreedom" inherent in knowledge which, in this case, is a knowledge of pain that another part of our collective relations or shared body has experienced and may still be experiencing. As hooks put it:

Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth. This is usually the most painful stage in the process of learning to love —the one many of us seek to avoid. Again, once we choose

⁷⁰⁶ Jackson 1999: 42.

love, we instinctively possess the inner resources to confront the pain. Moving through the pain to the other side we find the joy, the freedom of spirit that a love ethic brings.⁷⁰⁷

Recalling hooks' words at the beginning of this section, the ethic of love in community is service. When members of a community then gather on terms of mutual service, it becomes possible to shoulder incalculable burdens together.

Obligations and Bondage

Even though Karl Barth was opposed to them, the liberals were right in their stress on freedom as an essential element of the imago Dei, though they had the wrong idea of freedom. Freedom is not a rational decision about possible alternatives; it is a participation of the whole person in the liberation struggle. The Barthians were correct on the personal aspect of freedom in the divine-human encounter, but they failed to place due emphasis on the role of liberation in an oppressive society.

-James Cone⁷⁰⁸

If you're not ready to die for it, take the word "freedom" out of your vocabulary.

-Malcolm X⁷⁰⁹

Now, after discussing challenges both in language and relationship, hooks emphasized that the community within one struggles is, in turn, setting its gaze outward as well as inward in its work, in its service, in its duty to those outside of the community. Referring to leaders such as Septima Clark, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, and Howard Thurman, hooks wrote:

They encouraged black people to look beyond our own circumstances and assume responsibility for the planet. This call for communion with a world beyond the self, the tribe, the race, the nation, was a constant invitation for personal expansion and growth.⁷¹⁰

What she implied here then was not merely a reaction to injustices that oneself or one's own community was subject to, not just a struggle for "an end to what we feel is hurting us,"⁷¹¹ but toward a sense of obligation toward all people and all life. The obligation is

⁷⁰⁷ hooks 1994: 248.

⁷⁰⁸ Cone 1970/1990: 93.

⁷⁰⁹ Malcolm X, *Chicago Defender*, 28 November 1962.

⁷¹⁰ hooks 1994: 250.

⁷¹¹ Ibid 244.

however non-coercive and comes from within through what hooks referred to as “love.” This level of conversation and practice regarding a sense of obligation to challenge injustice is, as hooks articulated it, entwined with the two prior levels.

Although hooks used the word “love,” her definition of love would match what others might refer to as “spirituality.” Mark Andersen, white anarchist and co-founder of Positive Force (a DC-based straight edge collective and center for activism), cited James Cone on the co-dependency of politics and spirituality. Of the two, he found spirituality be the foundation for his political engagement.⁷¹² For Andersen, a convert to Catholicism, the practical emphasis was on “voluntary simplicity,” in which those who are privileged enough to have a surplus of goods and time (or energy) learn to exercise self-control for the greater good:

The idea of “living simply so that others may simply live” is no doubt useful for those of us who have grown up enjoying this culture’s material riches and spiritual poverty. It has the side-benefit of helping to free us from commodity slavery, as to be able to dive deeply into each other, into life, into struggle. Some may dismiss this all –especially the brief discussion of spiritual practices –as just so much self-help mumbo-jumbo. Fair enough. I can only say that such healing has been necessary for me, driven as I have been (and often still am) by my human weaknesses. In my experience, many of us would-be “changers of the world” might do better to focus a little more on our own failings, lest we betray, even destroy, that which we claim to build. The internal work does not take the place of the external, nor vice versa; both aspects are needed, simultaneously, if we are to move toward realizing transformation.⁷¹³

With this personal starting point he has been involved in numerous benefit concerts, protest, direct actions, and community support for people in need over the last 30 years. Two recent qualitative studies have looked at how white activists have sustained similar types of solidarity work. The first one, by Mark Warren (2010), involved interviews with U.S. activists involved in racial justice work. One pattern that he saw was that of the eight interviewees (out of a total 50) who had grown up in families with traditions of social justice, five of them had had transformational moments (“seminal experiences”) that brought them into their activism. Such moments had been necessary to involve them in a type of work that ought to have been natural to them. Why were these experiences necessary? As he investigated this question with he discovered that there was a social gravity pulling white people away from close relations with people of color. Warren concluded, “Dominant institutions appear to continually push whites away from racial understanding and toward ‘a white world’ despite their families’

⁷¹² In this light, he noted that Twelve Step groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) “seem strikingly like anarchy” (Andersen 2004: 124).

⁷¹³ Andersen 2004: 125.

influence.”⁷¹⁴ As one of his interviewees, Laurie, stated, “It requires constant intentionality to not be pulled into white enclaves.”⁷¹⁵ He noted that with so many temptations to give up in the light of difficulties and struggle, many of the white activists felt that “one of their biggest accomplishments is simply that they have persisted in the face of so many obstacles.”⁷¹⁶

Furthermore, his work lent support to bell hooks’ contention that the process of involvement is also a process of learning about *why* one is involved.⁷¹⁷ Indeed, Warren was stunned to find how little a role anti-racist belief *prior* to involvement actually played in the decision of white activists to become involved: “Rather, many develop and strengthen their understanding of racism as they practice their activism, not before they start.”⁷¹⁸ Instead, anti-racist education, as in the case of Emily Zeanah, contributed to a sense of paralysis and non-involvement. It was not until she had begun to work with activists of color at the Beloved Community Center in Greensboro, North Carolina that she was inspired to devote herself to activism.⁷¹⁹ Another interviewee Kate began to work at the Catholic Worker house in Hartford, Connecticut after college. There, she helped serve an all-black neighborhood which was her first direct experience with racism:

I started to see that this thing is deep, and this has nothing to do with my good intentions and how much that I can say I’m not a racist. We carry these things wherever we go without even meaning to, without being aware of it. . . .I could have easily just gone back to the suburbs and gone back to an all-white community. But I feel like those experiences made me see that the questions of racial justice had to be central to my life.⁷²⁰

For Warren, the shouldering of this type of centrality was a critical step toward taking on the struggle for racial justice as one’s own struggle rather than something one does on behalf of others: “If whites remain simply allies, they will never fully embrace the struggle for racial justice as their own.”⁷²¹ As an example of what a white embrace of racial justice could look like, he gave the example of whites who were active in the

⁷¹⁴ Warren 2010: 34.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid 38.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid 232.

⁷¹⁷ This is also in line with the contention of South American Liberation Theologians who have argued that theory begins by first taking an active stand on the side of the oppressed. Only after working with and struggling alongside the oppressed, according to theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff, can theory develop in a meaningful way that is both connected to the lives of most people and consistent with the teaching of Jesus.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid 40.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Ibid 49-50.

⁷²¹ Ibid 230.

campaign for Obama's presidency. They were not campaigning in solidarity or as allies but were working as full participants in a struggle on their own behalf. This type of shift demands a re-orientation of priorities and behaviors yet it is possible and it does happen:

Whites can come to embrace the political project of racial justice as they see its centrality to their own values, transforming democracy toward the kind of society in which they want to live and raise their children. ...Nevertheless, achieving a common political identity for racial justice across lines of race will depend to some extent on progress in creating new multiracial social identities, even as race-specific identities continue. ...By working together, people forge social ties and create a sense that we are in this together.⁷²²

The second study, by white psychology scholar D. Kantorová (2014), focused on the activism of eight white activists involved with Palestinian-solidarity work.⁷²³ The purpose was to investigate what motivates and sustains actions on the behalf of others when demands for sacrifice are high and perceived gains are low. According to dominant rational choice theory, people ought not to participate in such activity at all. And yet they do. According to Kantorová, surprisingly little research has been done in this area. Psychological studies have tended to focus on intergroup conflict rather than intergroup cooperation and harmony and there were, as of 2014, "no clinical psychology studies exploring the phenomenon of activists entering traumatizing situations voluntarily."⁷²⁴

In order to qualify for selection, all eight had to (1) have been voluntarily pursued solidarity work (which entailed engaging in a cause on the behalf of an oppressed group with whom the activist does not identify as a member),⁷²⁵ (2) have experienced at least one potentially traumatic situation, that is, engaged in some form of sacrifice or risk, (3) have been willing to repeat the trauma or sacrifice for the sake of their solidarity work without expectations of external gain or compensation. The problem was essentially outlined in a quote by white historian Howard Zinn:

⁷²² Ibid 231.

⁷²³ A few more details could be noted of the eight activists: All were described as "middle class." Three were women and five were males. Five were under 40 and three were over 50 years old. Interestingly, six of the eight were either Jewish or anarchist and three of those were both (i.e., Jewish anarchists). Also, the participants had minimal nuclear family ties. Only one (participant 5) had children (an adult son). Only two participants (1 and 2) were in relationships. None were married. One woman was lesbian (participant 1) and seven were heterosexual/heteronormative.

⁷²⁴ Kantorová 2014: 128.

⁷²⁵ Here, D. Kantorová referred to these activists as "aspiring allies" because the role of "ally" is relational and when a person allies with a group, they must be recognized by the group members as an ally and there may be differences of opinion amongst group members regarding their ally aspirations and/or qualifications.

Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of leaders ...and millions have been killed because of this obedience ...Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves ...[and] the grand thieves are running the country. That's our problem.⁷²⁶

So the question was then: what causes people to be willing to address the problem even at great cost to themselves? Kantorová explored a variety of research related to obedience, disobedience, altruism, and solidarity as well as notable examples of people who crossed the lines of privilege in order to take serious risks on behalf of others. Some of the examples were Avner Wishnitzer⁷²⁷ and Miko Peled,⁷²⁸ both taken from *Beautiful Souls: Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times* by Eyal Press (2012). Another example was Rachel Corrie. In many ways the case of Corrie was emblematic and, in some cases, a catalyst, for the involvement of the eight activists interviewed in the study.

Corrie was a young white American woman from the state of Washington who had been working with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) to defend Palestinian homes from being bulldozed by Israeli forces. A bulldozer ran over her in Gaza and killed her on March 16, 2003. She had long felt that privilege carried with it responsibility and had once written in a poem: “Freedom is the rule; I am hungry for one good thing I can do.”⁷²⁹ She eventually volunteered at a community mental health clinic and, after September 11, 2001, engaged herself in peace activism. She wanted to go to Gaza to witness U.S. foreign policy in action and wrote:

...I actively seek to personalize suffering that is distant from me... Thinking about privilege—going to Gaza. What is privilege? It is the thing that is uncomfortable to say

⁷²⁶ Kantorová 2014: 6.

⁷²⁷ Wishnitzer had been a member of the Israeli Defense Force's elite unit, Sayeret Matkal. His change took place after attending a lecture on the situation of Palestinians in the West Bank and their harassment by Israeli settlers. This led Wishnitzer to join a humanitarian aid convoy to the West Bank to see their living conditions first hand. He subsequently founded Combatants for Peace: former Israeli and Palestinian fighters engaged in peace dialogue. The brevity of his story is not to suggest it was an easy journey. According to Wishnitzer, “The physical courage it took to serve in Sayeret Matkal was considerable, but saying no to the army—exercising moral courage—was ten times harder” (Kantorová 2014: 46; original source in Press, 2012: 113).

⁷²⁸ Peled, author of *The General's Son*, began his transformative journey as a Zionist son of an Israeli general. He had never met Palestinians directly and by adulthood was living in California. But when his 13-year old niece was killed by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem (where he was born and raised) he felt compelled to discover the source of their anger. He joined a Jewish-Palestinian discussion group and found a connection with Palestinians that he had missed in American Jews: a love of the land, Palestine.

⁷²⁹ Kantorová 2014: 49. Original source in Corrie, 2008: 23.

... Any advantage you enjoy based on your position in society— anything unearned— arbitrary. What is white-skin privilege? White-skin privilege is the giant iceberg looming beneath the tip that is the security checks at the airport.⁷³⁰

The “personalization” of distant “others” defuses not only of dehumanization but, in some cases, of “infrahumanization,” (wherein certain humans are portrayed as animals or machines —incapable of emotion). All three of these people, Corrie, Peled, and Wishnitzer, sought out connection. They made their journey toward sacrifice and solidarity because they first refused to dehumanize Palestinians, but they also chose to meet with and listen to them as human voices whose stories and experiences had value. Once they listened, they established bonds with people whom they listened to. This entailed giving up some of their privilege. Yet, returning to Corrie’s words, what is privilege? Kantorová contrasted a dictionary definition of privilege (“a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people”) with that of Peggy McIntosh who wrote that privilege was an “unearned power conferred systemically.”⁷³¹ Both definitions exposed the inherent inequality that composes “privilege.” Yet whereas the dictionary definition referred to a “right” or “advantage,” McIntosh’s definition notably framed “privilege” as a form of power and furthermore a power that is unearned and distributed systematically which meant that there are no visible actors responsible for the inequality and the benefits bestowed to the privileged become similarly difficult to recognize. Furthermore, such blindness can be exacerbated by “collective numbing,”⁷³² “system justification,”⁷³³ and an increasing sense of isolation and aloneness which, as argued by Erich Fromm, can lead to susceptibility to conformity, destructive behavior, or even authoritarianism.⁷³⁴ Along with the tendency to dehumanize the “other,” these dynamics each tend to make people less likely to engage in protest actions —much less sacrifice on the behalf of others.

Kantorová pointed out an additional dilemma in this self-perpetuating system of violence and inequality: privileged people who have access to more resources and greater ability to affect change have less of an ability to recognize inequalities and the need for change. Marginalized people, on the other hand, may be able to better see inequalities and problems first-hand but, with their limited resources, be compelled to focus on

⁷³⁰ Ibid; Original source in Corrie 2008: 176, 218

⁷³¹ Kantorová 2014: 38; Original in McIntosh 1998.

⁷³² Ibid, 23. A shutting down of empathy when the implications are too overwhelming (Lifton 1967). This could describe the case of Mark Warren’s interviewee, Emily, who had felt paralyzed by knowledge about racial injustice prior to her involvement.

⁷³³ Ibid 30. “System justification” refers to the tendency of people to desire certainty more than fairness and subsequently, the more likely an anticipated event seems to be, the more desirable it is perceived to be, thereby reinforcing the status quo in any given context (Jost, Chaikalis-Petritsis, Abrams, Sidanius, Van der Toorn, & Bratt, 2011).

⁷³⁴ Ibid 7; See Fromm 1941.

survival. Thus, the act of engaging in solidarity with people who are not members of one's own group can often be more difficult for people who are struggling to make ends meet. Kantorová recalled Paolo Freire's (2001) concern that privileged persons may risk losing their humanity due to their privileged status because it disconnected them from the plight of others. As such, struggling against oppression would be in the interests of all parties. As one of the relatively privileged interviewees acknowledged: "I regard time spent pursuing solidarity as a form of privilege."⁷³⁵

Yet, as Kantorová noted, pursuit of solidarity with oppressed peoples from a status of privilege did not erase the privilege and did not always lead to constructive results. In a quote from Lynn Gottlieb, a rabbi and anti-occupation activist, "I see many Jews working on "peace" without engaging in equal status contact with Palestinians. This distorts the way forward. Solidarity and ally work requires a lot of self-education with a huge dose of humility."⁷³⁶

Struggle and sacrifice has, it turned out, can, under certain conditions, have some perks. Kantorová cited Martín-Baró's remarks that paradoxical as it may seem, even war can bring benefits: "Faced with 'limit situations,' there are those who bring to light inner resources they weren't even aware they had, or who reorient their lives toward a new, more realistic and humanizing horizon."⁷³⁷ Some people return from conditions of trauma with a greater sense of empathy and responsibility for the plight of others.⁷³⁸ Such "altruism born of suffering" can be dependent upon various factors including a healing process, "social support, supportive actions of others, and actions taken to stand up for oneself during traumatization."⁷³⁹ Much of this was corroborated by Kantorová's interviewees.

As with Warren's study, human relations and a sense of connection were important for each of them in becoming active. All eight of the interviewees had gotten involved due to personal relationships in some way or another. Several were able to identify with the plight of others due to their own personal experiences ("It's like, yeah, I know what it's like to be beaten up and to be pushed around and stuff like that... So I identify with people who are being mistreated. ... You're identifying with them, you're making common cause with them").⁷⁴⁰ Second, inequality was both acknowledged and accompanied by a responsibility. Seven of them regarded their relatively privileged status as something that demanded action from them:

So some of it had to do with the complete dissonance you understood, and by understood I don't mean cognitively so much ... but also emotionally, between your own sort of privileged bodily position as a Jewish Israeli in that state and the immense violence

⁷³⁵ Ibid 116 (Participant 5).

⁷³⁶ Ibid: 39; Original source in Gottlieb, 2013: 247.

⁷³⁷ Ibid 149; Original source in Martín-Baró 1994: 118-119.

⁷³⁸ Ibid 24, referencing Thalhammer et al., 2007; Staub & Vollhardt, 2006.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid 113 (Participant 4).

of people that look like you, act like you, talk like you, and those that you would on a most intimate level relate to as your brothers, the Israeli soldiers, do to others. And I think that dissonance... amplified by both my personal experience prior to that and political theoretical understandings or partial understanding or whatever, of insight, presents a very strong sense of inescapability. Inescapability in the sense that there was no other choice. ...There was no rational choice there. There was not this cognitive processing of what you may or may not do, thinking about the consequences. It was just something you were supposed to do.⁷⁴¹

Similarly, other interviewees felt a sense of obligation due to solidarity with the cause of injustice (“if they’re fighting against an injustice, it’s our obligation to also stand against that injustice”)⁷⁴² or due to the responsibility that, as Ballou pointed out, accompanied actions done on their behalf (“My tax dollars are paying for that occupation. And so I guess that sense again of privilege and accountability I think is definitely highly influential for me”).⁷⁴³

Third, community support was important for the ability of these activists to sustain their ability to continue their work at a strategic as well as emotional level. Several described a feeling that what they were able to do as part of a group would have been impossible to do alone. There was a “sense of empowerment ...of strength, of people being able to resist even in that kind of environment”⁷⁴⁴ and a feeling that “if you’re going to be a revolutionary for peace you can’t do it alone, you have to be with other people.”⁷⁴⁵ In the words of another interviewee, a white, single, middle class, heterosexual, Jewish man over 50 years old who identified as an anarchist and pacifist:

I would say the thing that made it tolerable for me was knowing that I was in a group of other activists who shared my general opinions and feelings. I was with other people like me. I wasn’t alone. ...I knew that we were all in this struggle together. We made a commitment to stand together as a group and to support each other. That type of solidarity with each other helped me, helped comfort me, and I was able to tolerate the anxiety.⁷⁴⁶

After their engagement and trauma, five of them described experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and seven of the eight interviewees regarded community support as important for their subsequent recovery. Several described the importance of community during the trauma itself (“Unbelievable sense of community

⁷⁴¹ Ibid 116-117 (Participant 6).

⁷⁴² Ibid 120 (Participant 3).

⁷⁴³ Ibid 93 (Participant 1).

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid 121 (Participant 1).

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid 123 (Participant 4).

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid 98-99 (Participant 4).

there. ...I think trauma gets people closer. So they go through that on a daily basis. ...The hospitality that I experienced there was just on another level. And so I've never experienced something like that in my life").⁷⁴⁷

Fourth, the increased sense of connection with those who were subject to oppression and trauma did two things: it increased a sense of *disconnection* with mainstream society and, in several of these activist, increased an *awareness of the need for stepping back* (more than inclusivity, this entailed acceptance of leadership by people who being oppressed and relinquishing a sense of control). Regarding the sense of disconnect with mainstream, dominant culture, there was a general feeling that "you can't understand it unless you've been there or in a similar atmosphere."⁷⁴⁸ Not only could these feelings be difficult to explain but sometimes the gap in experiences resulted in a sensation of living in two different worlds at the same time, their own and the one of people around them "I'm in school full-time, I work part-time, and I mean, I guess—it's like I don't know, other students play videogames and I go to protests."⁷⁴⁹ With contrasting lifestyles, so too could basic worldviews and attitudes disconnect so as to hinder an ability to communicate across those boundaries about fundamental issues:

It took me a while to adjust to society again in a lot of respects... And I kind of didn't know how to relate to people. I had this one roommate who was—I don't know, sort of a brat, she was a bratty young woman who was very pretty and would just be like a brat all the time and get people to do things. And I couldn't—it's not like I couldn't deal with her at all—I couldn't relate to her at all. I didn't even want to have antagonism, I just was like, whoa, I don't even know what to do with your reality. It took me awhile.⁷⁵⁰

Also the act of including and connecting with others also seemed to be associated with an appreciation of limits, accepting leadership from Palestinians, and submission—all of which are supposed "unfreedoms." One interviewee advised others "to know your own limits."⁷⁵¹ Recognizing one's own limitations opened up the door to recognizing how one is dependent upon others ("make sure that you have people you trust around you") and also highlights the need to cultivate "ways to take care of yourself."⁷⁵² The illusion of control could lead to anger and desperation whereas limitations could enable a more balanced psychological approach to sustaining activism and solidarity work. After describing a history of substance addiction, one young man said,

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid 105, 124 (Participant 2).

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid 101 (Participant 1).

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid 115 (Participant 1).

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid 102 (Participant 8).

⁷⁵¹ Ibid 110 (Participant 1).

⁷⁵² Ibid.

...now I understand that I only have control over myself, my actions, and my reactions to the world around me. So by realizing that things out there were going to happen regardless and I'm fortunate that I now have the understanding that things are out of my control, and by sort of surrendering that control ...by acknowledging my powerlessness, I'm able to see— I'm able to maneuver through the world in a much healthier way.⁷⁵³

Another activist, a Jewish mother in her 60s, stated that her reason was relinquishing a sense of control was due in part to recognizing how much damage the tendency to control has done on justice struggles:

The West, that is, the white West has a very missionary quality to it. "We're going to go out and save the world, and we know better" and all that. But there's been so much harm done as the result of missionary good intentions. In order to remedy the harm the West has perpetrated, we have to continually revisit the way we struggle in light of the experience of those impacted directly by violence. We have to struggle in ways that lend strength and authenticity to the pursuit of justice. How to struggle in ways that promote justice and peace rather than maintain the status quo—that question is very hard to answer in isolation. An activist can only chart a solidarity course in partnership with people who are on the front lines of their particular struggle.⁷⁵⁴

In Kantorová's conclusion we can further read about a fundamental challenge to attempts toward inclusion across boundaries of inequality and privilege:

Two prominent issues have made me think urgently and extensively on the concept of solidarity and liberation struggle. The first is the "Block the Boat" effort, aimed at preventing the unloading of an Israeli ship at the port of Oakland, as a response to Israel's bombing of Gaza. An extensive debate occurred about whether such an action could be organized without Palestinian activists in leadership. The second question was whether protest actions against police terrorism could be organized without approval or participation of the families of its victims. The question of the roles that should be played by those who are direct targets of oppression (and frequently the most traumatized), whose future is threatened by oppression, and those who live sheltered by privilege but are still affected (be it through vicarious traumatization or apathy and numbing) needs to be carefully examined. I have maintained the perspective that these roles need to be held in the context of long-term relationship building among these various stakeholders.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵³ Ibid 108 (Participant 3).

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid 119 (Participant 5).

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid 158.

This conclusion highlighted the importance of inclusion early in a process of organizing. Kantorová also noted that participants “did not view their activism as activism ‘on behalf of another group,’ but rather as work *in partnership with* members of the oppressed group.”⁷⁵⁶ This subtle but significant distinction can be the difference between a relationship of benevolent dominance and non-domination. That is, inclusion cannot be subject merely to the representation of the interests of oppressed peoples by privileged classes but must be rooted in leadership by those people who are subject to oppression. In a sense, this is democratic inclusivity in a nutshell: those who are more affected by decisions become more central to decision-making processes.

This challenge is all the more difficult when those on whose behalf one struggles cannot speak for themselves—at least not in any public forum. A prime example of this is the case of animals, plants, and the welfare of eco-systems upon which they depend.

Whereas the law in the United States has long ascribed personhood to corporations, some indigenous peoples who inhabited the same land prior to the U.S., such as those in the Pacific Northwest, described “salmon within their indigenous language as a distinct ‘people’... with corresponding rights and duties between the human and non-human “peoples” that affects systems of governance.”⁷⁵⁷ Yet the developing the idea even of what “people” or a “person” means or has meant in a non-European culture can be an enterprise that far exceeds the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say, the dimensions are not only physical but temporal as well. As Rebecca Tsosie wrote,

Indigenous identity is intergenerational. This means that the contemporary people honor duties and obligations to their ancestors and to the future unborn generations. Although these categories of human beings are not currently lives in being, they nonetheless have an identity and are deserving of respect and protection.⁷⁵⁸

A combination of respect for the dead *and* animals can be seen, for example, amongst the Mbendjele in the northern Congo. Explaining to a researcher about their ban on laughing at dead animals, Phata, a 65-year old from Ikamba stated that the expected response would be: “Stop laughing at my animal. That animal felt great pain and suffering from my bullet. Why do you laugh at my hunting?”⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid 118. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵⁷ Tsosie 2012: 1139.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Lewis 2008: 310. It can be worth noting how the evolution of ethics typically presented in European-language scholarship has imagined a straight progression (rights for blacks, then women, then animals, etc.). This strategy places Europeans as the most advanced for having the most sensitive conception of rights in stark contrast to cultures that do not grant rights to certain castes or genders. Yet, when the

In India, concern for animal welfare stretches back at least to the Jains and Buddhists who critiqued Vedic Brahman rituals of animal sacrifice. They were not granted personhood however. The contemporary animal rights movement is a much more recent phenomenon. Up until late-medieval Europe, however, animals, even insects, could be held on trial for their “crimes.”⁷⁶⁰ This was not either the same as ascribing them rights or personhood. A significant turning point came in 1975 when the book *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer was published which called for the release of all animals from captivity on the same basis of arguments that were offered by abolitionists and suffragettes (fulfilling the image of a Western evolution of ethics). Referencing sentiments issued by Thomas Jefferson, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Sojourner Truth, Singer argued that the same logic that has applied to equality of rights for women and blacks ought to logically extend to animals. He cited a passage from Jeremy Bentham as the ultimate criteria for rights: “The question is not, Can they *reason?* nor Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*”⁷⁶¹ There exist a wide range of differences between various human beings, Singer noted, but this is not the determinant for rights:

...the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact. Equality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact. ...the basic element—the taking into account of the interests of the being, whatever those interests may be—must, according to the principle of equality, be extended to all beings, black or white, masculine or feminine, human or nonhuman.”⁷⁶²

He accused most human beings of being “speciesists” which, like sexism or racism, unjustifiably discriminated against a group of living beings: “the overwhelming majority of humans ...take an active part in, acquiesce in, and allow their taxes to pay for practices that require the sacrifice of the most important interests of members of other species in order to promote the most trivial interests of our own species.”⁷⁶³ In more recent years, political theories have arisen that go so far to conceive of animals as citizens.⁷⁶⁴ In relation to the exclusion created by the “state of nature,” such work goes part of the way in overcoming the arbitrary human-animal binary at an individual level but in regard to the devastation of nature and continued exclusion of indigenous

matter is one of a culture that has greater sensitivity to the rights of animals or other beings, these are somehow not taken to be a sign of advancement but of primitivism.

⁷⁶⁰ See Evans 1906.

⁷⁶¹ Singer 1975: 7.

⁷⁶² Ibid 5.

⁷⁶³ Ibid 9.

⁷⁶⁴ See, for example, *Zoopolis* by Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011. Ironically, Kymlicka was less liberal in regard to homeschooling rights extended to the Amish in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. See a discussion by Peddle 2000.

peoples rejection of their claims to land and self-determination, human *society* is still caught in Hobbes' dichotomy. Billy-Ray Belcourt has argued that scholars such as Donaldson and Kymlicka do not go far enough. Citing their work and work by anarchist animal liberation scholar Anthony Nocella, Belcourt wrote that it is problematic to merely affirm "a holistic understanding of the commonality of oppressions"⁷⁶⁵ including specieism, ableism, homophobia, sexism, racism, capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism because such seeming inclusiveness obscures the backdrop from which all these oppressions occur. Instead, a strategy of inclusiveness of animals and anti-oppression must entail, for Belcourt, "first or simultaneously dismantling settler colonialism and re-theorizing domesticated animal bodies as *colonial subjects* that must be centered in decolonial thought."⁷⁶⁶

The question then is how does one engage in solidarity work with or for animals? What follows here is an example of a debate between animal rights scholars and thereafter expressions of solidarity. The academic debate selected here is designed to give an general idea of some of the difficulties associated with such work. It took the form of three articles in regard to animal liberation between Alasdair Cochrane (2009) on one side and Robert Garner (2011) and John Hadley (2013) on the other, and the second involves direct action as manifest by Earth First!.

The debate began with Cochrane who had argued that animals have "instrumental" but not an "intrinsic" interest in "freedom." Because humans feel bad about confinement, they feel bad when animals are confined, according to Cochrane, but they do not, in and of themselves bear an intrinsic opposition to confinement *per se*, as long as they are well-treated. Animal welfare interests certainly means a need for better legislation but "they do not necessarily include the *liberation* of animals."⁷⁶⁷ In response, Hadley argued that the question of "intrinsic" is misleading in regard to what animals think or feel. Even if "it is difficult to say how exactly liberty *necessarily* enhances the well-being of individual animals," we tend to conceive of a valuable life for animals (and humans) as "free-roaming creatures" and therefore they do "have an intrinsic interest in liberty."⁷⁶⁸ Garner, in turn, responded to Cochrane by stating that Cochrane's logic would imply that if animals do not have an intrinsic interest in "liberty" then neither would "marginal humans" or "human non-persons" (i.e., people with severe mental disabilities) and if one could terminate an animal's life on that premise then one could apply the same logic to "marginal persons." And for some people it does. Garner cited Peter Singer's claim in regard to cognitive abilities to desire life over death in relation to the question of killing when he said "Killing a snail or a

⁷⁶⁵ Belcourt 2015: 1 (citing Nocella).

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid 2.

⁷⁶⁷ Cochrane 2009: 662.

⁷⁶⁸ Hadley 2013: 100.

day-old infant does not thwart any desires of this kind, because snails and newborn infants are incapable of having such desires.”⁷⁶⁹

Garner argued that even if Cochrane is correct in asserting that animals have no intrinsic interest in liberty, the real questions turns not on “liberty” nor on suffering per se but on whether or not animals are suffering *unnecessarily*. He noted, “In the United States alone it is estimated that some 103 million pigs, 38 million cows and calves and a staggering 9 billion broiler chickens are slaughtered each year” (approximately 27 million killed per day, more than one million per hour).⁷⁷⁰ As it is easy to challenge the *necessity* of this type and degree of animal suffering, Garner argued, “Cochrane’s approach does not rule out the legitimacy of radical steps to end, or significantly curtail, most of the ways in which we currently exploit animals.”⁷⁷¹ All three writers, including Cochrane, were doing some sort of advocacy work on behalf of animals even if no animals were necessarily directed impacted by their advocacy. The very nature of advocating on behalf of others is, as hopefully this brief discussion revealed, a messy matter. Yet, if we follow the premises outlined earlier about involvement preceding debate and theoretical development, it may be that action is easier than words.

In 2003 Jourdan Imani Keith founded the Urban Wilderness Project (UWP) which is “an organization led by people of color and designed to meet the cultural needs of ethnically diverse groups including the young LGBTQ community.”⁷⁷² Through the UWP, school excursions to wilderness areas are organized, workshops in social justice, and job-training experiences are offered. On their homepage, Keith wrote of how she began to work with the wilderness:

through studying Native American storytelling I learned that not all cultures perceived animals and people to be separate. The knowledge that we are all one was embedded in the language of Native tellers, but European translators needed a separate word for animal and a word for people so that it would fit into their cultural perceptions of the natural world. They did not see themselves as a part of it. That perception, manifest in language, informs our attitudes, our policies and our shortcomings in the environmental movement.⁷⁷³

In a TEDxRainer presentation, Keith addressed how our language constructs hinder us from conceptualizing defense of natural systems as self-defense:

⁷⁶⁹ Garner 2011: 178.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid 183.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid 186.

⁷⁷² *Seattle Medium*. “Urban Wilderness WORKS Offers Mountain Top Work Experience For Underserved Young Adults In The Pacific Northwest.” 17 July 2013 <http://seattlemedium.com/urban-wilderness-works-offers-mountain-top-work-experience-for-underserved-young-adults-in-the-pacific-northwest/> Accessed 15 September 2015. Also see

⁷⁷³ Urban Wilderness Project homepage <http://www.urbanwildernessproject.org/ru> Accessed 9 July 2014.

If you were a body of water, would you protect yourself? If you knew that your water body was connected to every other water body –human and non-human? Because you are part of the water cycle, would you begin to protect your waters?

You are a body of water –surrounded by land, a human estuary, like the estuaries of our planet where fresh water meets the sea. But the land is your skin. Your skin, like the soil, absorbs the contaminants carried to it by water through its surface. What the water carries to your skin percolates in your body and is absorbed more readily than through ingestion or inhalation.

Twenty feet of blood vessels in every square inch of your skin allows for more healthy or toxic things, lotions, hairspray, make-up, shampoo, cleaning solvents, and chlorine to be absorbed than if you drank them. ...However, our language enforces a false separation. Humans *are* nature. Which need to be re-categorized as moving bodies of water—much like estuaries. Why? Because our language gives us our place in the world. In the way we organize it and protect it.

If we shift our language, we will shift our understanding. We will see that our urine streams, our blood streams are connected to the veins of the planet. As naturalists, we accept the system of Linnaeus, of observation, we say that life in an aquatic environment, that's toxic, is less harmful to us.

But what we fail to see is that ...we are constantly immersed in our internal sea. ...As naturalists we rely upon Linnaeus's system of taxonomy but what we fail to detect is the cultural colonialism that's imbedded in his view as a naturalist.⁷⁷⁴

If attacks on animals and eco-systems are attacks on oneself, how then might one respond in solidarity? After all, responses have ranged from education about waste and recycling to engaging in property destruction and eco-sabotage. For example, Earth First! activists such as Dave Foreman have agreed with the perspective Keith described and advocated “self-defense on the part of the Earth” with the self-perception: “I’m operating as part of the wilderness defending myself.”⁷⁷⁵ Yet, regardless of which tactic one chooses, the outline provided here would suggest that answers to that question would be provided through service in relationship with those on whose behalf one is fighting. Yet this entails listening in ways other than how we are accustomed. Because we think, plan, and act “through language, we are open to the dangers of abstraction

⁷⁷⁴ Jourdan Imani Keith, Urban Wilderness Project, “TEDxRainier - Jourdan Imani Keith,” *TEDxRainier*, Uploaded 28 November 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRSAF2h3GtE> Accessed 7 September 2014. A version of this appears in *YES! Magazine*: Jourdan Keith, “Your Body is a Body of Water,” *YES!*, 14 November 2012 <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/its-your-body/your-body-of-water/>

⁷⁷⁵ Nash 1989: 196.

and exploitation,” Leslie van Gelder wrote. “The wild’s silence in our language is not tacit approval for its annihilation.”⁷⁷⁶ In Keith’s case, her group accomplishes the first step in that vital process of building relationship by bringing urban youth out to the wilderness, in order to begin to be able to listen in ways beyond language.

This section discussed (1) how different levels of struggle were interwoven and that “love” or “spirituality” can serve as a basis for “political” struggle; (2) This struggle, in turn, was seen as one based not only on one’s own welfare but also for the sake of others outside one’s own community or group of identification; (3) Solidarity work begins with and continues through relationship by listening to those with whom one is in solidarity; (4) Acknowledging the animal in us, the water in us, can cultivate a form of solidarity wherein, like Warren’s description of white Obama campaigners, engagement entails full participation for one’s own sake in a broader sense; and (5) New ways of thinking and listening are required to be in solidarity with creatures and systems that do not speak our language.

These discussions about solidarity work with people overseas, with animals, and with eco-systems illustrate that the word solidarity itself is a misnomer when interdependence. Instead, these discussions point toward shared interwoven struggles that base themselves on shared interwoven identities. The very existence of a cage in this sense, is to be caged. And in the words of Malcolm X, “Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything. ...you take it.”⁷⁷⁷ According to this principle, words are challenged by changing them. Relationships are built by serving. Cages are dismantled by the construction of doors where none existed.

Concluding Thoughts

Just as assumptions about “free will” (existentially and psychologically) tend to underlie descriptions of physical and social “freedom,” and all of these provided the basis for developing game-changing conversations about the state (political, religious, and economic “freedoms”), so too have conversations here about the language, borders, relationship, and bonds laid a basis for game-changing conversations about obligations and injustice. The whole consists of the key elements: critical eye toward language, service in relationship, struggling for welfare of all. Leaving any out of the equation would radically change the result. This point can be illustrated by another story from another study.

A qualitative study, “Marginalizing Magdalena” (2011), by Eric Michelle Lagalisse examined the social dynamics of exclusion involved in a speaking tour in Canada of two indigenous activists from Oaxaca, Mexico. The Canadian anarchists involved with Zapatista solidarity work had organized the tour in 2006. Lagalisse described how the two activists, Juan and Magdalena had begun the tour speaking on

⁷⁷⁶ Van Gelder 2004: 223-224.

⁷⁷⁷ Breitman 1965: 111.

more or less equal terms but that relationship soon devolved into terms that conformed to anti-religion and patriarchal expectations of the audience and organizers. In fact, the tour was delayed because it had been so difficult for the organizers to find a female speaker to accompany Juan. During the tour Juan talked in general terms about the history of their movement and state repression and he “spoke in the third person, assuming the voice of a generalized, objective ‘other.’ Magdalena spoke in the first person, about specific people who were tortured and what they told her afterward.”⁷⁷⁸ She talked about how government representatives had pressured her as a community health worker to promote sterilization among indigenous peoples. She spoke about moral ecology, and the need for harmonious lives in the community. When she talked of God and popular Catholicism, “the anarchist translators largely omitted these references and summed up her narratives rather than offering the word-for-word translation they granted Juan’s discourse.”⁷⁷⁹ Lagalisse, as a member of the collective organizing the tour described one of the discussions behind the scenes. Being sensitive to the way that indigenous people in Canada might react to talk about the Church, Magdalena asked if it was appropriate to mention God.

A man in our collective said “F—k Jesus anyway, we’re not here to talk about religion, what’s important is the struggle (*la lucha*)!” to which Magdalena responded, “Maybe I shouldn’t speak, let Juan go without me.” Another collective member and I assured her that she could express herself freely, that the audience would understand the difference between her faith and an endorsement of this church. It was true. The indigenous translator captured her poetry, and the audience hung on her every word, nodding as she spoke.⁷⁸⁰

The dynamic at universities was the opposite however and Juan was again the one to whom primary attention was devoted. By the second week of the tour the relationship had been completely transformed. In the beginning of the tour Juan and Magdalena spoke equal lengths of time. By the end, Juan would pass the microphone to Magdalena for her to briefly introduce herself and then he would speak for an hour. At the end, he would pass the microphone to her again to thank the audience: “a dialectic between Juan and the audience—including tour organizers—was encouraging his speech while marginalizing that of Magdalena.”⁷⁸¹ Lagalisse noted that this was far from a case about a single person and her exclusion. It had to do with gender dynamics and how entire classes of people can be excluded in solidarity work. She noted that “religion” as a social construction has been portrayed as the opposite of “secularism” and thereby contributed to misunderstandings about what “religion” is for indigenous peoples.

⁷⁷⁸ Lagalisse 2011: 659.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid 660.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

There were no winners in the exclusion of Magdalena. To the contrary, Lagalisse suggested that her exclusion amounted to a loss for their shared struggle.

Magdalena and others who situate their political agency within scales both larger (the cosmos) and smaller (the family) than the modern public sphere may demonstrate particular subversive potential. It is not that the religious is always or necessarily more subversive of capitalist political economy or always more emancipatory for women. However, a capacity to situate one's political subjectivity in realms beyond the analytical categories of materialist socialism appears to complement the imagination of radical transformation. . . .perhaps women in Latin America, Magdalena included, who situate themselves as mothers and religious subjects, who would not appear sufficiently feminist, strategic, or politically agentive according to [academic] typologies, are in fact ahead of the game. Furthermore, insomuch as these women situate their acts of resistance on cosmic or domestic scales, or both, their disregard for the "political" dovetails with the anarchist project of decentering the nation-state in the framework of analysis.⁷⁸²

As Lagalisse has argued for the need to challenge existing categories in a context of working together for the benefit of all, this chapter has attempted to articulate how this type of work could be woven together. In the spirit of bell hooks and the "love as a practice of freedom," the aim has been to articulate a structural groundwork for conversations that are based in practice—not just theory—on principles of democratic inclusivity. When taken together these principles, even if widely shared, would radically change existing conversations if put into practice (see Fig. 21).

⁷⁸² Ibid 672.

TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN



Fig. 21
Decolonialist map of the world.

3. *yang* Practice: Words and the Lives that Color Them

Stories of “Freedom” in Three Texts and Contexts

This section shall address the central texts of each context. One of the characteristics shared by all three is that these texts would be considered unconventional if they were to be surveyed by a Religious Studies department as “scriptures.” None of them match prototypical expectations for what a “sacred scripture” should look like. The Seven Principles of the UUA, currently consisting of 81 words (less than one third the size of this paragraph), were drafted by a committee and voted on. The MOVE Organization initially distributed a few hundred copies of The Guidelines in the early 1970s but later rescinded them. Nobody has seen a single collected copy of The Guidelines in book form since then (which now number thousands of pages in various locations).⁷⁸³ Taqwacore’s central text was a fictional novel written without the intention of creating a following or starting a scene. While its content dealt with topics that most scholars might classify as “religious” (such as debates between the characters in the novel about the meaning of Quranic verses) the message of the novel leaves few indications about how a person ought to live their life (aside from an inherent implication that a person ought to be true to themselves and one another rather than uncritically follow the dictates of a text). Yet, even though these texts might not be understood as “sacred scripture” (at least in conventional senses), it is safe to say that none of the social contexts that have arisen around these texts could have become what they did *without* those central texts.

Another commonality that is shared by these three texts is that “freedom” as a word and a concept figures prominently within them. The purpose of this section is to describe this centrality and to provide some examples from the texts in order for the reader to get a sense of the tone and narrative style of each text.

In order to facilitate the analysis of these texts, the presentation will begin with the core texts and follow up with secondary texts and examples from actual behaviors.

⁷⁸³ It was the unwillingness (or inability) of MOVE member Frank Africa to present a visible “scripture” to Judge Adams in 1981 that contributed to Adams’ determination that MOVE did not constitute a “religion” for the purposes of the First Amendment.

It is assumed that any conversation about “freedom” will include an inclusivity principle, a discussion of “freedom” in terms that are recognizable as such, and the explicit or implicit presence of “unfreedoms.”

Unitarian Universalist Association Central Texts

In the form that it is today, the central inspirational text that unites Unitarian Universalists (often applicable to those who identify as Universalist and/or Unitarian even if they are not a member of the UUA) is only 30 years old (as of 2015). Its roots stretch back further, at least overtly, to 1944 when the AUA Committee on Unitarian Advance headed by A. Powell Davies articulated “Five Principles of Modern Unitarianism.” These “Five Principles” proposed by the Committee however were rejected on the basis that they seemed to form a possible creed (see Fig. 1, Appendix 1).⁷⁸⁴ They eventually morphed however into Six Principles that were adopted when the Universalists and Unitarians merged in 1961. Changes were proposed and rejected in 1981, 2009, and 2014. Changes were proposed and adopted in 1985 and these constitute the current Seven Principles. For an overview of their gradual development over the years (see Table 1). The Seven Principles as they stand today and enshrined on the walls and literature of UU congregations across the United States and in other countries read as follows as “affirmations” shared by Unitarian Universalist congregations:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

⁷⁸⁴ Wright 1997: 160.

Table 1

Evolution of the Seven Principles (Words that appear in future variants are printed here in bold).

1944 Comparable principles	1961 Comparable principles	1981 Proposed changes	1985 Current principles	2009 Proposed changes (in italics)
	Principle 3a: To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man...	Principle 4: Affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every personality.	1: The inherent worth and dignity of every person	[no change proposed]
Principle 3: Democratic process in human relations	Principle 4 (see below) Principle 6: To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land; Principle 3b: in human relationships	Principle 3: Recognize the importance of equality among women and men	2: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations	[no change proposed]
	Principle 1a: To strengthen one another ... Principle 6: To encourage cooperation... Principle 5: To serve the needs of member churches ...and extend and strengthen liberal religion	Principle 7: Serve the needs of member societies.	3: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations	Acceptance of one another and encouragement <i>of</i> spiritual growth
Principle 1: Individual freedom of belief Principle 2: Discipleship to advancing truth	Principle 1b: ...in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship	Support the free and disciplined search for truth as the center of our religious community.	4: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning	[no change proposed]
Principle 3: Democratic process in human relations	Principle 3c: ...the use of the democratic method ...	Principle 5: Support the democratic process and mutual respect in all human relationships.	5: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large	The right of conscience and the use of <i>democratic processes</i>
Principle 4: Universal brotherhood, undivided by nation, race or creed Principle 5: Allegiance to the cause of a United World Community	Principle 4: To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace	Principle 6: Strive for a world community of love, justice and peace .	6: The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all	[no change proposed]
	[No precedent]		7: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part	<i>Reverence</i> for the interdependent web of all existence...

A cursory glance at the Seven Principles shows how central the concept of “freedom” is the text: the actual words “free” and “liberty” appear in Principles Four and Six, while the related concepts of “rights” and “democracy” both appear in the Fifth Principle. “Unfreedoms” that imply bonds are equally apparent through values such as “justice” (also appearing twice), “equity,” “respect,” “acceptance,” “compassion,” “inherent worth,” and “interdependence” in relation to contexts of “every person,” “our congregations,” “human relations,” “society at large,” “world community,” and “all existence.”

The Seventh Principle is the most recent and also the most distinct because, unlike the other ones, it was not drawn from Judeo-Christian aspects of Universalist and Unitarian traditions. Instead, its origins stem from indigenous traditions in the United States which were picked up by a current of feminist Goddess traditions in the UUA during the 1970s. The idea of an “interdependent web” was rooted within white American culture at least as far back as the 1930s (Aldo Leopold). Alongside the Seven Principles, are “Six Sources.” While not playing quite as central a role as the Seven Principles, they are certainly part of the core central text and typically distributed alongside the Seven Principles:

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature [added in 1995].

A basic principle of inclusion is apparent in the first of UUA: “The inherent worth and dignity of every person.” The inherent worth of this principle however was dependent in part upon how one interpreted the meaning of “person” and how one determined *relative* worth. Regarding the second aspect, the mantra that “Black Lives Matter” similarly raises the question: a doctrine based on colorblind racism would assert that of course “black lives matter,” but remain quiet about the conviction that “white lives

matter *more*.” This dilemma is in part resolved by the following principle: “Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.” Although “equality” does not appear in the Seven Principles, “equity” and “justice” can serve a similar function in calling for equal value on all lives.

The radical change from the Six Principles to the Seven Principles and Six Sources (the sixth of which was added in 1995) was due to a wave of feminism and workshops on Goddess-worship spread through the UUA. The Women and Religion Coalition proposed changes to the bylaws/principles in 1981 that would affirm gender equality and remove gendered language. In the 1983 the proposal was revised to something very close to the existing Seven Principles and, for the first time, included principle on care for the earth: “The integrity of the earth and our responsibility to protect its resources for future generations.” What is notable here is that between 1983 and the final version in 1985, the distinction between humans and the earth were eradicated when the formulation instead emphasized humans as part of the “interdependent web of all existence.” This formulation became the starting point for a radical new understanding of the “individual” and thereby inclusion—not just in relation to other people or animals or the planet but to existence itself.⁷⁸⁵

While “unfreedoms” were consistently paired with “freedom,” the language of church and allusions to rigidity or punishment were shifted from “free and *disciplined*” to “free and *responsible*.” This placed the emphasis of “freedom” from something internal and associated with strictness to something relational and associated with accountability.

The removal of “supreme” in relation to worth seemed to be a response to problems inherent in individualism or anthropocentrism and the removal of the word “religion” seemed to be an answer to advocates of “spirituality” and “secular humanism,” whereas the replacement of “brotherhood” by “liberty” seemed to suggest a rejection of patriarchal language in favor of an ambiguous and unspecified “freedom” which few could disagree with. Alongside the extra push for “liberty,” the new Principles removed older, more traditional words such as cooperation and especially service/to serve. Also, by inserting the word “right” in “right of conscience,” the Principles appealed to conversations rooted in the state and affirmation of “rights.” The combined insertion of “liberty” and “right” increased the amount of “freedom talk” in the Principles by about 100% (if one includes both “democratic process” and “free and disciplined search” as the earlier components). At the same time, the burden upon the

⁷⁸⁵ Yet, while this affirmation was radical and new for UUs, it had long been an integral part of many of other traditions —especially those of indigenous peoples. Indeed, even Robert Bellah, according to a UUA Commission on Appraisal report, “pointed out that the first and seventh Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association are in the reverse order from what is common in most other religious groups: The first refers to every individual, while the seventh, a late addition, refers to the interdependent web of all existence” (2005: 33).

individual was depicted not just as mere “tolerance” but associated with a greater responsibility through the insertion of “acceptance.”

Another central text of the UUA has also been present since the 1961 and undergone changes: the Bylaws.⁷⁸⁶ Both the text itself and changes made are far beyond the scope of coverage here. What is significant here is the nature of the text, its relationship to inclusivity, the centrality of “freedom,” and the presence of “unfreedoms.” First, the text is a legal document that determines the structure and rules of the UUA as a registered corporation. This relates to inclusivity in the sense that the complexity of legal texts necessitates a class of UU members who, far better than other members, can access and understand what the text says, how to change it, and how to interpret it. The major change had to do at least as much with the *quantity* of text as with the content. Between 1961 and 2013, the Bylaws more than doubled in size (with a total of 2,979 lines of text, an increase of 109 lines just since 2010). The text is not overly drenched in legalese but the terse style and complex nature of the organization does not invite a broad readership. Instead, its very constitution (no pun intended) is exclusive and conducive to the construction and maintenance of a technical elite. Additionally, UU historian Conrad Wright complained that in 1968, a change was made to the Bylaws which made the electoral process of the UUA more exclusive. By removing the Board from the nominating process for president, the process of nomination petitions and campaigns became reserved for those who can raise enough funding.⁷⁸⁷

Regarding the centrality of “freedom,” a few examples can be cited. Aside from the Seven Principles and Six Sources (found in Article II Principles and Purposes, Section C-2.1), there are various sections that affirm congregational autonomy, democratic process, lack of creedal requirements, and so on. In the 1961 Constitution and By-Laws we can see references to “freedom” and “unfreedom” in, for example, the following sections (bold for “freedom” and italics for “unfreedom” and underline for both):

1961: Article II Section 3: The Unitarian Universalist Association hereby declares and affirms the **independence** and **autonomy** of local churches, fellowships, and associate members; and nothing in this Constitution or in the By-Laws of the Association shall be deemed to infringe upon the congregational polity of churches and fellowships, nor upon the exercise of direct control by their memberships of associate member organizations, nor upon the **individual freedom of belief** which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages.

Article VI (The Ministry) Section 1: The Association recognizes and affirms that member churches alone have **the right to call and ordain their ministers**.

⁷⁸⁶ This was spelled “By-laws” in 1961 and “Bylaws” by 2013.

⁷⁸⁷ Wright 1997: 188-189.

A few examples of “freedom” found in the 2014 Bylaws and Rules:

Article II (Principles and Purposes) Section C-2.1. Principles. As **free congregations** we enter into this *covenant*, *promising* to one another our *mutual trust* and *support*.

Article II Section C-2.4. Freedom of Belief. Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the **individual freedom of belief** which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, *covenant*, or *bond of union* used by any congregation unless such is used as a creedal test.

Article III (Membership) Section C-3.1. (Member Congregations): The Unitarian Universalist Association is a **voluntary association of autonomous, self-governing member congregations**, which have **freely chosen to pursue common goals together**.

Article III Section C-3.6. (Termination of Membership). A member congregation upon written notification to the Association **may withdraw** from the Association **at any time**.

Article XI (Ministry) Section C-11.1. (Ministerial Fellowship). **No minister shall be required** to subscribe to any particular *creed*, *belief*, or *interpretation of religion* in order to obtain and hold fellowship.

And notably the addition of a specific text on democratic inclusivity:

Article II Section C-2.3. Inclusion. Systems of *power*, *privilege*, and *oppression* have traditionally created *barriers* for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to **replace such barriers** with ever-widening circles of *solidarity* and mutual respect. We *strive to* be an association of congregations that *truly welcome all persons* and *commit to structuring congregational and associational life* in ways that **empower** and **enhance everyone’s participation**.

It could be noted that the word “freedom” itself was prominent (above in Article II Section C-2.4) but had only one appearance in the Bylaws. Aside from the Seven Principles, the words “free” and “freely” only appeared once each (see above Article II Section C-2.1 and Article III Section C-3.1 respectively) and the word “liberty” does not appear at all. While the presence of a “covenant” with a “promise” of “mutual trust and support” is the first instance of “unfreedom” partnered to “freedom,” the very first instance of an “unfreedom” appeared in Article I Section C-1.1, the act of naming the Association. Not only does the naming constitute a form of limitation as well as ownership (as shall be seen later), it is clearly specified that the UUA is not just any organization of people but is “*the* successor to the American Unitarian Association, which was founded in 1825 and incorporated in 1847, and the Universalist Church of America, which was founded in 1793” (emphasis added). Thus, the claim of both traditions is both a restriction of as well as power over the legacy and heritage of those two institutions.

Most instances of “unfreedoms” however are scattered throughout the text in terms of, for example, “responsibility/responsible” (10 appearances in the text); “procedure” (24 appearances); “must” (as in “must be received...” or “must pay...” 25 appearances); “duties” (33 appearances); and “rules” (60 appearances). One restrictive rule that was added after 1961 was Rule II G-2.3, “Non-Discrimination” for congregations applying for membership which prohibits discrimination based on “racialized identity, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, sex, disability, affectional or sexual orientation, family and relationship structures, age, language, citizenship status, economic status, or national origin.” The rule was specifically designed to “promote the full participation of persons in all of [the Association’s] and their activities.” That is, in order to comply with a principle of inclusivity, an “unfreedom” in the form of a restrictive rule was inserted. Another restriction is that “All member congregations must be congregational in polity” (Rule III Section C-3.3.5c). This means that the decentralized form of structure that constitutes congregational autonomy also implies that the congregation not be subject to some other authority other than its direct and immediate membership.

The Six Principles that were adopted in 1961 were sort of a lowest common denominator negotiated between the two institutions of Universalists and Unitarians. Twenty four years after the first Principles were agreed upon, they were renegotiated. Significantly restructured, the changes emphasized inclusivity, connection, acceptance, and accountability. The Bylaws, while recognizable, have veered even more in the direction of democratic process as a specialized rather than popular text. At the same time, principles of inclusivity were formalized.

Secondary UUA Texts and Interviews

If a close examination of the Bylaws and Rules are far beyond the scope of this study, then even more so could be said of secondary texts of the UUA. By secondary texts, it is here meant to include (between 1961 and 2014) weekly newsletters of individual congregations, all texts related to General Assemblies (including newsletters, updates, and information), brochures of the UUA and its member congregations, the shared songbooks (*Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey*), the quarterly UUA magazine *UU World*, the UUA homepage, homepages of UUA-affiliated organizations and projects (e.g., Faithify.org), UU blogs, UU workshop handouts, UU sermons, books and media productions by UU authors, publications by either of the UU publishing companies (Skinner House or Beacon Press), publications of any of the UU-affiliated ministries (e.g., Unitarian Universalist Service Committee), professional organizations (Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association) or educational institutions (e.g., Meadville-Lombard, Starr King). Although *some* material from all of these sources has been reviewed for this dissertation, they have not been reviewed systematically.

Again, the point here is not to make any definitive statement about what “UUs believe” or what “they” say but to select themes and concepts drawn from UUA-related contexts. These themes and concepts and then connected to questions of inclusivity, “freedom,” and “unfreedom.” In some ways, the distinction between text and practice is also blurred here. Is a public sermon “only” a text or is it an act as well? How shall one regard the Acts of Immediate Witness that are considered actions but consist primarily of words? Rather than worry about such matters of categorization, the focus shall instead be to review some of the issues that I have heard over the years that are relevant to this study.

As with the central texts, “freedom” is often central either explicitly or implicitly. For example, the two Unitarian Universalist hymnals *Singing the Living Tradition* (SLT) and *Singing the Journey* (SJ) mention variants of “freedom” in 85 out of 490 hymns with a total of 237 appearances (267 appearances if one were to include “liberty” and variants such as “liberating”).⁷⁸⁸

Regarding inclusivity, there have been a number of issues that people have talked about that are not evident when reading the Seven Principles of the Bylaws. Some of the concerns that I have heard repeatedly are people who have felt excluded or marginalized to some degree because they (a) identify as Universalist in a predominantly Unitarian association, (b) appear or identify as a person of color in a predominantly white association, (c) struggle as working class or poor in an association with higher income and educational levels than most denominations, (d) identify as “Christian,” “Humanist,” “atheist,” or “pagan” in congregations where they are the minority, (e) identify as Republican or Libertarian in a predominantly liberal (Democratic) association, (f) appear or identify as youth in a predominantly adult/older (above 35 years old) association, and (g) are associated with, serve with, or identify with the U.S. Armed Forces. Women, people who identify as LGBTQ, or people with disabilities have also aired their feelings but their concerns seem more reflective of U.S. cultural dynamics at large rather than anything specific to the UUA (it could be noted however that while several moderators of the GA have been women, the UUA has yet to elect a president that is female — or even openly gay/queer).

A few selections shall be mentioned here insofar as they address issues of inclusivity/or “freedom” and “unfreedom.” One of the most memorable instances (for me) in which I heard “unfreedom” spoken in a UU context was in 2014 when the headline speaker who presented the Ware Lecture was Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby. Campbell had drawn national attention when the Vatican tried to clamp down on nuns in the United States who were involved in social justice work. Instead of being silenced, she came out openly in favor of health care reform and organized a “nuns on the bus” tour of nuns who toured the country highlighting social issues. Admittedly, I was affected by my Catholic background as I listened to her but she did provide moving details of her work with

⁷⁸⁸ The subject that is “free” varies from “God” to “I”, from “we,” to nature and/or animals.

immigrants and the struggles that people endured in before, during, and after their attempts to cross the Mexican border into the United States. She called upon UUs to “walk toward trouble,” to engage injustice directly, to resist it, and to stand up in partnership with people who are being oppressed and marginalized.

The Reverend David Bumbaugh has written about his feelings of alienation in the UUA. As a young Universalist who campaigned and voted for the merger of the two denominations, he felt that some things that were important to him fell by the wayside under Unitarian-dominated leadership. These things included the need for the group to define its religious position and for members to clarify their commitments to “*our* Judeo-Christian heritage” rather than “*the* Judeo-Heritage” which is how it then stood in the Six Traditions.⁷⁸⁹ For him, Universalists were the underdogs. Unlike the Unitarians, they “did not have roots in the religious establishment.” In his image, they were “[f]rom the very beginning, ...dissenters, come-outers, separatists.”

In the years that have passed, I have spent my life in service to the Unitarian Universalist Association; but, in truth, I have never felt fully at home in that Association. As I have come to know and understand more of the history of the two parent organizations, I have come to realize that the root of my discomfort lies in fundamental differences between Unitarianism and Universalism—differences that we were quick to paper over in the drive to consolidate the two movements. ...I long for the day when we take up once more the unfinished agenda that Universalism brought to this movement. I long for the day when we will boldly address those three central questions: What do we believe? Whom do we serve? To whom or what are we responsible?⁷⁹⁰

In this case, the question of “freedom” was implicit in his longing for a group self-expression that he could identify with. With his personal identity bound to the larger group, he was not “free” to be completely who he was with others as a group. Notably, he wanted to use to this “freedom” to more clearly articulate “unfreedoms” such as an emphasis on service and responsibility. Elsewhere Bumbaugh was cited as stating that “beneath all our diversity and behind all our differences there is a unity which makes us one and binds us forever together in spite of time and death and the space between the stars.” To this the author, Mark Morrison-Reed, wrote: “It was to the unrelenting tug of this reality, which I know as God, that I gladly submitted that long-ago day.”⁷⁹¹ The article was about Morrison-Reed’s journey from identifying primarily as a *Unitarian* Universalist to a Unitarian *Universalist*. He had been raised Unitarian prior to the merger but he discovered something special in Universalism: the idea, implicit in the title of the article “Dragged Kicking and Screaming into Heaven,” that God loves each of us so much that even those who attempt to resist “heaven” with “an ‘us’ versus

⁷⁸⁹ The current formulation is “Jewish and Christian teachings” in the “Six Sources” without being prefixed by either “the” or “our.”

⁷⁹⁰ Bumbaugh 2011.

⁷⁹¹ Morrison-Reed 2013: 2.

‘them’ mentality” will eventually be drawn into “the oneness of the human family” because

we are all beloved by a God who, dismissing free will (yes, you do not get to decide), embraces alike the saintly and despicable, who created both Mother Teresa and Saddam Hussein, supports both Obama and Boehner, loves both Bush and the now-dead Bin Laden, and drags Hitler into heaven as well.⁷⁹²

For Morrison-Reed, as for Bumbaugh, the unity of God and the unity of all existence are one and the same. It is only a matter of time before each and every one of us are compelled to submit to this reality. Such ideas are not typically associated with UUs by outsiders but they are far from unusual within the fold. In fact, there has been an internal struggle over how UUs shall speak to one another from the pulpit and in public declarations. Then-president of the UUA William Sinkford cited Bumbaugh in his call for UUs to get over their reluctance towards “god language.” Sinkford wrote:

Our Principles serve us well as a covenant, presenting a vision of a more just world on which we agree and our promise to walk together toward that vision, whatever our theology. But I wonder whether the language of the Principles is sufficient to capture our individual searches for truth and meaning. For this, I think we need what the Rev. David Bumbaugh, a Unitarian Universalist minister and religious humanist, calls a vocabulary of reverence. “We have manned the ramparts of reason and are prepared to defend the citadel of the mind,” Bumbaugh writes. “But in the process . . . we have lost . . . the ability to speak of that which is sacred, holy, of ultimate importance to us, the language which would allow us to enter into critical dialogue with the religious community.”⁷⁹³

This call by Sinkford was not just a call for UUs to develop an ability to respect people who use terms like “God,” “Allah,” or “Jesus” nor only to expand the ability of UUs to communicate more deeply with a broader spectrum of faith communities but also to cultivate sense of the sacred. The sacred, in some sense, is an ultimate “unfreedom,” a limit, a boundary of respect for which one is presumably willing to defend or make sacrifices on behalf of maintaining that sanctity whether it be in the form of human dignity, inherent worth of living beings, justice, or the interdependent web of all existence.⁷⁹⁴

One of the most common themes that reverberates throughout UU articles and sermons is about the need for community and respect for human relationships. Often this is casted as a direct challenge to what is perceived to be an exaggerated emphasis

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ Sinkford 2003: 9.

⁷⁹⁴ The proposal for changes to the Seven Principles in 2014 included a change from “*Respect* for the interdependent web...” to “*Reverence* for the interdependent web...” yet it was, along with the entire package of changes ultimately rejected.

on the “individual” and the quest for more personal “freedom.” I’ve heard this sentiment expressed repeatedly by Unitarian Universalists. In one sermon, a minister explained:

The idea that we are the sum of our choices implies that we always have choices. And we don’t. Or that we can control everything in our lives. And we can’t. ...There is no good individual —only good in relationships. Society tells us that each of us is responsible alone for our lives. Ironically, they tell that to all of us. But the truth is we can only fix it together. One of the most liberating insights is that we are not responsible for everything and cannot solve it all alone. We can only solve it together.⁷⁹⁵

The speaker was Andrew Millard, the minister at my local congregation in Newport News (see Fig. 22). Despite being a rather agnostic Buddhist, his concerns and formulations are resonant with UUs across the country. To cite one example of a Native American UU writing from a prison cell, we can read the words of Randy Miller, whose voice was made public by another congregation to which I belong The Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF)— a UU fellowship for all those UUs who do not have a “brick and mortar” location to gather with other UUs. Miller wrote in *Quest*, the newsletter of the CLF:

Community has been lost in today’s world. People have become so engrossed in their own wants, dreams, and desires that they don’t worry about helping anyone else. ...Amongst Native culture, the importance of community is prevalent throughout their history. ...For the Lakota people the expression is *Mitakuye O’yasin*, for the Cherokee it is *Ahwensa Unhili*, and in English it translates to *All Our Relations*. ...All Our Relations is the acknowledgement that each and every person you encounter throughout life is from the Creator and thus, related to you. ...You are more than family; you are spiritually linked to each and every person, and each and every person is dependent upon you and to experience their sense of community. ...To Native people, each and every living thing, whether it be animal, plant, reptile, mineral, all the way to the atom, is a living thing created by the Creator. ...These things, too, become your relations. Even in everyday routine life, Native tribes exhibited community in all things. They hunted, not for the sake of one household or family, but for the benefit of the entire tribe.

...So where have our communities gone? Why the need for separation of the classes and the masses? When did we lose the ties that once bound us so closely together? I believe we haven’t lost those ties; we have just lost sight of them. I have found community and fellowship within a place most people fear more than anything else. For the last nine years, I have been incarcerated at Indiana State Men’s Prison, a maximum security

⁷⁹⁵ Rev. Andrew Millard, “Making Life New,” sermon delivered on 30 November 2014, UUFP, Newport News, Virginia.

hellhole. Yet, while living with the worst of the worst, I have found the best of the best and a place with true community and fellowship.

I am a graduate and now an aide/mentor of the Purposeful Living Units Serve program, or PLUS program. This program is designed to help inmates to correct their thinking and behavioral patterns through a series of classes and projects. But the most successful way we have found to heal ourselves and the victims of our crimes is through service to our community. Through this service we have found that we depend on each other, help each other, teach each other, and that we succeed or fail as one.

We go to classes, eat, sleep and many of us pray together. We do service projects for the prison and the local community together. In a prison filled with what the state calls animals, we have found community and fellowship and have come together to create something positive. We have found success through service to our community and are striving to help others learn to do the same.

So why is it that society can't come together and find fellowship themselves in the free world? Whether it's a Native path and you accept all living things as an extension of yourself through the Creator, and show all things the respect you would show yourself, or whether you follow the lead of a bunch of convicts who have come together and found the healing power that community and fellowship bring with it, each and every one of us is responsible for bringing back our fellowship with All Our Relations. Each of us has the power within us to take the first steps to repairing the damage done by today's society on our communities.⁷⁹⁶

Despite the common conceptual themes however, there are other unspoken themes that tend to permeate UU conversations. In both the case of Andrew Millard as well as Randy Miller, there was an undercurrent of submission, an acceptance, a relinquishing of control, a "de-liberation," if you will. This release of control took place in the face of encounters with boundaries, with communities, with responsibilities, and with relationship through interdependence.

Sometimes the type of community that is strived for among UUs is openly inspired by communities of color. As Unitarian Universalist Myke Johnson quoted Mab Segrest, ubuntu is "born to belonging." After mentioning John Locke's social contract theory of individuals, Johnson continued:

Today, this individualistic understanding is endemic. But Mab Segrest challenges individualism, and she begins her argument with the experience of motherhood. She writes,

It was after watching Barbara give birth to our daughter, Annie, ...that it occurred to me the degree to which this Original Individual was a ridiculously transparent...fiction. None of us

⁷⁹⁶ Miller 2013: 4.

start out as individuals, but as fusions of sperm and egg, embedded and growing in the mother's body for nine months. For months after birth, our consciousness is still merged with its environment, and a sense of the particular and separate self emerges only gradually.

We start out in relationship, and our individuality grows out of that circle of relatedness. Not the other way around. We all need each other in order to flourish and to thrive in life. ... Spirituality is our experience of being a part of the larger whole. Spirituality is restoring our awareness of our connection to the earth, to other people, and to the Mystery at the heart of our vast universe. All of it is one. When we choose community, when we practice loving a particular group of people, we are letting the reality of the universe enter our hearts—we are learning how to experience the reality that we truly are all part of one another. Of course we don't always get it right. Otherwise we wouldn't need to practice. We are not here to try to fix everything in order to create some sort of perfect circle—we are the circle right now, trying to wake up together. Every person is sacred, and we are all one circle.⁷⁹⁷



Fig. 22
Advertisement across the street from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Peninsula (with roadside marker barely visible in the bottom-left).

At one point I began to wonder about how some UUs addressed the idea of “free will.” I asked a UU named David Hovey whom I had met on a train ride home from a General Assembly and he listed his thoughts on the topic quite methodically:

⁷⁹⁷ Johnson, Myke. “Dreaming in Circles.” *Quest* 68, no. 8 (2013): 3.

A) rationally, I don't see where free will enters into the complex system of life: I believe all is atoms and vectors of motion and charge, and the position and values of same are dictated by prior atoms and forces, then, where does choice enter in to it?

B) although it may be determined, it is not predictable. Like a pachinko machine or leaves in the wind, the number and variation of the variables far exceed our comprehension.

C) One might use the above to decouple their actions from their accountability, causing mayhem or slipping into idleness because "what do our actions matter if we are not their choosers."

D) I don't want those outcomes. I still feel desires; I still have wants. And I want to be someone who creates beauty and joy.

E) so, if there is no free will, I am apparently someone who is determined to act as if I have free will until proven otherwise.

F) in support of this position, I have the fact that "Just because rationally I don't see how free will enters the system...doesn't mean I'm right."

G) I find that philosophically, the "self" I have is "that which makes choices" (even if invisible forces influence them).

H) Because my inability to disprove determinism creates the world and outcomes I value, I have an active disinterest in creating proofs that might be illusory.

I) for this reason, and other much more valuable attractions and challenges in life, I when I came to this conclusion, stopped investigating this line of thought.

After that he made sure to add the caveat that this was only his personal view and other UUs may all believe something completely different and then he concluded by remarking: "I am a determinist, but I don't let it get me down."⁷⁹⁸ While he was certainly correct in assuming that many UUs may believe something very different, it feels safe for me to say that the way that he expressed his views may not be shared by others UUs but his line of reasoning would at least be comprehensible and in conversation with many (if not most) UUs even if they disagreed with his conclusions.

Another type of relinquishing control and submitting oneself to circumstance can be as far from theoretical speculation as one can imagine: sacrifice. On July 27, 2008 a very disgruntled, unemployed man named Jim David Adkisson in Knoxville, Tennessee wrote an anti-liberal, anti-homosexual, anti-black manifesto declaring that, because he

⁷⁹⁸ E-mail to author, 1 July 2015.

was unable to attack the real powers (politicians, celebrities, and media executives), he would attack those he could reach: the “Unitarian Universalist Church” which “isn’t a church, it’s a cult. They don’t even believe in God. ... if they find out [you’re] a conservative, they absolutely hate you.”⁷⁹⁹ After writing the manifesto, he entered the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church during a children’s performance with a sawed-off shotgun and opened fire. Linda Kraeger, 61, was one of those killed. The other one was the usher Greg McKendry, 60, who stood in front of Adkisson to protect others. Then four members of the church and a visitor acted together to disarm Adkisson. If McKendry acted on impulse in his spontaneous sacrifice, the UUA and the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church had time to think about their choice. After holding vigils and caring for the church community members, the UUA went out with an ad in the New York Times on August 10 stating “Our Doors *and* Our Hearts Will Remain Open.”⁸⁰⁰ There, UUA president William Sinkford wrote, “Unitarian Universalists stand on the side of love. We invite you to stand with us.”

It did not, however, end there. That became the beginning of a new campaign for UUs dubbed “Standing on the Side of Love” which called for UUs to step up their commitment for social justice even more and take an active stand in relationship with refugees, immigrants, gays, and racial minorities. The campaign has continued ever since 2008 and has involved dozens of actions (if not hundreds) by various UU congregants from opposition to Arizona’s anti-immigrant laws and book censorship to participation in Black Lives Matter demonstrations in response to police brutality and killing of African Americans.

The record however remains spotty and one activist who had been vocally supportive of Black Lives Matter stated at GA 2015 that dozens of UUs had expressed their opposition to his involvement in the Black Lives Matter campaign. I must admit to feeling a bit shocked to hear that. However, I am not sure that I should have been. Looking at the literature, it is possible to read some UU histories with an implicit message that people of color do not matter as much as whites. Narratives by David Bumbaugh, Jane Rzepka, and William Schultz can serve as examples.

Whereas Bumbaugh (and many other Universalists) have felt under-prioritized or excluded in the UUA, Bumbaugh himself wrote a history of Unitarian Universalism which, in turn, under-prioritized or excluded people of color. In *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (2000) he noted that UUs are not defined by a common theology but *are* “defined by a common story” and “because that story has shaped our institutions in significant ways” he offered a narrative account of Unitarian

⁷⁹⁹ Satterfield, James. “Church shooter pleads guilty,” *Knoxville News* 10 February 2009. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/local-news/church-shooter-pleads-guilty-letter-released> Accessed 19 October 2014.

⁸⁰⁰ Donald Skinner, “UUA’s ‘New York Times’ ad affirms justice stances,” *UU World*. 25 August 2008. <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/nyt-ad-affirms-justice> Accessed 14 October 2014.

Universalist history.⁸⁰¹ Although he provided the caveat that this was not “a scholarly exposition, but rather a restatement of the myth at the heart of our movement,” he nonetheless indicated in both instances that there was *a* Unitarian Universalist history and he had access to “*the* myth at *the* heart of *our* movement.”⁸⁰² In light of Bumbaugh’s concerns about the power of particular words (“the” versus “our” in relation to “Judeo-Christian heritage” in the Six Sources), the implications of a single UU history here are significant. Then he began the story with a similarly exclusive imperative: “Those who seek the roots of Unitarian Universalism must begin in the early years of the Christian church.” Those who seek “proto-Unitarians” or “proto-Universalists” in ancient Egypt or Greece are using “more imagination than scholarship.”⁸⁰³ Recall that in his caveat, his own history was not intended to be a “scholarly exposition,” and now “scholarship” is used as a club to “objectively” beat down other historical narratives of Unitarian Universalism that deviate from his own. Considering that Transcendentalists drew so heavily from Indigenous peoples and Eastern faiths, it is noteworthy that Bumbaugh wishes to now exclude those histories from the profound impact that they had on what UUism means today.

Soon the story proceeded to Servetus and his conflict with John Calvin. Without noting the irony of the fact that the early Unitarians and Universalists in New England *were* Calvinists, albeit *dissident* Calvinists, Bumbaugh dismissed the contention of those who would wish to credit Calvin with more influence than Servetus. His reasoning this time was not based on “scholarship” but on popular opinion: “Whatever truth there may be in this argument, it remains the fact that Unitarian Universalists find it easier to identify with the martyrs rather than with the persecutors. It is Servetus rather than Calvin who is honored...”⁸⁰⁴ Non-European cultures and traditions were interesting for Bumbaugh’s narrative primarily as destinations for missionary work in, for example, India, Japan, and among the Chippewa Indians of Minnesota.⁸⁰⁵ African Americans too were largely excluded from Bumbaugh’s history. White UUs were portrayed as being abolitionist but those UUs who were in favor of enslavement were not mentioned. By framing the spectrum of internal UU debate as one between “radicals” on one side and “socially conservative Unitarians” on the other, the image of “good” Unitarians was sustained and the debate between anti-enslavement and pro-enslavement Unitarians was obscured. At the same time, early black Unitarians such as Rev. Ethelred Brown or Francis Ellen Watkins Harper were neglected. Although not necessarily the norm (I am not equipped to make that determination), Bumbaugh’s treatment is not an isolated oversight.

⁸⁰¹ Bumbaugh 2000: 5.

⁸⁰² Ibid: 5-6

⁸⁰³ Ibid: 7.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid: 19.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid 128-129, 136.

Another UU minister, Jane Rzepka, wrote in *Quest*, a very brief coverage of “of Unitarian Universalist History in Just Under Two Thousand Words.” The problem she was attempting to resolve was the skepticism that UUs meet when they are confronted by people who deny that UUs have much grounding in history. Again, there is the caveat that she “would have liked to have included more continents, more diversity, more nuance, indeed, more technical accuracy,” yet the lineage she chose was almost identical to the one cast by Bumbaugh.⁸⁰⁶ She began with Origen of Alexandria in the 200s as a proto-Universalist and then Arius in the 300s as a proto-Unitarian. Calvinists are presented as the “other” whom Universalists “offered relief.” Transcendental theology was reduced to “a religion of direct intuition” without reference to the non-European influences upon Emerson, Thoreau and others. Everybody she mentioned in her story was (or would typically be perceived as) a white male with the single exception of Olympia Brown, a white woman. Not one person of color was mentioned by name (and yet white UUs commonly wonder why there are so few black people in their pews).

She portrayed UUs as revolutionaries, heretics, doubters, and thinkers and cited Mendelsohn who claimed UUs to be “free, not bound by tradition, inheritance, geography.”⁸⁰⁷ Yet ultimately, the history she shared was dominated by white males from England or New England (so much for not being “bound by tradition, inheritance, geography”). Historical revolutionaries, doubters, heretics, and thinkers who were predominantly African, Asian, Muslim, Jewish, Latino, black, red, pagan, or even Buddhist in their culture or self-identification do not even make the slightest appearance or mention in this history.

It is worth recalling Mendelsohn’s words cited by Rzepka that UUs are “free, not bound by tradition, inheritance, geography.” This declaration may go some way to explaining how the tendency among UUs to emphasize history rather than theology might mask a degree of colorblind racism. By ignoring the “unfreedoms” of identity, collective memory, and inequalities bound to tradition, inheritance, and geography, white UU writers can present exclusive white stories conveniently disentangled from “tradition, inheritance, geography” while supposedly inheriting a tradition of anti-racism without acknowledging the inheritance of white privilege on the geography of occupied land.

In *Making the Manifesto: The Birth of Religious Humanism* (2002), former UUA president (1985-1993) and former head of Amnesty International (1994-2006) William Schulz told a story not explicitly about UU history but about a very closely related phenomenon: the birth of religious humanism. Although Schulz’s book 148-page book only covers the making of the first Humanist Manifesto, the topic is worth a brief (somewhat digressive) overview.

⁸⁰⁶ Rzepka 2008: 1.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid: 3.

Schulz labeled the rise of humanism to be a “a natural step in the evolution of left-wing Unitarianism.”⁸⁰⁸ Ideas expressed in part by Unitarians such as Curtis Reese, John Hassler Dietrich, and others during the early 1900s eventually coalesced into a Humanist Manifesto in 1933. This first Manifesto (HM I) was later followed by subsequent manifestos in 1973 (HM II) and 2003 (HM III). The development of the text enabled an oversight of changes and of the times in which they were crafted. The Humanist Manifesto of 1933 was a 1,109-word text that seems to have been intended to galvanize humanists, articulate a vision, and propagate the concept of “religious humanism.”⁸⁰⁹ Though all three were dominated by European American males (HM I seems to have consisted exclusively of white male signatories), the ratio of diversity among the initial signatories increased somewhat over the years.⁸¹⁰ Interestingly, another transition took place in regard to “freedom” and “religion.” The word “free” or “freedom” only appeared once and there were no appearance of the words “liberty,” “autonomy,” “democracy,” “right,” or “rights” in HM I. “Responsibility” appeared twice and the term “religion” or “religious” appeared 27 times.⁸¹¹ Yet by 1973, the roles had reversed: the term “free” or “freedom” appeared 13 times, and now the terms “nation,” “law,” “government,” “rights,” “autonomy,” and “liberty” were introduced into the manifesto. “Religion” was, by this time, marginalized and the phrase “religious humanism” no longer appeared at all. “Responsibility” did however remain in six instances such as the belief in “maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility,” and “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves. ... We are responsible for what we are or will be.”

“Freedom” was also located explicitly within dominant white culture when the signatories noted, “principles of human freedom evolved from the Magna Carta to the Bill of Rights, the Rights of Man, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” At the same time, the signatories were slightly more diverse and now included Europeans, European Americans, and two of the 120 signatories were African Americans: James Farmer and A. Philip Randolph.⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁸ Schulz 2002: 78.

⁸⁰⁹ The phrase is repeated but one example runs thusly, “Religious humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. ... Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted as rapidly as experience allows, in order to function effectively in the modern world” (Schulz 2002: xxvii).

⁸¹⁰ The first Manifesto even went so far as to advocate the development of “manly attitudes... fostered by education and supported by custom” (Schulz 2002: xxvii).

⁸¹¹ “Secular” appeared once, but only to demonstrate that there was no line between “religious” and “secular.” As such, they were explicitly arguing against dominant conceptions of religion: “Nothing human is alien to the religious. It includes labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation--all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living.”

⁸¹² A separate humanist document not associated with the American Humanist Association (as the others were) was drafted in 2000 and signed by, amongst others, Norm Allen (founder of the African Americans for Humanism) and Anthony Pinn.

In 2003 HM III appeared as much more condensed text (less than a fifth the size of HM II). The terms “state,” “nation,” “law,” and “government” now disappeared again. “Religion” was now absent completely. “Freedom” (now with 3 appearances) remained along with “rights,” “responsibility” and the “democratic process.” The signatory list remained open but often appeared with a list of “notable” signatories such as Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Dawkins, Arun Gandhi, David Bumbaugh and, the only African American to sign it, Ethelbert Haskins. The percentage of women signatories remained the same at about ten percent.

What this brief digressive overview suggested was that the Manifestos were a particularly white-dominant and male-dominant enterprise, especially in the earliest years which was the time period Schulz chose to cover. The period was certainly interesting in that it saw the birth of “religious humanism” which to many people today seems to be an oxy-moron. When the humanist tradition split between the secular humanists and the religious humanists, only the former, with scholars such as Dawkins leading the way, became familiar to most outsiders while Unitarian Universalists (9 of whom signed HM III) tend to be among the few remaining representatives of organized religious humanism. The “secular” humanists, in defining “religion” by the presence of belief in the supernatural, further the focus on rationality and “freedom” that was so prominent in the so-called Enlightenment. If for nothing else, Schulz’s story of the birth of “religious humanism” is interesting as a strike against the religion-secular binary.

At the same time, the consequences of choosing an exclusively white context to study without labeling it “Making of the White Humanist Manifesto,” is inherently exclusive. Had the scope been broader in time to include HM II, then James Farmer, A. Philip Randolph, Alice Walker, and William Jones might have been included. Had the contextual scope been broader to include humanists not directly tied to the Manifesto then contemporaries such as Unitarian minister E. Ethelred Brown, author Langston Hughes, sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, author C. L. R. James, or socialist activist Hubert Henry Harrison could have been at least mentioned. As it was, the story remained a “whites-only” narrative. The result was the reproduction of cognitive and narrative segregation.⁸¹³

Yet, while conceptions of “freedom” in UU contexts often descend explicitly from (and are framed within) white European Christian and Humanist traditions, they also contain elements of conceptions of “freedom” and “unfreedom” that challenge colonial

⁸¹³ That Schulz knew about Ethelred Brown was quite clear as he cited Morrison-Reed’s work which was largely about Brown. Schulz even mentions the racist mistreatment of McGee (a story of white violation rather than black accomplishment) which was drawn from Morrison-Reed’s *Black Pioneers* (Schulz 2002: xxii) Yet the fact that Floyd-Thomas could write an entire book on Brown and black humanism (including all of the aforementioned except Hurston) while Schulz found absolutely nothing to say on the topic is in itself a noteworthy comment on the black-white divide. For the record, Floyd-Thomas’s work does not Schulz’s either.

orders and colonial conceptions. One of them, Thandeka, is a UU minister, introduced earlier as a “critical race studies scholar.” In light of her book, *Learning to be White*, she is that too.⁸¹⁴ Furthermore, her discussion about “white skin privilege” in relation to racism can be added here as a UU-related text about “freedom,” with the analogy being that “white freedom” could, like “white skin privilege,” similarly be described as being less “mutilated” and, rather than a bonus (a “privilege”), it could be better described as “powerlessness in the midst of a pervasive system of abuse.” In fact, Thandeka explicitly framed racism and “privilege” in rights language as a means of speaking about how some “citizens ...are able to avoid being ...having their basic human rights violated.” Yet, the idea of whites being trapped in racism along with blacks did not mean for Thandeka that they were excused from acting (which was James Cone’s fear and concern about describing whites as being adversely affected by racism as well). Instead, the exposure of racism and the implications of both equality and interdependence demand of any white person looking at it (as Thandeka helped white people to do) to act according to their own moral compass to right these wrongs.

Another more subtle anti-colonial current within UUs are those rooted to the “interdependent web of all existence,” in particular those who have advocated a transition from “respect” to “reverence” in both deed and text. Those currents that favor revering the “web” can be seen as expressions of “freedom” in conversation with Native American traditions that see the land as sacred as well as in conversation with Frances E. W. Harper and the immediatists of the 1800s who called on citizens to place their allegiance upon values more profound than the nation-state.

While some white UUs have been relatively passive in relation to anti-racist work in recent times, others have taken the issue to heart. On June 25, 2015 I attended a seminar on Black Lives Matter. There were three to four hundred UUs in attendance. Among the speakers were Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou and co-founder of the Right Relationship team Elandria Williams who said “We UUs must use liberation like it’s tattooed on our body”. White ally Chris Crass spoke as well and when he said “Our spiritual journey as UUs is not about how many black people are in our congregations but about how much damage can we do to white supremacy” and received a standing ovation.⁸¹⁵ They ended the seminar/workshop by standing together with the audience holding hands and chanting the words of former Black Liberation Army activist Assata Shakur: “We must stand up and fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support one another. There’s nothing to lose but our chains.”

Regarding resistance to colonial orders, the UU General Assembly voted in 2012 to reject the Doctrine of Discovery and called upon members, member congregations, and the UUA to make this repudiation explicit in both word and action. In the words of the Responsive Resolution:

⁸¹⁴ If the reader did not already know this, then one might consider any difference in image that one might have had of “Thandeka” as critical race scholar or “Thandeka” as UU minister.

⁸¹⁵ General Assembly, “Black Lives Matter,” 25 June 2015.

...we, the delegates of the 2012 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery as a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and religious, cultural, and racial biases having no place in the modern day treatment of indigenous peoples; and ...we call upon the Unitarian Universalist Association and its member congregations to review the historical theologies, policies, and programs of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism to expose the historical reality and impact of the Doctrine of Discovery and eliminate its presence in the contemporary policies, programs, theologies, and structures of Unitarian Universalism; and ...invite indigenous partners to a process of Honor and Healing (often called Truth and Reconciliation), and if one or more partners agree, to undergo such a process about Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist complicity in the structures and policies that oppress indigenous peoples and the earth; and ...encourage other religious bodies [and] ...the UUA ...to propose a specific Congressional Resolution to repudiate this doctrine; and ...call upon the United States to fully implement the standards of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the U.S. law and policy without qualifications. In doing so, we support the establishment of commissions that include accountable representatives of the indigenous nations of North America and the Hawai'ian Kingdom.⁸¹⁶

Other texts in this spirit that have followed are, for example, a curriculum for workshops on the Doctrine of Discovery organized by Gail Forsyth-Vail and *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) on Beacon Press. An e-mail advertisement for the book was sent with the accompanying text:

On Monday, October 13, many people will celebrate Columbus Day, but our faith calls us to fully understand the legacy of Christopher Columbus, just as it calls us to respect and learn from indigenous peoples and support their struggles for social justice and religious freedom. That is why Unitarian Universalists instead will be honoring Indigenous Peoples Day.⁸¹⁷

During the UU General Assembly of 2013, I listened to the invited headline speaker Eboo Patel discuss his vision of interfaith relations. He began by pointing out commonalities and differences between Muslims and UUs. I found this interesting because it implied that one could not be both UU and Muslim which, I knew, some of those in the audience were. He effused confidence in determining what constituted a Muslim (based largely on his claim of the shahada to be a creed "God is One and Muhammad is his Messenger"). It made me wonder if Patel would welcome people who identified with taqwacore as "Muslim."

⁸¹⁶ UUA Homepage. "The Doctrine of Discovery 2012 Responsive Resolution," <http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/209123.shtml> Accessed June 18, 2014.

⁸¹⁷ E-mail sent from UUA Bookstore (bookstore@uua.org), "Celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day," 9 October 2014.

This seemed especially interesting in light of the fact that the year prior Unitarian Universalist minister Meredith Garmon had delivered a sermon that explicitly identified taqwacore as something that seemed Unitarian Universalist. In his sermon, he not only addressed inclusivity but also underlying issues of “freedom” and the obligations that accompany “freedom” in community.

Garmon discussed the semiotics of labeling, identity, and the strong pull toward community. He mentioned his professor in grad school who was into bird-watching but only did it because there was a name for it (“birder”). Otherwise, it would have been too weird and difficult to explain. Names, Garmon noted, are extremely useful and powerful in that sense, that is, when they tell who we *are*. Garmon referred to the “countervailing call to freedom and acceptance and diversity” which meant being pulled in opposite directions of both needing rules and wanting to resist them:

We can't get a community of shared rule following without putting some energy into policing those rules making sure that everyone's following them. If we don't all follow our rules then who are we? We don't get to have the connection of a shared-life pattern if you don't follow the pattern. Community is hard. It's always falling apart and we're always looking for it, trying to find it, or build it. Community based on strict rules can be so attractive, it's so clear and direct but there's a price to be paid for all those rules. The Unitarian Universalist approach to community is not to have much in the way of rules which means it isn't so clear what binds us together. For a lot of people that isn't very satisfying. There's also a price to be paid for minimalism on rules. Community is hard any way you cut it.⁸¹⁸

Garmon did not just mention taqwacore in his sermon, he devoted more or less the entire sermon to it. He described in detail the storyline of the original novel and he even explained aspects of Five Percenter philosophy to his audience (certainly not a topic commonly raised in UU congregations). In his conclusion, he integrated a passage from *The Taqwacores* into the sermon which I now integrate into the conclusion of this discussion on exclusion. I quote:

Michael Muhammad Knight's dream sounds pretty much like what I would imagine a Unitarian Universalist Muslim would sound. As like when he says:

Allah is arranging things beyond all our grasps. The earth isn't spinning because you told it to. Your intestines aren't digesting by your command. You are made up of a trillion cells that don't ask your permission before offering up their rakats [ritual prayers]. And we think submission's about applying a strict discipline to our worship? We think surrender's about not eating a pig? That's too small to me. I can't fit my deen, my faith life, in a little box because to me, everything comes from Allah. Birds sing Allah's name. To say Allah is in this

⁸¹⁸ Rev. Meredith Garmon, Sermon delivered on 21 October 2012, “Taqwacore: Punk Islam” <https://itunes.apple.com/se/podcast/taqwacore-punk-islam/id457887067?i=122925181&mt=2>
Accessed 19 June 2014.

book and not that one. Or He likes this and not that. Do you know who you're talking about? Allah is too big and open for my deen to be small and closed. Does that make me a kufr? I say Allahu Akbar and if that's not good enough then bleep Islam. You can have it. Imam Husayn said, "He who has not religion, let him at least be free in his present life." So there you go. Now let us pray.

End quote. So there you go. So now let us sing.

Except for his minor exclusion of the word "fuck" (replaced by "bleep") during the service, Garmon expressed a broad degree of inclusivity and a low degree of censorship. This may be because he saw the "other" in himself and hoped to share with his congregants a broader conception of what a Unitarian Universalist might look like.

Living Words in the UUA

When thinking about the ways that UUs put their texts into practice, one of the first things that come to my mind is when, on February 24, 2013, I visited a UU congregation of about 400 members. On the wall they had a big poster a couple meters wide in which they had written all of the various groups and committees in the congregation. I counted 75 different groups ranging from welcoming committees or youth group to a wide variety of social justice groups (soup kitchen, ecology issues, interfaith work, etc.). More than 60 of those groups were not explicitly governance-related. This suggested to me that a large part of the congregation was actively involved in some form or fashion in various ways aside from merely attending Sunday services. Services in themselves vary from congregation to congregation as each one is autonomous. I've seen a variety but the most common variant is one that includes, amongst other rituals, a lighting of the chalice, songs, prayer or meditation, a collection, a sermon, a sharing of "joys and concerns," and a holding of hands.⁸¹⁹ Services are usually followed by a social hour which, in some cases, is in coordination with opportunities for signing up for social justice causes.

The results however can be mixed. As former General Assembly moderator Gini Courter told me:

...Sometimes there's confusion about where UUs stand. We're either the most liberal defender of the status quo or the most conservative of those pushing for radical change.

⁸¹⁹ For a description of UU services see Pinn 2012: 118-121. For anyone who wonders what "religious humanism" might look like in practice, many congregations of the UUA provide an example every Sunday.

There's individuals who fall outside who fall outside that spectrum but that's the bulk of the UUA so if you're expecting something else, you're gonna be disappointed.⁸²⁰

Indeed, the UUA today is a far cry from the radically pacifist, communal-oriented group of Unitarians led by Faustus Socinus in Rakow, Poland in the late 1500s.⁸²¹ Today, the UUA both supports UU clergy and members who work in the U.S. military. This is notable in some of the books they have released such as *War Zone Faith: An Army Chaplain's Reflections from Afghanistan* (2013) and *Bless All Who Serve: Sources of Hope, Courage and Faith for Military Personnel and Their Families*, (2010) which interestingly cites anti-militarists and anarchists such as Dorothy Day, the co-founder of Catholic Worker, and pagan activist Starhawk in a text designed to support people in their faith while engaging in their work in the armed forces.⁸²²

On the other hand, the UUA also supports activism that challenges U.S. policies on immigration and gay marriage and many UUs and UU-affiliated groups or congregations are involved in anti-militarism, opposition to the use of drones and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. It is not uncommon for some members to engage in civil disobedience to protest U.S. or corporate environmental policies and practices but UUs can also adhere to elite echelons of society. UUs are organized as fellowships in which the vast majority of members do not live in a collective, but efforts have begun to move in the direction more shared living. The Lucy Stone Collective, supported in part by the UUA, has recently spearheaded efforts to found a new collective through the internal UU-crowd-funding homepage Faithify. The image of UUs as individualist contrasts with the message repeatedly heard at gatherings. When I attended the General Assembly in 2013, a speaker recalled somebody who had died and stated, "We warm ourselves by fires we did not create. We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant. We drink from wells we did not dig. ...and so we are forever bound to community."⁸²³

One of those who came before was Reverend Stephen Fritchman. He described a story of his own background when as a college student he had taken a job reading gas meters in Cleveland: "Amidst slime, garbage, rats, ad cast-off clothing, I recorded the month's consumption of the precious fuel, and discovered how men and women treat each other and their offspring when tortured by low wages, cramped quarters, exhaustion, and cheap liquor with no time for anything but eating, sleep, and procreation on the simplest of terms. ...My own little private world of middle-class comfort evaporated, never to be fully recovered."⁸²⁴

Fritchman had been accused of participating in "communist front" organizations and using his role as editor of AUA paper *The Christian Register* to present material that conformed "solely to pro-Soviet policies." In response to the initial hearings about

⁸²⁰ Interview with author 17 March 2013.

⁸²¹ See Mortimer (2009).

⁸²² Tittle 2010.

⁸²³ UU GA 21 June 2013.

⁸²⁴ Eddis 2011: 17-18.

the matter which exonerated Fritchman, AUA president Frederick May Eliot wrote in 1946,

When challenged, the principle of freedom becomes paramount in importance; but once it's accepted, it becomes less important than the problem of creating unity through diversity. ... There is a need to ... to redouble our determination to cultivate the spirit of fair play, to avoid name-calling, and to keep emotional reaction under the control of common sense. ... The incident may prove helpful by reminding us of the distinction between the use of freedom and its abuse.⁸²⁵

Homer Jack, a socialist-pacifist Unitarian minister in Chicago, had insisted that outing Fritchman was not name-calling but a matter of transparency. Red-identifying was not the same thing as red-baiting, and saw nothing wrong with Fritchman expressing himself “but not under the official Unitarian label.”⁸²⁶ In 1947, Fritchman was forced to resign from his position as editor of the Register and began the next year his position as minister for First Unitarian of Los Angeles. From 1947-1949, a group formed calling itself the National Committee of Free Unitarians whose membership included Edward B. Wilcox, a former U.S. army intelligence officer and Unitarian minister. The “Free Unitarians” engaged in anti-communist agitation including a 29-page pamphlet directed against Fritchman. In their first bulletin, they wrote of their purpose in addressing certain concerns:

the leadership of the American Unitarian Association, knowingly or unknowingly, has been encouraging or at least tolerating communistic ideology, materialistic, naturalistic, and humanistic philosophy detrimental to Unitarian Christianity, and ... the same leadership has shown more concern for social service and political and legislative propaganda than for the spiritual side of religion.⁸²⁷

In response to accusations of supporting communism, Eliot wrote in 1947:

There is a difference between the realm of ideas and the realm of action; and it sometimes happens even in a free fellowship, that the adherents of one particular “ideology” or “philosophy” attempt to gain dominant or even exclusive power in the fellowship as a whole. So long as I am president of the Association, no such group will be permitted to have its way—neither the communists, nor the humanists, nor the theists, nor the committee to which you belong. The Unitarian fellowship is committed to the unrestricted exercise of reason, and I consider it my sacred obligation to protect that

⁸²⁵ Ibid 35.

⁸²⁶ Ibid 38

⁸²⁷ Ibid 55.

principle to the limit of my power. I consider your accusation evidence that I have not wholly failed in the discharge of my duty.⁸²⁸

An open letter was sent to Free Unitarians signed by Rev. James Luther Adams and about 50 others which supported Eliot and countered the “Free Unitarians” with the argument that they were propagating for “the ‘elimination’ of all philosophies distasteful to them,” and ignored “the congregational tradition and policy of our churches as recognized and safeguarded in our bylaws.” They continued,

There is no place in ‘pure religion’ for the Grand Inquisitor. Nor is pure religion “pure spirituality.” ... The essence of Unitarianism has always been the application of religious and ethical insight to the practical issues of common life, for the creation of constant re-creation of the forms of society. ... Concern for social service and for political and economic justice is the sign of love to God and love to man. ... There can be no neutrality in this matters. Silence or inaction are themselves forms of action; they betray democracy and liberal religion by default. And neutrality is often a conceal way of taking sides. ... we are firmly united in our loyalty to our free faith, to the commanding vision of prophetic religion... We call upon the leadership of the American Unitarian Association to continue its fidelity to these principles which the “Free Unitarians,” “knowingly or unknowingly,” threaten.⁸²⁹

After his resignation, Fritchman wondered, “...the issue is the ultimate one of Unitarian religion—are we men who honor the free tongue or are we not?” He claimed that he been accused of “administrative non-cooperation” but that he had been cooperative and transparent with one caveat: “...I was encouraged to print ‘both sides’ of issues when often I knew from my reading of the one-sided sermon on the Mount that there was only one side for an honest man to take.”⁸³⁰

In 1950, the Levering Act of California was passed by the California legislature which required all public employees to affirm that they did not advocate the overthrow of the government “by force or violence or other unlawful means.” In 1954 the act was broadened mean that all tax-exempt organizations, including churches, were required to annually declare that they did not advocate the overthrow of the government. Fritchman resisted and First Unitarian of Los Angeles membership meeting voted 206 to 31 to instruct its board of trustees to resist making such a declaration. Together with First Unitarian of Berkeley, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Van Nuys and the Methodist Church of San Leandro, they chose to give up their tax-exempt status while contesting the case in court. Finally, after reaching the Supreme Court in 1958, they won the case (and received their taxes plus interest in return).⁸³¹ The story of Stephen

⁸²⁸ Ibid 55-56.

⁸²⁹ Ibid 56-57.

⁸³⁰ Ibid 66.

⁸³¹ Ibid 99.

Fritchman is one example of both the internal tensions that have arisen among different visions within Unitarianism and later the UUA as well as the practice of resisting government constraint.

Regarding structure, the UUA as an organization is quite complex in itself (see Appendix part three for a governance chart of the UUA executive branch). The UUA furthermore supports and interacts with a number of long-standing institutions from the publishing companies (Skinner Press Beacon Press and Skinner House Books) and the quarterly magazine *UU World* to support for ministerial education (Meadeville Lombard, Starr King, etc.) and the Lucy Stone housing collective, from the annual General Assembly (a massive undertaking in itself) to the 40,000 member-strong Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). The UUSC currently has three major operations: (1) “Choose Compassionate Consumption” (CCC) which simultaneously mobilizes support for ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage (which they label a “moral imperative”), support for Fair Trade consumption, and demands that taxes on the rich are raised, (2) Sustainable Recovery in Haiti (trauma support work and collaborating with the Papaye Peasant Movement in eco-village development), (3) the Human Right to Water (emphasizing collaborative work with “Rural communities and low-income urban residents, Indigenous people, People of color, women, children, and people living with disabilities,” to safeguard water sources in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and California).⁸³²

Recently the UUA has supported the launching of a UU crowd-funding site Faithy.org where members can post their own projects ranging from outreach and social justice to Ordination costs and UU-related travel expenses. One project was devoted to providing courses in Non-Violent Communication (NVC). The Church of the Larger Fellowship congregation (of which I am a member) recently posted a proposal for expanding their prison ministry and raised \$10,000 in two months. Six hundred of the CLF’s 3,600 members are currently incarcerated. The ministry aimed to expand existing correspondence courses to engage three other UU congregations and “provide classes, pastoral care, and companionship to prisoners as well as provide new connections for resisting the system of mass incarceration that unjustly effects far too many people of color.”⁸³³ The most celebrated UU to be incarcerated in recent times was Tim DeChristopher who gave a false bid on federal oil and gas leases at an auction in Utah. His work to stall destruction of land near national parks earned him a two-year stint in federal prison (yet under the Obama administration the land became permanently preserved which means that his action succeeded). In a denomination where UUA presidents are known to regularly engage in civil disobedience (and sometimes spend time in jail) on behalf of causes such as anti-racism, immigrant rights, and environmental defense, DeChristopher’s case was widely supported by the UUA.

⁸³² See UUSC, www.uusc.org Accessed 12 October 2015.

⁸³³ “CLF Prison Ministry Expansion,” <http://www.faithify.org/projects/clf-prison-ministry-expansion/> Accessed 12 October 2015.

On a more local and personal level, one of the practices that UU services tend to incorporate is called “Joys and Concerns.” These are the times each Sunday that any member of the congregation can walk up front, light a candle, and if they wish to speak in addition to lighting the candle (which they usually do), they introduce themselves and then share with fellow congregants what’s been on their mind. I recall one day in particular when a person stood up to speak and said how it was difficult to introduce themselves because the person in question was undergoing a sex change process and was about half-way through. Which name to use? How to describe oneself? That sharing helped me fathom the difficulties that such a journey must entail and how the simple ritual of “Joys and Concerns” made it easier for this person to both express themselves and share this information with others in a supportive context without fear of judgment.

In line with the UUA’s strong advocacy for marginalized peoples and principles of democratic inclusivity, they have also challenged way that gender binaries in language have constructed social and physical space. By having only two options imagined in language, the result has become only two options available in terms of basic services such as bathrooms. No toilet is available for somebody who does not identify as simply either “male” or “female.” Nor do these two options provide optimal service for people who might identify as one or the other but who do not appear to match dominant prototypical images about what a “male” or “female” ought to look like. Unitarian Universalists, by including the voices of people who had been excluded from the building and bathroom design at convention centers, took it upon themselves to rearrange social space. Subsequently, at UUA General Assemblies one can choose a “male” bathroom, a “female” bathroom, and a bathroom that welcomes all people. They posted signs at these gender-neutral toilets to inform assembly participants about this decision. The signs read:

Sometimes because of how people look, they aren’t allowed to pee. Here at General Assembly, we can do better!

THIS BATHROOM IS FOR EVERYONE.

There are real impacts when bathrooms are labeled for women or men *only*. One of the places where oppression happens is in bathrooms. For transgender and/or gender non-conforming people, the use of restrooms can come with emotional and physical harassment, deep discomfort, risk of arrest for being in the ‘wrong’ bathroom or even physical violence and death. As a step toward being a Welcoming Assembly, restrooms near the Plenary and Exhibit Halls are designated for use by all genders. ... *Please trust that each individual knows which restroom is most comfortable and appropriate for them.* You are encouraged to thoughtfully examine and challenge your assumptions around gender identity and gender expression. We invite compassionate dialogue around these issues, and as part of our work around right relationship, it is important to remember

that personal processing should not be done with transgender and/or gender non-conforming people.⁸³⁴

This seemingly small gesture has significant impact. First, it re-organized social space away from binary thinking about something as basic as gender. Second, it demonstrated an active interest in making sure that all people are able to participate on equal terms. It is precisely in this spirit of equal inclusivity and mutual respect that the UUA created the Right Relationship Team in 2006 which could be described as a system of non-coercive mutual aid that facilitates communication between parties and provides assistance in regard to asymmetrical power relations.⁸³⁵ To understand its function, it can help to understand why it was created.

The background to the Right Relationship Team is rooted in exclusive *white* relations many years prior to the founding of the UUA. White Unitarians and Universalists were not always determined anti-racists or helpful allies for people of color. Despite a number of Unitarian abolitionists (notably author Lydia Maria Child and Thomas Wentworth Higginson), the denomination was divided. Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was a Unitarian who successfully appealed to fellow Unitarian President Millard Fillmore in 1850 to sign the notorious Fugitive Slave Act which required Northern states to send blacks who had escaped the South back to their captors. Calhoun, who also happened to be the founder of All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington DC, belonged to the class of southerners who argued in defense of “slavery as an institution in terms of liberty and self-determination for white male Southerners.”⁸³⁶ His colleague Daniel Webster, another Unitarian and U.S. Senator, gave a speech entitled “Liberty and Union, one and Inseparable, Now and Forever,” with precisely that message. Mark Morrison-Reed’s work *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination* (1994) and the anthology *Darkening the Doorways* (2011) shared a number of stories of African American Unitarians and Universalists who were given a cold shoulder, weak support, or even hostility in the past hundred years. For example, when Adin Ballou, then Universalist, took a radical stance against enslavement, he lost a significant number from his Massachusetts congregation.⁸³⁷ Indeed, despite consistent black membership since the very beginning, it took Universalists more than 100 years to ordain their first African American minister. Joseph Jordan, who was ministering a congregation in Norfolk, Virginia, was ordained in 1889. His 35 congregants

⁸³⁴ 21 June 2103. UU GA.

⁸³⁵ The first General Assembly for the Right Relationship Team was however in 2007. Christopher L. Walton And Tom Stites, “Environment and diversity themes of General Assembly: Report on the Unitarian Universalist Association’s 2007 annual meeting.” 18 August 2007. <http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/36904.shtml> Accessed 23 October 2014.

⁸³⁶ Floyd-Thomas’ phrasing, 2008: 66.

⁸³⁷ Morrison-Reed 2011: 90.

occasionally included white Universalists who had no white Universalist alternative in the area.⁸³⁸

Jessica York related an inside story of how white Unitarians were grappling with the question of desegregation in 1948. At the time, most congregations in the U.S. were segregated by law, choice, or custom. The First Unitarian Society of Chicago was no exception. Yet, in this case, the white Unitarians had their whites-only church located in a neighborhood where many African Americans lived. Racial segregation was written into the by-laws of the Unitarian congregation. White theologian James Luther Adams had set out to change that.

The day came when many members began to believe they needed to take action against racism if they really wanted to live their values and principles. The minister, the Reverend Leslie Pennington, ...and James Luther Adams proposed a change in the church's by-laws to desegregate the church and welcome people whatever the color of their skin. They saw this as a way to put their love into action. When the congregation's board of directors considered the desegregation proposal, most of them supported it. However, one member of the board objected. "Your new program is making desegregation into a creed," he said. "You are asking everyone in our church to say they believe desegregating, or inviting, even recruiting people of color to attend church here is a good way to tackle racism. What if some members don't believe this?"...

The debate went on in the board of directors' meeting until the early hours of the morning. Everyone was exhausted and frustrated. Finally, James Luther Adams ...asked the person who had voiced the strongest objection, "What do you say is the purpose of this church?" ...

The board member who opposed opening the church to people of color finally replied. "Okay, Jim. The purpose of this church is to get hold of people like me and change them."

The First Unitarian Society of Chicago successfully desegregated.⁸³⁹

This story was shared by Lynn Ungar who continued by stating: "The purpose of church community is to get ahold of people like us and change us. Not into some false version of ourselves based on peer pressure and going along with the crowd, but into a truer version of ourselves, the people that we are able to be with the support and challenge of a visionary community."⁸⁴⁰ This quest for change has been an arduous route for UUs. In 1963, UUA president Dana Greeley and many other UUs joined Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March on Washington. Later they joined the Civil Rights activists in Alabama pushing for equal voting rights. Two of the UU activists who went

⁸³⁸ Frank 2011: 95.

⁸³⁹ Ungar 2013: 7.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

to Alabama were Reverend James Reeb and Viola Gregg Liuzzo. Reeb was clubbed by a mob on March 9, 1965 and, after the hospital in Selma refused to treat him, he died on the 11th. President Johnson called Reeb a “man of God” at the same time as he delivered the Voting Rights Act to Congress on March 15th. Dr. King eulogized Reeb the same day. Ten days later Liuzzo, who had stated that she knew she might be killed before she left Michigan, was driving with Leroy Morton in Selma, Alabama. They shot by the KKK (one of whom was a paid FBI informant; Morton survived the shooting, Liuzzo did not). These incidents undoubtedly placed UUs on the map for many blacks. It would seem as if white UUs were willing to die for the rights that blacks had been literally dying to attain for years. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded in 1966. The same year Martin Luther King gave the Ware Lecture at the UU General Assembly.⁸⁴¹ The summer of 1967 saw 75 major riots across cities in the United States resulting in at least 83 deaths. In October 1967 the Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus (BUUC) was formed during an Emergency Conference on the UU Response to the Black Rebellion organized the UUA.⁸⁴²

The BUUC made a list of nonnegotiable demands to the assembly which included the creation of a Black Affairs Council (BAC) funded by the UUA at \$250,000 for four years. Following intense debate the demands were passed. Then, in February 23-25, 1968, the BUUC gathered about 200 of the total of about 600 African American Unitarian Universalists for a meeting in Chicago where the 9-member BAC was formed (containing six blacks and three whites). On February 29, the U.S. government released the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders where the famous declaration was made: “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

On April 4, 1968 the BAC, representatives from the BUUC, and the white support group FULLBAC (Full Recognition and Funding for the Black Affairs Council) gathered to meet in Philadelphia. The meeting itself was very mixed. But when news came of the assassination of Martin Luther King, the groups split according to race to mourn and cry separately.⁸⁴³ As Lewis McGee noted in his eulogy of King, where King had once eulogized Reeb, now McGee was compelled to eulogize King.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴¹ The Ware Lecture is the keynote speech given every year at General Assembly by somebody outside of the UUA dealing in some way with social justice.

⁸⁴² In the same year, across the country, Black Unitarians for Radical Reform (BURR) was formed by LA-area blacks to push for racial reform within the UUA. Also the same year a survey was published that found that more than a quarter of UUs believed that being black would hamper a minister’s effectiveness and nearly half said the same thing in regard to ministers being women. In 1989, the figure sunk to 13% for women but remained the same in regard to blacks. By mid-1968, the total number of black UUs seems to have more than doubled in half a year to about 1,500 (either that or the statistics are inconsistent: see Morrison-Reed 2011: 319-21).

⁸⁴³ Morrison-Reed (2011: 178).

⁸⁴⁴ McGee (2011: 180).

More riots followed in the wake of King's death. The national tension produced by the riots, the war against Vietnam, and the increasing protests against the war in Vietnam helped create an intense sense of urgency for many —particularly black Americans who were seeing black leaders killed and black neighborhoods destroyed. The next month, in May, a group of UUs composed of African Americans and European Americans formed the Black and White Alternative (later "Action" instead of "Alternative") known as BAWA. In contrast to BUUC they argued for joint-race projects against racism.

The sole African American on the UUA Board, Wade H. McCree Jr., adamantly opposed accepting the demands of the BUUC, threatened resignation, and said that the very principle of a Black Affairs Council made him feel "obliged" to form a "White Affairs Council."⁸⁴⁵ Similar feelings were held by black UU psychologist Kenneth Clark, and African American UU Whitney M. Young, Jr. who argued that the way that "white radicals... fell over themselves" in their attempts to completely comply with "insulting resolutions, and ...wild talk" constituted "a subtle kind of racism ... for their implicit assumption was that blacks had to be humored and pacified."⁸⁴⁶ Others, such as Mwalimu Imara (then Renford Gaines), were growing tired of attempting to get white people to understand racism: As a UU minister in Illinois and host of a radio program called the "The Psychopathology of Racism," he was randomly attacked, received repeated death threats, ignored by the sheriff, and left with a largely white congregation who had difficulties in believing his reports of harassment. In a sermon entitled "Blacks, Get Your Guns," he preached:

Black people live with the reality of a police state every day. It is hard, difficult, perhaps impossible for white people in America to understand that black people do not have the same protection of the law and from the illegal law coercion that white people enjoy. It matters little whether we live in a suburb or a ghetto. The white man with a badge on his chest and a gun on his hip has unlimited license to kill blacks. ...Middle class blacks have been too silent while young black people have been dying to bring humanity and justice to black people in this country... I, as a black man, live in two worlds. If you wish to retain me as minister you will have to share as much of both my worlds with me as I share your intimate life with you. ...Time is running out for all black people. We are about the business of survival, not parliamentary debating points of romantic escapism.⁸⁴⁷

Imara's plea was not answered by the majority of white UUs. In the end, the UUA Board subsequently declined funding to BAC directly and instead proposed that BAC

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid 184.

⁸⁴⁶ Morrison-Reed 2011: 224.

⁸⁴⁷ Gaines 2011: 201-202; Though this sermon was from 1969 and his words captured a sentiment of urgency and frustration that was running high among many black UUs and completely foreign to many white UUs.

apply for affiliate status and seek money from a newly created racial justice fund with a budget of \$300,000 per year.

In June 1968, just two months after King's death, the UUA General Assembly gathered in Cleveland where the city's first black mayor Carl B. Stokes held the keynote speech. Amid heated debate between BAWA and BAC supporters the GA voted overwhelmingly to reaffirm the funding decision to BAC *and* additionally supply \$50,000 to BAWA. Following GA, however, the UUA Board of Trustees affirmed the decision for only one year due to lack of funds. Indeed, the lack of funds has been a continual problem for UUs. Partially, responsibility lay with Greeley's administration for excessive spending which devastated the UUA economically leading to drastic spending cuts and partially responsibility lay with the 50% of UUs who have a sizable income: "The second-highest income earners among North American religious groups, UUs rank lowest in financial giving to their churches."⁸⁴⁸ Yet none of that mattered in the moment when a solution was needed to the problem at hand.

The Board recommended that the BAC reapply for funding annually and they reconfirmed their funding of BAWA —both of which the BAC adamantly rejected. The conflict resurfaced at GA in Boston 1969 where the division led to a walk-out and nearly produced a schism. Successful mediation ensued and, in a final vote, 798 to 737 delegates voted to support BAC but not BAWA. However, in response to more perceived resistance by white leadership to funding the BAC on its terms, the BUUC voted to disaffiliate BAC from the UUA in 1970 and seek funding from non-UU sources (which it eventually gathered more than \$100,000).

Notable events between the 70s and the 2000s include the following: In 1980 the UUA engaged in an Institutional Racism Audit. In 1982, the Network of Black UUs was formed. In 1988 African American UU Ministries (AAUUM) was formed. The UUA had 17 black ministers by then. In 1992, the Continental Congress of African American UUs gathered in Philadelphia for Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Although she had been a celebrated poet, worked with the Underground Railroad, and shared stages repeatedly with Susan B. Anthony (who was white) and Frederick Douglass (who was male), her name had been left out of textbooks (presumably for being neither).⁸⁴⁹ In 1997, another group was formed: Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM) and it remains today the most prominent group in the UUA for people of color. In 1999 Qiyamah Rahman became the black female district executive (Thomas Jefferson district) and by the year 2000 twenty-six African Americans are UU ministers across the country. With Sinkford's election as UUA president in 2001, it would seem that African Americans were being fully welcomed into the fold. Yet, more tension unfolded a few years later.

Just as the UUA was attempting to close the door on the Empowerment Saga with the Commission on Appraisal's report, "Empowerment: One Denomination's Quest

⁸⁴⁸ Lee 1995: 392.

⁸⁴⁹ Boyd 1994.

for Racial Justice 1967-1982,” at the 2005 General Assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, another pivotal incident in the history of the UUA took place. The series of incidents took place in Dallas and Fort Worth immediately prior to and during the 2005 GA which involved experiences of discrimination felt by various UU youth of color. These incidents were, like the Empowerment Saga, complex and contested. Afterward, the UUA engaged a Special Review Commission to conduct more than 80 interviews in order to reconstruct a timeline of events. After their conclusion were published in a report in March, 2006, the *UU World* described the results:

...the timeline reports “miscommunications and misunderstandings” at a Leadership Development Conference in Dallas for youth of color the week preceding the General Assembly; a failure to reserve hotels for youth near the convention center; incidents in which GA participants mistook UU youth of color for hotel staff and others in which hotel staff ignored the needs of youth of color; a conflicted GA workshop on transracial adoption; harassment by Fort Worth police; and a confrontation between three youth of color and a white UU minister at the assembly’s Closing Ceremony, leading to cancellation of an intergenerational dance scheduled later that night.

The UUA Commission report also included “The Elevator Story” which was both a true story as well as a metaphor for the conflicting experiences that people were having during that period. As a handout in relation to the “Fort Worth Incident” introduced the two stories: “Each of us brings into every situation a personal body of experience that affects the nature of our interactions”:

In this true story, a woman of African descent recalls riding in a crowded elevator with several emotionally exhausted youth and young adults of color on the final night of General Assembly. Two of the youth had just been involved in a near-altercation with a white female minister outside of the Closing Ceremony. The elevator stopped, and as the doors opened, the woman heard a white woman yelling at the youth of color in the elevator, “If you people really want to be antiracist, you will get off the elevator now and allow this poor man to get on.” The woman of African descent peered outside the doors and observed that the man in question was an older, black hotel employee with a food cart. When she looked at him, she read shame and embarrassment on his face. Meanwhile, the white woman had boarded the elevator. The woman of African descent remembers a flood of emotion. “In his eyes,” she says, “I saw me.” And she wondered, “What was I doing with rude, insensitive white people so far removed from his world, my roots?” This episode reminded her of many of the negative, race-based encounters she’d experienced within the UU community over the past 15 years. She questioned why she was a part of this faith community, but “I stayed on that elevator. I stood my ground. ...I belonged on that elevator, too.” Soon after she learned that the white woman was a UU minister, which increased her discomfort.

The white UU minister recounts the same event. She had heard only that the dance had been canceled due to incidents of racism and the youth community feeling “broken.”

Leaving the ballroom, she came upon an older, black hotel employee waiting at the elevator doors with a food service cart. An elevator arrived and a dozen YRUU youth hurried past him to fill it. This happened twice as she watched. The man told her that he'd been waiting for some time as this scenario repeated itself. The third time the elevator arrived and youth rushed to enter, she interrupted to ask if they would step out and let the man in. She recalls that the youth "were screaming at me that their world was broken."

She told them that if they were concerned about racism, they would care about this man. She reminded them that everyone at GA was privileged and urged them to look after the hotel staff. After boarding the elevator, she and the youth continued to dialogue until an adult woman of color said to her, "You need to stop now and go with your white community and talk about this."

This incident left her shaken. She was accustomed to speaking out for the underdog, she said. Although she too had attended the Closing Ceremony, "I had no clue what had happened with the youth or what I had gotten into." She described this incident as "one of the more unpleasant experiences in my entire life."

The story of the elevator demonstrates the vastly different lenses through which two women viewed the same event. While race played a factor, so had encounters immediately preceding this one and all the experiences associated with being an adult, a parent, a woman, a person of color, a white person, a person of authority, and so on. The Commission views the elevator story as a metaphor for many of the stories we were privy to during this investigation. It is our conclusion that a vital part of the effort to become a more whole and loving community involves listening to and sharing our honest perspectives—not to determine who is "right" and who is "wrong" but to identify where we have attempted to communicate with one another and simply failed. The good news is that we are reaching out and striving to connect. Let us be kind to each other and try again—and again, and again. Ours is a continuing story.

Through collective efforts and a lot of communication the ground was gradually laid so that when UU youth of color experienced discrimination at a UU convention in Texas in June, 2005, the UUA was able to learn from it and come out of it stronger. This is how they did it.

First, they listened. The UUA formed a Special Review Commission who engaged in 80 interviews to figure out what happened when and how people felt about it.

Second, they published their findings. In the March 2006 issue of their national magazine *UU World*, they let everybody know a summary of what they had heard.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁵⁰ An excerpt from the report read: "...the timeline reports 'miscommunications and misunderstandings' at a Leadership Development Conference in Dallas for youth of color the week preceding the General Assembly; a failure to reserve hotels for youth near the convention center; incidents in which GA

Third, they changed. A group of UUs connected to organization planners who had been formed prior to 2005 to address cross-cultural issues came up with an idea.⁸⁵¹ They formed what has become known as the “Right Relationship Team.” According to one description:

A Right Relationship Team observes and is available to delegates when communication is harmful. All the while during plenaries, workshops, lectures, worship, and celebrations the Right Relationship Team monitors the behavior of delegates and reports back to plenary sessions any deviation from standards of respectful, caring communication. In this way the Right Relationship Team models the very peacebuilding process we value.⁸⁵²

When I first witnessed how it worked, I was surprised that other places hadn’t done something similar. It was rather straightforward: At every major gathering (I’ve even seen them active on online sessions) representatives of the Right Relationship Team introduce themselves to participants (about 3,000 people for UU General Assemblies). The Team consisted of about a dozen volunteers wearing special bright-colored t-shirts so they are easily identifiable. If anybody feels marginalized by a person or group in any way they can report this to the Team. If they would like mediation for a conflict they can also turn to the team. An issue might be something like “Men are talking way more than women at the workshops,” “Attendees often don’t look where they walk and stumble over people in wheelchairs,” or “Organizers did not provide gender neutral bathrooms.” Whatever comments might be relevant to the general group of participants are then relayed by a Team representative at the next plenary gathering. They do not name names or point fingers. Their comments tend to be very brief and constructive. In my field notes from 2013, I noted how the Right Relationship Team were introduced by being welcomed on stage and then they informed the attendees that the Team would be keeping everybody updated as to “where we do well and where we need work.” People were instructed to be forgiving and trust the best intentions. The team was there to facilitate communication “if you feel like relationship has been broken.” They might offer suggestions such as “step up, step back” (if you had not yet spoken then “step up” and if you have already spoken then “step back”) or they may just ask

participants mistook UU youth of color for hotel staff and others in which hotel staff ignored the needs of youth of color; a conflicted GA workshop on transracial adoption; harassment by Fort Worth police; and a confrontation between three youth of color and a white UU minister at the assembly’s Closing Ceremony, leading to cancellation of an intergenerational dance scheduled later that night.”

⁸⁵¹ According to Moderator Gini Courter, “After the St. Louis General Assembly the Council on Cross-Cultural Engagement (Unitarian Universalist leaders talking about how we can be more amazingly adept at noticing and courageously crossing borders) brainstormed a list of ways we could use the skills we already have to make General Assembly (GA) a kinder experience more in keeping with our values. The GA Right Relationship Team was formed as a result of this Council conversation...” Gini Courter. “GA 2011: Tending the Flame July 10, 2011.” *Just Gini*. <http://justgini.blogspot.se/> Accessed 5 April 2013.

⁸⁵² Bertilson 2011.

people to be aware of these issues when they are participating at the assembly. The Team themselves have described their work this way:

The Right Relationship Team exists in response to historic instances of oppression (such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism/ homophobia, and ableism) in large Unitarian Universalist gatherings. In addition to responding to particular events and problems, we work to create an environment where oppression will not happen. In the case of this gathering, we are additionally called to be mindful of our collegial covenant.

The Right Relationship Team encourages us to live out our commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of every person in our personal interactions with one another, as people and as members of a common family of faith.

We encourage people to see the strands that connect us to each other and let our faith and collegial commitment shape our behavior throughout the Convocation. What affects one person, affects us all (Convo 2009).

Garner Takahashi-Morris, a convener of the Right Relationship Team, echoed those remarks in 2011:

In a community of this size, we are blessed to have so many perspectives and experiences in one place. And when the inevitable happens, and our trust and faith in each other is broken, we will do our best to help rebuild it together. It is hard work to stay in Right Relationship. And it matters, what we do and say to each other. Oppression is a reality of the world that we live in, and so it's present and active in our community as well. It takes all of us to realize the transformative potential of this community.

If one person is hurting, we are all hurting. By the same turn, with each moment of learning with grace, we grow as a community and as a religious movement. If we cannot learn in this gathering of beloved people, then how can we ask it of our world?

In a post-assembly report from 2011, we can even see an example of pre-emptive suggestions regarding a specific incident:

Right Relationship Team Chair Petra Aldrich ...said that "there are different ways that we take care of each other to try to stay in right relationship. These stories are inspiring and painful." There were two different stories she shared:

We have every scooter and wheelchair available in Portland. The Accessibilities volunteers are making possible participation in GA for as many people as possible, and congregations back home and their ministers have worked hard to get their people here. But there is also the story of a white middle-aged woman who was approached by police at the mall downtown who wished to help her through construction. Recognizing that close observation by the police

might feel different for people of color, she alerted chaplains so that others would understand the police's action.⁸⁵³

What impressed upon me with the Right Relationship Team was that in the face of difficult conversations, unequal power, and racial tensions, UU members stood up to the task and communicated—first by listening, then by reporting and consulting, and finally by brainstorming and transforming. The change they instituted was not merely a statement, a campaign, or a new policy: it was something fundamental. They changed the UUA as an institution by integrating a channel for internal communication that had not previously existed. It alleviated not only concerns about racism but other forms of power inequity as well. It enabled new thinking. If the organization were a brain, the change could be compared to the formation of a new dendrite (bridge) that connects two different neurons together. So now when Unitarian Universalists run into the same problems—which they will—they are even better equipped to deal with them now than they were in 2005 (which was better prepared than they were in the 1960s).

The MOVE Organization Central Text

The Guidelines by John Africa, as dictated by him to his disciples between the early 1970s and 1985 constitute the primary text of the MOVE Organization. Yet nobody outside of MOVE has ever seen the entire corpus that constitutes this text. At first glance, it would seem difficult if not impossible to make any comments about what the text is saying. However, if limited access to textual fragments prevented textual analysis then what would that say about entire disciplines that are based on, for example, apocryphal biblical texts (wherein only small isolated fragments remain in many cases)? So this case, although contemporary, may be treated in a similar manner. In fact, it is much easier in this case because there exist certain documents (such as John Africa's "Judges Letter") which are intact in whole from beginning to end. Furthermore, selections from a great number of other documents have been cited and distributed by MOVE members over the years within their own texts. What can be analyzed is the corpus of text that *is* available. Whatever degree such analysis might change in light of future knowledge about John Africa's Guidelines is another matter. For now, we can study what we have access to.

Selections from the Guidelines are cited by MOVE members in various MOVE-related literature including the 24 issues of their newspaper *FIRST DAY* which were published as recent as 2001. Since then, various citations have appeared on the MOVE Organization homepage and in Friends of MOVE newsletters. Selections from the Guidelines can also be found in John Africa's courtroom testimony of 1981 which is

⁸⁵³ Presley, Lisa. "Right Relations Team Report." 8 September 2011. <http://www.uua.org/ga/past/2007/business/31338.shtml> Accessed 23 October 2014.

preserved in trial transcripts. Early press releases and newspaper letters or columns authored by MOVE are another source.

The oldest document I have is probably a table of contents to “The Book” which lists approximately 60 different chapter-headings ranging from “INSURANCE” and “COMPETITION” to “TIME” and “FARMERS, SOIL DOCTORS.”⁸⁵⁴ This list alone demonstrated something I had already known but was very clear here: the Adams ruling was wrong. Adams had claimed in his ruling that the Teaching of John Africa only focused on health and a natural diet. MOVE was concerned about one issue only, a natural lifestyle, and therefore not comprehensive in the way that a true “religion” is. As it was not comprehensive, it could not therefore qualify as a religion for the purposes of the First Amendment. The assumption that the teaching of John Africa is not comprehensive could hardly be farther from the truth. As niece to John Africa and ex-member Sharon Sims Cox stated:

There are Guidelines on every single thing in the system: marriage, science, education, mathematics, homosexuality, animals, politics, fashion, technology... John Africa has wrote about every facet of the lifestyle and it's so clear, direct, simple and to the point, you can't misread anything.⁸⁵⁵

This section shall not address the entire body of texts to which I have access. Instead, it shall only address a few selections cited here which happen to be particularly relevant to the questions at hand. Namely, how does the text relate to questions of inclusivity, to what extent and how does “freedom” appear overtly and how does “unfreedom” appear?

First, all quotes for the rest of this section regarding the central text are from John Africa.⁸⁵⁶ When the source is somebody else, it is because they quoted him. Second, it ought to be clarified that in a literary sense, the genre here is revelation and often reads like a sermon. The text is often written in all capital letters and according to the spelling

⁸⁵⁴ It should be noted for the many people who have insisted that MOVE was initially named the “American Christian Movement for Life,” there is no such name on this book. Instead, it states “THE MOVEMENT” which is consistent with the testimony of ex-member Sharon Sims Cox. The name “American Christian Movement of Life” (ACML) is generally sourced to McCoy (1986) who did not cite the source of his information. I have located an early police file on MOVE that bears that title and has “MOVE” in parentheses but that document gives no justification for the name nor an explanation of the context or where it came from. In fact, the police file nonetheless refers to the group as “MOVE” in the text itself. The earliest newspaper articles on MOVE only refer to the group as MOVE and no MOVE member has ever been quoted as ever identifying with the ACML name. Yet the statement that they began with that name has been repeated again and again. Until there is actual evidence to support it, that story seems best put to rest.

⁸⁵⁵ Cox 1985: 171.

⁸⁵⁶ Any quotations from MOVE members shall be placed in footnotes.

style of the transcriber. A common pattern is that when it is transcribed, there is no use of periods—only commas. This can make pages of text appear as one long sentence.⁸⁵⁷

Although the author of the revelation is “John Africa,” it is not apparent to outsiders what is meant by “John Africa” who tend to only associate the name with the man John Africa. However, to understand the teaching of John Africa is also to understand that John Africa is nothing that can be limited to a body. That is, to make a distinction between “God” or “Mama Nature” and “John Africa” as different things would be to misunderstand the very core of the message of John Africa’s teaching which is rooted on an understanding of self. As John Africa testified in 1981: “When you left the principle of one, you committed a crime. This is in fact the second reference that was taken from the first.”⁸⁵⁸ If the reader understands “self,” then there is no distinction between “your” self and “another” self: “The tragic paradox of divisional confusion is the treacherous undoing of unity in people.”⁸⁵⁹ After all, “You all have one Mama.”⁸⁶⁰ In other words, there is only One: one self, one God, One John Africa. As ex-member Sharon Sims Cox put it: “Number one is single and single is whole, is family. Number two is division and from the number two on, that means separation. Two leads to wars, race riots. You can’t fight with one. Numbers, like letters, are dangerous.”⁸⁶¹ MOVE’s mission, according to the teachings of John Africa, have been to “put out information” about this truth and by educating people tear down the system that is killing and distorting life. A tree—whether blown down by the wind, uprooted and dried out or standing up and full of green leaves—is life. A pencil or paper made out of that tree is a distortion of life. People who see anybody or anything as separate have only been confounded by the divisiveness of words. The purpose of the teaching is to enlighten people to this fact and not be deceived by words:

... a single mind is an assertive mind, when we think as **one** we are as **no other**, when we think as **one another we’re defeated** because **one is one** and **another is something other**

⁸⁵⁷ While the style of text has a function for the presentation of text by MOVE members (e.g., liberal use of **bold** and CAPS to emphasize intensity; lack of periods being in accordance with the belief that there is no beginning and no end, etc.), the citations used here shall be sometimes be slightly adjusted for readability’s sake. That is, boldness or caps shall be removed from certain citations and occasional periods shall be inserted. This is in accordance with the style from the court transcripts. In no case are any stylistic changes made that would in any way change the meaning of the text. I have decided however to retain the original style in certain cases (both in texts by John Africa and texts by MOVE members) so that the reader can get a feel of what the original texts are like.

⁸⁵⁸ *United States of America v. Vincent Leaphart AKA John Africa and Alphonso Robbins*. No. 77-380 (E.D. Pa. 1981).

⁸⁵⁹ Chuck Africa, “FREE PPs & POWs WORLDWIDE,” *FIRST DAY* 20, 7.

⁸⁶⁰ *United States of America v. Vincent Leaphart AKA John Africa and Alphonso Robbins*. No. 77-380 (E.D. Pa. 1981).

⁸⁶¹ Cox (1985: 171-172).

than one, this ain't no word game, **revolution** is **not** a game no more than words are innocent...⁸⁶²

Words are not innocent because they have led people astray from understanding their true identity. Words created divisions in life causing people to think they were different from animals and superior to them. Yet animals, plants, air, water, and land, are all One Life and people are not separate from that. Life is permanent and eternal. But when people get caught up in words, they believe that there is such a thing as "time" or "death," or beginnings and endings, which is not true of Life. In John Africa's words: "Don't fool yourself into thinking that people in coffins are dead. Anybody that goes against the principle of life is dead."⁸⁶³ That which goes against the principle of life is anything that adds to what already is with artificial boundaries, or additives, or concepts. Life is an activity, not a concept.

...MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO PEOPLE CREATED THE TERM 'THE BEGINNING OF LIFE' – AND BECAUSE OF THIS IDEA THEY BEGAN TALKING ABOUT THE END OF LIFE, WHICH OF COURSE IS NOT TRUE, FOR LIFE AIN'T A BEGINNING OR AN END, IT AIN'T A MILLION YEARS, A THOUSAND DAYS, A HUNDRED SECONDS, IT AIN'T EVEN A TERM WHEN TOTALLY REALIZED, FOR YOU SEE, WHEN PEOPLE REFER TO THE END OF LIFE THEY'RE REALLY REFERRING TO THE BEGINNING OF SCIENCE, FOR SCIENCE DOES HAVE A BEGINNING AND IT WILL HAVE AN END, BUT LIFE WILL GO ON AS IT HAS GONE ON...⁸⁶⁴

There is no difference between any of us and that timeless Life. It is all One, so even the use of numbers is part of the "second reference," that is, "the system." In the "first reference" (true knowledge of self) there is only One. Once a person has recognized true self, they no longer recognize any other authority than Self:

...Why must you attempt to believe in a government, a monarch, a ruler that is totally unbelievable, ...ungovernable, unruly? It is foolish to think that you can trust a government that has constantly proven to be untrustworthy: so long as you attempt to invest your life in the failing deception of external government you can expect failure, ain't nothin safe, the whole thing is disastrous, for there is only one government, one system, one establishment, the government of self, system of commitment, established direction of common consistency...⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶² Phil Africa, "In the Name of Crazy Horse—Free Leonard Peltier!!" *FIRST DAY* 20, 8.

⁸⁶³ *United States of America v. Vincent Leaphart AKA John Africa and Alphonso Robbins*. No. 77-380 (E.D. Pa. 1981).

⁸⁶⁴ *United States of America v. Vincent Leaphart AKA John Africa and Alphonso Robbins*. No. 77-380 (E.D. Pa. 1981).

⁸⁶⁵ Merle Africa, "How You Can Save Your Kids," *FIRST DAY* 15, 7.

Another implication of this recognition is that animals and plants are of equal value to people, because they are all life. So it is subsequently wrong to incarcerate a plant in a pot, an animal in a cage, or a person in jail. Several years before the formation of the Animal Liberation Front and the publication of *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer in 1975, John Africa had been teaching that:

...Simply because animals are not constituents, animals do not vote so politicians feel no obligation to animals and as politicians make the law those in law enforcement do not feel obligated to protect animals.⁸⁶⁶

John Africa taught that the source of violence toward animals, as toward people, was rooted in the mental categories that were used to divide life from life. Because people were taught that people were different from animals and some people were different from other people, they began to compare and feel superior.⁸⁶⁷ From this division and resulting prejudice comes war and oppression: "...People murder rats and justify murder in rats by the way people are trained to see rats, when the European murdered the Indian the murder was justified by a word called savage..."⁸⁶⁸ As such John Africa recognized the tactical use of words to further the ends of prejudice. Children are born innocent but they become misdirected by prejudice. Subsequently the "system" teaches them to be criminals as the system itself is criminal yet words again are used to disguise this connection:

...The system will put you in jail for stealing but this system is the teacher and the people in jail are its pupils but when you put this to this system, this system will act like in this case the teacher ain't got nothing to do with the pupil, when in fact the pupil will always be as the teacher, ...this system can twist words but twisted words are worthless, people don't need a **twist**, they need the **truth**, ... twisted words are **distorted** words, this is why people are distorted, when their **words** are twisted, their **message** is twisted and all those attempting to **apply** their message will be twisted, twisted into drunks, drug addicts, rapists, thieves, pimps, whores, prostitutes, homosexuals, retarded babies, deformed

⁸⁶⁶ Mario, "AND PHILLY JUSTICE FOR ALL!" *FIRST DAY* 9, 7.

⁸⁶⁷ In the words of Chuck Africa: "JOHN AFRICA teaches that people are contaminated with murder, rape and every crime imaginable because they are born into a world of prejudice. John Africa teach the root of all evil is **prejudice**. The "devil" is a result of prejudice and ignorance. Every problem existing throughout history has its roots in prejudice..." (Chuck Africa, "The System Teaches Our Youth to Self-Destruct," *FIRST DAY* 15, 5). It should perhaps be emphasized that Chuck put "devil" in quote marks because John Africa did not teach the existence of a mythical "devil." Rather, there is only Life, the first reference or *form*, and the System, as the second reference which distorts, adds to, or *reforms* the original form. The system, however is an illusion and any belief in a "devil" in a mythical sense would be part of that illusion.

⁸⁶⁸ The MOVE Organization. "Why the MOVE Organization Supports Mumia Abu-Jamal." *FIRST DAY* 5, 2.

adults, afflicted teachers, perverted standards, all created by this system, by people who begin twistin' things more when you confront them 'bout this lie...⁸⁶⁹

So whereas government institutions and the media would categorize “criminals” as the “other,” John Africa argues that people who commit crimes theft and rape are only doing what they were taught by a larger society. In regard to inclusivity, it could be noted that “homosexuality” is placed here alongside drug addiction and prostitution.⁸⁷⁰ Yet, despite the tone of this text, there is little moralizing against ordinary people’s behaviors in John Africa’s teachings. Rather, the focus is on the “system’s” crimes. In this way, his teaching stands in sharp contrast to the moral crusades of evangelical preachers in the United States such as Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson who lambasted gays and feminists for their immorality and breaking down the traditional family structure. Furthermore, the main focus of John Africa’s teaching lay not on such behaviors but on the ways that the “system” is waging war against life and what people need to do to stop it. As John Africa testified in court in 1981:

I’m fighting for air that you’ve got to breathe. And I’m fighting for water that you’ve got to drink, and if it gets any worse, you’re not going to be drinking that water. I’m fighting for food that you’ve got to eat. And, you know, you’ve got to eat it and if it gets any worse, you’re not going to be eating that food.

Don’t you see? If you took this thing all the way, all the way, you would have clean air, clean water, clean soil and be quenched of industry. But, you see, they don’t want that. They can’t have that.

I’ve been a revolutionary all my life. Since I could understand the word revolution, I have been a revolutionary, and I remain a revolutionary because, don’t you see, revolutionary simply means to turn, to generate, to activate. It don’t mean it should be evil and kill people and bomb people. It simply means to be right. If this world didn’t

⁸⁶⁹ Janine Africa, “We’ve Got to Save the Children,” *FIRST DAY* 15, 4.

⁸⁷⁰ According to the teaching of John Africa, homosexuality (as well as abortion), is unnatural because it goes against life. In the case of homosexuality, people cannot naturally reproduce life in homosexual relationships without technology and it is therefore unnatural. Abortion goes more directly against life. While MOVE has received critique for these stances, it could be noted that while they have not changed their position, they have never focused on these issues. Not only have they not threatened anybody (to my knowledge) for being gay, they have been working together with gays for years. Likewise, I have never heard of MOVE ever protesting outside of an abortion clinic and never heard of them rejecting or speaking ill of somebody who had an abortion. The strongest incident regarding homosexuality was in the early 2000s when *AWOL Magazine*, edited by a MOVE supporter, took an active stand against homophobia and MOVE members did not want to be associated with that stance.

revolutionize, everything would stop. If your heart didn't revolutionize, you would stop. If your lungs don't revolutionize, you would stop.

Monkeys don't shoot people, but people will shoot monkeys. Yet monkeys are seen as unclear and people are seen as intelligent. You can go as far as you want in the forest and you won't find no jails. Because the animals of the forest don't believe in jail. But come to civilization, that's all you see.⁸⁷¹

As we can see above, jails are also a distortion, a creation by "man" that goes against the principle of life. So regarding conceptions of "freedom" within the teaching of John Africa, the dichotomy is as clear as the distinction between the System and Life, between right and wrong, or between truth and deceit:

...The reformed world system cannot teach love, while making allowances for hate, peace while making allowances for war, freedom while making allowances for the inconsistent shackles of enslavement. For to make allowances for sickness is to be unhealthy, to make concessions with slavery is to be enslaved, to compromise with the person of compromise is to be as the person you are compromising with. Sickness is not to be allowed, it is to be eliminated, hatred is not to be considered, it is to be abolished, the enslaving person of war is not to be conceded, accepted, temporarily obscured by the illusion of peace, it must be completely cut down, directly done away with, totally destroyed through the reality of peace.⁸⁷²

"Freedom" is therefore something positive and is part of the configuration of references associated with Life. This means that the idea of "freedom" that is being presented in John Africa's teaching is against all ideologies of "freedom" make allowances for anything that goes against "freedom" such as war, enslavement, or prisons. As such, "freedom" is central recurring theme in the teaching of John Africa: "Freedom is your diet and must be consumed just as the food you are taught must be consumed or you will starve."⁸⁷³

If we being however with the basic level, "free will," the teaching is more complex. Although "free will" is never discussed outright in those terms, it seems clear that John Africa taught that things will be as they will be according to the movement of life. True knowledge of self implies acting according to instinct and not on the basis of words, ideas, and concepts. The very idea of "free will" would qualify as a concept and therefore separate from life and acting according to what is right. On one hand, the message is definitely assertive and one that calls upon people to choose to do what is right and, on

⁸⁷¹ *United States of America v. Vincent Leaphart AKA John Africa and Alphonso Robbins*. No. 77-380 (E.D. Pa. 1981).

⁸⁷² Janine Africa, "America the Free?" *FIRST DAY* 24, 10.

⁸⁷³ Janine Africa, "We've Got to Save the Children," *FIRST DAY* 15, 5.

the other hand, things happen because they are supposed to happen: "...much of what you are is not of your choosing but all that you are to be **must be**, for if you really intend to straighten things out you must start with you..."⁸⁷⁴ So each person must begin their work with themselves, recognizing themselves as One, but also recognizing a relinquishing of control, because the things that happen "must" happen:

...ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS TO MOVE HAPPENS BECAUSE IT IS NECESSARY TO HAPPEN, YOU ARE NOT EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND THIS BUT YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO ACCEPT THIS BECAUSE IT IS A FACT,...⁸⁷⁵

"Freedom," however, in the teaching of John Africa cannot be separated from the rest of the teaching. That is, one could not really understand what is meant by "freedom" in the context of MOVE, without grasping the rest of the teaching. Confusion can arise if people try to look at specific terms in isolation when the reader does not "see things in total."⁸⁷⁶ Whereas in white English-speaking contexts the term "freedom" developed as a contrast to existing conditions of enslavement or incarceration, "freedom" in the teaching of John Africa is simply the natural state of being untainted by the system: "Revolution ain't a principle that is **applied** when the oppressor is oppressing. Revolution is the principle of **Freedom** even when the oppressor **does not** exist."⁸⁷⁷ Examples of "freedom" are not taken from history or previous thinkers but from nature: "Water do not believe in prison, water is the power of LIFE, for water flow with the freedom of LIFE, nobody can stop the power of freedom, this is why nobody will stop the power of MOVE."⁸⁷⁸ Prisons in particular are targeted as an example of the opposite of "freedom." Prisons are critiqued for being profitable industries ("Prison ain't a corrective institution, it is a monetary industry..."⁸⁷⁹) but this does not mean that prisons could be justified even if they were not profitable ("...prisons is contrary to freedom no matter how it is masked...";⁸⁸⁰ "Prison draws the life from people; just as bombs drain the blood from people."⁸⁸¹). "Freedom" is not just a lack of being in prison but also the active opposition to imprisonment as implied by the example of John Brown who had organized a revolt against the institution of enslavement in 1859: "...an innocent example is a **free** example,...when innocence is jailed it ain't just **John**

⁸⁷⁴ Delbert Africa. "What Independence You Talkin' About?" *FIRST DAY* 24, 4-5.

⁸⁷⁵ John Africa, "Judge's Letter," *FIRST DAY* 9, 10.

⁸⁷⁶ John Africa, "ON THE MOVE," *FIRST DAY* 17, 11.

⁸⁷⁷ Edward Africa, "When the Revolution Come." *FIRST DAY* 24, 6.

⁸⁷⁸ *ON THE MOVE: Friends of MOVE Newsletter* 13, 2007: 28.

⁸⁷⁹ Edward Africa, "Prison Industry is Corrupt," *FIRST DAY* 23, 7.

⁸⁸⁰ John Africa, "ON THE MOVE," *FIRST DAY* 23, 1.

⁸⁸¹ Chuck Africa, "Political Prisoners & P.O.W.s in America," 14 July 1998, *FIRST DAY* 20, 7.

Brown that is jailed, **freedom** is jailed because freedom does not stop with **John Brown** no more than innocence stop with **John Brown's** mother...⁸⁸² Also, as indicated here, the existence of prisons anywhere threatens “freedom” everywhere:

When you understand the principle of freedom you are intolerant of anything that threatens freedom, When people are jailed freedom is threatened and everybody in this system is in jail, including the jailer, and the people that pay the jailer. ...For you see it is impossible to commit a person to the burden of prison without committing yourself to the prisoning burden of keepin that person in prison.⁸⁸³

So in one sense, each person’s “freedom” is tied to and contingent upon everybody’s “freedom.” To understand true self is to understand how one living being’s incarceration is also incarcerating one’s self. In another slightly different sense of the term, “freedom” is also a permanent state of nature that is contrasted by the “unfreedom” of courts and prisons. As such, courts cannot determine one’s “freedom” or set anybody “free” because their very existence is a violation against “freedom.” Compliance with the court system or belief in prisons, are in themselves a rejection of “freedom”:

The courts are said to be an institution that determines the guilt or **innocence** of people, the right or **wrong** of people, the freedom or imprisonment of people, but the courts don’t determine **nobodys** freedom, they are a **reminder** that you are enslaved or you wouldn’t have to go to court to try to **establish** your freedom thru a lawyer that is **paid** to try to **see** if your freedom **can be** established, if freedom **existed** in this system, lawyers **wouldn’t** exist cause **nobody** would be legal but everybody would be **free**, free of **cops**, free of **courts**, free of **lawyers**, free of **judges**, free of this whole **legal system** that is **supposed** to constitute **freedom** but congregates **prisons**... ...if everybody was filled with the freedom of equality but when you got a word called equal in your system and no demonstration of equal you got **plenty** of people to fill your jails, plenty of **jails** to accommodate these people and plenty of politicians to accommodate the money that is made through these people.⁸⁸⁴

In yet another sense, “freedom” is a state of mind and a condition of being that transcends prisons and incarceration. In this sense, no person with true knowledge of self can ever be imprisoned in any real way because such a person does not believe in prison at all:

Only the person that believes in prison can be imprisoned, because a person that believes in prisons will accept the conditions of prison, while the person that believes in freedom will resist the conditions of prisons, it ain’t bars that make you a prisoner, it is your

⁸⁸² Debbie Africa, “Politically Incorrect,” *FIRST DAY* 14, 4.

⁸⁸³ *ON THE MOVE: Friends of MOVE Newsletter* 12, 2006: 38.

⁸⁸⁴ Mike Africa, “The MOVE 9 are Revolutionaries Not Criminals,” *FIRST DAY* 17, 5.

acceptance of those bars that has you imprisoned, it ain't the wall that makes you a prisoner, it is your acceptance of those walls that makes you a prisoner, ...when a man believes in prison, that man is surely a prisoner to his belief, for when you believe in slavery, you are a slave, a slave to the belief of enslavement as oppose to freedom, for you can't get freedom from slavery you can only get freedom when your belief is free, an enslavin is not a free belief, it is an enslavin belief, and you cannot help but act as your belief, so you see the whole system is a prison, everybody in it is a prisoner, prisoners to jobs you don't want, prisoners to marriages you don't want, prisoners to a term in the army you don't want, prisoners to wars you don't want to fight, soldiers are not made prisoners of war when captured by the enemy, soldiers are already prisoners of war, for they have long been captured by the enemy this system, the enemy of peace, the enemy of freedom, the enemy of love, the enemy of life that imprisons you to the confinement of death, the opposite of life, the opposite of peace, the opposite of freedom.⁸⁸⁵

Although prison abolition is clearly an aim, the response is not to appeal to the jailers to quit jailing people nor to politicians to quit manufacturing prisons. Rather, people must take actions into their own hands and reclaim their "freedom" because, in the words of John Africa, "You cannot expect the same people who took your freedom from you to give it back to you."⁸⁸⁶ This connects to the distinction between what is "legal," and what "right" which is important in John Africa's teaching:

...the Jews didn't give in to some god-destructing legality when Hitler backed them into a corner, an didn't nobody expect 'em to, the Christians didn't give in to some god-destructing legality when the Romans backed them in a corner an didn't nobody expect 'em to, the Catholics in Ireland ain't doin' it and dammit Move ain't gon' do it, an if anybody is expecting Move to do it, they better be prepared to rewrite the history books.⁸⁸⁷

The hypocrisy of legal orders is thereby contrasted by the practice of Natural Law wherein MOVE members live in accordance with the teaching. This entails unity and collective action as a single force to establish what is right and oppose what is wrong.

...the restrained and oppressed is like a damned up wild river that is only to be turned loose and directed, a strategic revolutionary is the pivotal point in a restrained society that pivots the restrained in the way of revolution by informing the restrained of the power of freedom through examples of freedom against examples of slavery.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ John Africa, "ON THE MOVE," *FIRST DAY* 24, 10.

⁸⁸⁶ Quote taken from audio recording of Delbert Africa on a CD compilation of MOVE material purchased from MOVE entitled "25 Years of Resistance Project," 2003.

⁸⁸⁷ Ramona Africa, "LYNN ABRAHAM and MOVE," *FIRST DAY* 14, 1.

⁸⁸⁸ Phil Africa, "In the Name of Crazy Horse—Free Leonard Peltier!!" *FIRST DAY* 20, 8.

The ideas of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of religion” are also specifically critiqued by John Africa as hypocritical notions that are put out there deceptively and applied unequally. Regarding “freedom of religion,” John Africa pointed out that each group now recognized as a legitimate “religion” or “government” started out unrecognized by ruling powers at the time:

Didn't the Jew that is now accepted, start out as unacceptable? Didn't the Catholic that is now respected start off as disrespected? Didn't the protestant that is now so-called valid start out as invalid and wasn't this govt. totally disrespected, disregarded, completely unrecognized till now? Yet what is the difference in all these religions, these govt.'s? What has the Jew got now that they didn't have then? What has the Catholic got now that they didn't have then? What has the protestant got now that they didn't have then? What is it that was invalid about the govt. then that ain't invalid about this govt. now?⁸⁸⁹

Similarly, the “freedom of speech” is considered legitimate as long as it does not threaten the ruling class and their own idea of “freedom”:

...YOU'LL SAY PEOPLE CAN SPEAK FREELY UNTIL THE SPEECH BEGINS TO THREATEN YOUR IDEA OF SO-CALLED FREEDOM, THEN FOLKS AIN'T FREE TO SPEAK, THEY'RE KICKED, PUNCHED, CLUBBED, STOMPED, HANDCUFFED, SHOT, JAILED BY THE COPS, AND JAILED AGAIN BY JUDGES WHEN THE TRAIL TAKES PLACE... AIN'T NOBODY FREE IN THIS SYSTEM...⁸⁹⁰

This last sentence, “Ain't nobody free in this system,” is often cited by MOVE members and sums up the relationship of MOVE's conception “freedom” to “freedom” as it is discussed in academia. In this sense, “freedom” in the teaching of John Africa stands in complete opposition to any conception of “freedom” that is rooted in the “system” such as mainstream white academia from Hobbes to Berlin. For John Africa, in contrast to Rousseau, animals are “born free” —not humans. Humans are born in a “system” of control and violation of “Natural Law.” Rousseau's conception of being born “free” began with the idea of slavery as something that human birth refutes. Rousseau thought in post-slavery terms. In contrast, John Africa's conception might be said to have pointed toward a “pre-slavery” or “non-slavery” state of being except that it does not consider slavery as a point of reference. In fact, the violation against real “freedom” occurred long before the enslavement of human beings and can be seen in the enslavement of animals, of plants, and even minerals. The context of the following is that of a military patriotic parade that John Africa is opposing:

Yall wanna talk about freedom — free those animal skins from those drums used in freedom week; and give em back to the earth — free those bass trumpets from the

⁸⁸⁹ Merle Africa, “Open Letter to Lynn Abraham,” *FIRST DAY* 14, 5.

⁸⁹⁰ Mumia Abu-Jamal, “What Independence?” *FIRST DAY* 24, 12 (citing from “Judge's Letter”).

confused lips of these paradin maniacs, shuffling idiots, and put em back in the ground, free those nickel-plated flutes from their mouths, unshackle those plastic saxophones from their rotten-teeth, clarinets from their swollen lips –take all this noisy gadgetry from these red white and blue freaks, patriotic windbags, and return em to the freedom of the soil... open them cages and free all those birds that were born to freedom – free the fish from the tanks, and give ‘em back to the sea, open those traps that are enslaving’ lions and return them to the freedom of Africa... stop interferin’ with plant life – free the air of these air-pollutin’ freedom day parades...⁸⁹¹

The concept of “freedom” then in these central texts is one that implies a demand to first understand the necessity of life in order to recognize and oppose that which is unnecessary and a violation against life. The call then for change is a moral imperative to rectify all that has gone wrong in the world. This imperative is not an either/or stance such as working to build alternatives (communes, etc.) versus working to oppose and challenge government violence. Both actions are part of one and the same principle of defending life.

...WATER IS LIFE, GOD IS LIFE, EVERYTHING IS GOD AND WHEN YOU ALLOW YOUR WATER TO BE POISONED YOU ARE BEING DISRESPECTFUL TO THE LIFE GOD GAVE YOU TO PROTECT... AIR IS THE NECESSITY OF GOD, BUT POLLUTION IS THE ACCESSORY OF CIVILIZATION, CAUSE INDUSTRY IS AN EXCESS OF LIFE, AND ADDITION TO GOD’S LAW THAT HAS CAUSED ALL DISORDERS, MURDER, RAPE, THEFT, SLAVERY, WAR, GUNS, BOMBS, CRIPPLES.⁸⁹²

So the so-called “freedoms” of the “system” are really “unfreedoms,” and the existence of these “unfreedoms” come with the demand upon people to reject and oppose them:

...any system that sells the air, barter the water, puts a monetary price on soil, markets the health, the worth, the freedom of the entire universe for a goddamning dollar is to be exposed, condemned, cut down for good, cut down for the good of life, the good of love, the good of freedom, the necessity of health, cut down for the good of god, that law of air, the law of soil, the law of water...⁸⁹³

There are boundaries and limits in the teaching of John Africa as well and these are typically referred to as “Natural Law.” Natural Law is depicted as something that everybody can relate to because it is based on the necessities and laws of life. Unlike laws made by humans that are temporary and unequal, Natural Law is eternal and affects everybody equally such as the need to eat and rest. The compulsion to do what is right is not based on consequences in an afterlife but on the cause and effect of things

⁸⁹¹ John Africa, “ON THE MOVE,” *FIRST DAY* 24, 1.

⁸⁹² Janet Africa, “WHAT’S REALLY KILLING US,” *FIRST DAY* 6, 5.

⁸⁹³ Yawney 1997: 12 (Phil Africa citing John Africa).

right here and now. As John Africa taught: “When you upset things upstream, you upset things downstream.” Subsequently, MOVE people do what they have to do to be healthy in body and mind. According to Natural Law, one cannot be healthy by doing what is unnatural and as all life is one, each person is compelled to oppose that which is unnatural everywhere. MOVE, as their name implies, means movement so being constantly “on the move,” by doing this work, which includes exercise and “putting out information” (evangelizing) are all part of what it means to live in accordance with Natural Law.

Secondary MOVE Texts and Interviews

Amidst a wealth of source material, it seems appropriate to begin by highlighting a single example. The purpose here is to place a face on the type of response that John Africa’s teaching elicited. Her name is Merle Austin Africa and her story is fairly representative for how many people in Philadelphia in the early 1970s were drawn to MOVE. She described her personal story as one that began with a troubled childhood plagued by drugs and alcohol. What turned her life around was encountering MOVE and the teaching of John Africa. In her own words, from a 1996 issue of *FIRST DAY*, she wrote:

I am a 45 yr. old woman of color living in the U.S. I’ve been a member of the MOVE Organization since 1973 and these 22 years have been the most satisfying and happiest I have ever experienced despite the 18 years unjustly spent in prison and vicious brutal murder my family experienced at the hands of the system May 13, 1985. ...I felt drawn to the true love, sensitivity and family unity I saw in the MOVE people I met and eventually, from talking to MOVE, I started going to study sessions to hear the teaching of **JOHN AFRICA, MOVE LAW**. The information I heard is the most **powerful, analytical, truthful** writing I have **ever** heard about this system. I was **real** impressed with the way **John Africa** took the time, had the patience to talk to a mother about her cranky unruly child or listen to **John Africa** speak at meetings giving a couple solution a marital problem they were having.⁸⁹⁴

As one of the MOVE 9, Merle Africa was never released from prison and two years after this text was published she died in prison. After the death of Merle Africa in prison, a special issue of *FIRST DAY* was made in dedication to her. Among the people who wrote in expressions of their love for Merle Africa were Native Americans Leonard Peltier and John Trudell, Black liberation activists Fred Hampton, Jr. and Sundiata Acoli, professors Mark L. Taylor (Princeton) and Carole Yawney (York University), as well as seven women (non-MOVE members) who were in prison with her. One of

⁸⁹⁴ Merle Africa, “THE MOVE 9: MERLE AFRICA,” *FIRST DAY* 11, 15.

them, Lois June Farquharca, wrote that Merle had left a “legacy of primal love and life force energy” behind her and that with Merle, a “helping hand was always available as well as a warm smile to one in a cold depression.” She concluded by writing “I loved her...but her spirit will always be there for those who knew her.”⁸⁹⁵ This sentiment of continuance was shared by Eddie Africa who wrote: “Merle is a **part of us, bound, tied, united** to and **with us** by the **strong ties of love, sharing** and **understanding** and so will **she always be with us!**”⁸⁹⁶

It is in light of the many years in prison that all members of the MOVE 9 endured and which seven of them remain enduring, that Ramona Africa stated that “Freedom must take priority over everything.”⁸⁹⁷ Yet, upon reading the context in which Ramona Africa said that, it becomes clear that “freedom” here is in the sense that John Africa taught and not merely the release of MOVE members from prison. When given the choice between being released from prison and staying with MOVE, she chose MOVE:

I was convicted and given 16 months to seven years in prison. They told me after 16 months that if I severed all ties with MOVE I could go. I told them to go to hell. Freedom must take priority over everything. I would prefer to do other things, but it is not an option.⁸⁹⁸

It becomes clear then when reading MOVE texts both that “freedom” is a central theme and that it is distinct from dominant conceptions of the term. In Ramona Africa’s words:

You can only be a revolutionary if you understand and believe in the principle of freedom, not in categories but in the totality of the principle of freedom. JOHN AFRICA teaches us that every living being is coordinated by MOMA Nature, the Mother of life, to be free; free of disease, free of poison and pollution, free of crime, free of oppression, free of brutality and torture, free of enslavement and exploitation. Man’s system is built on all these things-crime, disease, pollution, exploitation, enslavement, brutality, and torture, etc. As long as this system exists, all of these problems will continue to exist because they ARE the system.⁸⁹⁹

Believing in the “principle of freedom” means however standing up against injustice and being willing to bear the brunt of the consequences that the state can subject. Decades in prison for nine MOVE members has been a result of the showdown that concluded the police blockade of MOVE’s home in 1978. Every year MOVE members

⁸⁹⁵ Lois June Farquharca, “Letters from Women that were in Prison with Merle,” *FIRST DAY* 16, 9.

⁸⁹⁶ Eddie Africa, “MERLE: SISTER AND SOLDIER,” *FIRST DAY* 16, 5.

⁸⁹⁷ Azikiwe 2008.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Rosebraugh 2009: 141.

arrange events to raise awareness about the MOVE 9 and the bombing of MOVE members in 1985 (see Fig. 23).

August 8, 1999 me and my sisters and brothers known as the Move 9, will be in prison **21 years!**. That's a long time to be locked in a cell. Nobody wants to be in prison being told when to go to bed, when to get up, when you can go outside, when to come in. We're even told what to eat, when to eat, **how much** to eat! Prison is not the **vacation** a lot of politicians try to portray it to be.

It's hard to be in prison, with all the restrictions and confinement but what's hardest about prison is being away from our family! ...

...There's **nothing** like the love of a child because it's pure and genuine. And I miss being around that love. I miss being pregnant, carrying a new life close to my heart. I miss holding lil infants, feeling their soft skin. I miss laying on the floor and having the toddlers climb on me. I miss watching a baby sleep after an exhausting day of playing. You don't know what it's like to **never** be around **children!** I guess the best way to understand how I feel is to imagine waking up one day and **all** the trees and flowers are **gone!** That's how it feels being in prison and away from our children, our family, it's a heavy feeling inside of me but John Africa's teaching, the love of my family and knowing that what I'm fighting for is right, keeps me going. And if I had to do this all over again I would because the work Move is doing is making Move children healthy, our work is opening the way for all children to be healthy and happy. So if we've had to suffer it is not in vain.⁹⁰⁰

Yet, like Ramona, Janine and the others in prison choose prison over renouncing their ties to MOVE. This commitment has been unflinchingly echoed by all MOVE members in prison. Janine's response is representative for their stance. She acknowledged that prison life is very difficult, particularly in the evenings in when the day slowed down and she missed her family and yet she wrote:

If they told me I could get out of prison today if I left Move, give up John Africa's teaching —I wouldn't do it! Look at people outside of prison, they ain't happy, living under this system is causing them all kinds of problems, work jobs they don't like, pay taxes they don't want to pay, send their children to schools they don't want to go to, fight wars they don't want to fight. They're facing crime, drugs, alcohol, abuse, prejudice, mental illness and on and it's increasing. Things are getting worse not better. So where's the freedom? Why would I give up something that is guiding me away from all that confusion, just to be o the streets? So no there is nothing I would change about

⁹⁰⁰ Janine Africa, "TAKING MORE THAN OUR FREEDOM!" *FIRST DAY* 20, 3.

that statement “To live under the teachings of John Africa and do what’s right is to be free. Even if it means dying.” Long Live John Africa!⁹⁰¹

It can be worth noting that her comments—even from behind bars for the last 37 years—were in tune with the responses that Alford was surprised to hear from his interviewees: she gave a more accurate prediction of how people felt in America’s “free society” than Alford did before he began to interview people.

In contrast to the respondents in Alford’s study, MOVE youth have expressed a sense of appreciation for their lives and critiqued the larger society for its injustice. In support for the teaching of John Africa some of them formed a rap group in the late 1990s called Seeds of Wisdom. “Seeds of Wisdom” was John Africa’s name for the new generation of children being raised in MOVE as well as the MOVE charted members had started in Richmond, Virginia in the late 1970s to protect the children from the conflicts in Philadelphia. A MOVE supporter interviewed the members of Seeds of Wisdom. The youngest was 9 years old, Pixie Africa. The oldest about 20 years old, was Mike Africa, Jr. who, in particular, is an authority on dominant conceptions of “freedom.” He knows far better than most scholars what it feels like to walk into a prison and what it feels like to walk out. In fact, Mike Africa, Jr. was born in prison in 1978. Not only did his mother Debbie Africa give birth to him in a prison cell, she did so quietly. In this way she was able to keep him with her for some time before prison guards eventually discovered the child whom they had been expecting. Subsequently, he was torn from his mother and “released” from prison.⁹⁰² His mother and father have remained incarcerated for his entire life. Every visit with one of his parents (held at different prisons), has meant crossing the threshold for what is characterized as in dominant conversations as “freedom.” He is far from alone. All MOVE members and children cross that threshold to visit their loved ones and all of them have a close relative who was killed in 1985.

According to Raymond Africa there are consequences for each technological development that is intended to fix problems made by previous technological developments:

To make a hospital you have to make a machine that uses gas and gas pollutes the air and the water. People go out to get a water purifier but in order to make that water purifier you’ve got to make a factory, and factories pollute the air and water. **John Africa** teach Move people to get rid of the water purifiers, the cars, everything. Some people say

⁹⁰¹ Letter from Janine Africa to author 2 August 2014.

⁹⁰² Later, in Virginia, he was captured again by city authorities as a young child and, together with other MOVE children placed in the custody of the state. Thanks to rescue mission in a U-Haul van driven by his uncle Frank Africa (son of Louise James Africa and nephew to John Africa), they managed to escape Virginia police and return to Philadelphia.

that we don't believe in technology, but [we're] using cars, but **John Africa** teach that we do what's necessary to get the information out.⁹⁰³

Mike Africa, Jr. pointed out that a double-standard applied to animals (in their natural habitat) and cars (polluting the habitat):

They are always talking about how they are going to make the environment better for animals by putting them in zoos, how they want to stop the overpopulation of animals, but all of that is a bunch of lies. They use that as an excuse to do what they want to do with these animals for money. They talk about the overpopulation of animals when the overpopulation of cars are overpopulating even more. They say you need to spay or neuter your animal, but every time you turn on the television you see a car commercial.⁹⁰⁴

Blizzard Africa added that the double-standard is then applied to MOVE when they stand up in partnership with animals:

What's wrong with fighting for the air, soil, water, or animals? We don't have separate air, separate food from nobody else. We all breathe the same air. This system will call Move people dirty, but they've got dirty politicians, dirty cops, dirty officials. The people who are sending innocent people to jail are dirty. That's all this pollution, all these drugs, all these dirty politicians and they want to call *us* dirty.⁹⁰⁵

The youngest one, 9-year old Pixie Africa, observed that people get confused between what is toxic and what is dirty. Whereas dirt is natural people avoid it, but then turn around and eat food laced with pesticides. “

If you ain't got clean soil, how are you gonna get clean food? ...Organic food don't be shiny, organic food will have dirt on it. People say, “Eewww...this food's got dirt on it” they don't say Eewww... this food's got poison (pesticides) on it! They just eat the skin when the poison is on the food and be like “Eewww... get the dirt away from me!” They don't want nothing to do with it when dirt is on it.⁹⁰⁶

When asked “what is the most important thing that you want people to know about Move?” Nimrod Africa responded, recalling the centrality of “freedom,” in MOVE belief:

One of the most important things is to free life, to stop man's system from imposing on us. That's why we go out speaking the truth, putting out the truth about the enslavement

⁹⁰³ Blizzard Africa et al, “Seeds of Wisdom: *The Network Magazine* Interview,” *FIRST DAY* 19, 10.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

of life, the enslavement of plant life, animal life, people. Like speaking out for people like Mumia Abu-Jamal and the Move 9. That's what we do and that's what we try to encourage people to do, to fight for freedom for all life.⁹⁰⁷

So the new generation was, like the one before it, expressing the same sort of commitment and understanding of the teaching of John Africa in terms of the liberation of all life, including animals, from the throes of industry, incarceration, and insecticides. If John Africa was expressing the feelings of confinement that many Americans—white and black—have been feeling in the U.S. then it is hardly surprising that this should be seen as a threat. According to Alford's study, U.S. society has been producing the very constituency that might, like Janine Africa, find more "freedom" in prison challenging injustice than living outside in a country that most of them did not want to describe as "free." To become aware of alternative ways of being and living is then a dangerous thing: such people cannot be controlled by fear of prison and the state loses its primary trump card. What society based on domination would want to spread the idea that a person could *feel* more "free" by struggling for social justice? It was precisely this question that Alford asked his interviewees and he noted that the very idea seemed foreign to them. For MOVE members, it seemed to be the norm. In Debbie's words:

The teaching of John Africa gives me in prison a sense of satisfaction knowing that I have something that makes me feel whole, despite being in prison and away from my family, my children. I have the inner peace knowing that I am doing what is right by Life, by Moma. There is nothing more satisfying than to be able to sleep good at night because your conscience is clear. The teaching of John Africa gives me the understanding that work is going to make us happy, and healthy, and the drive, commitment to be able to stick with it no matter what. We have purpose.⁹⁰⁸

In attempting to parse out exactly what the different sense of "freedom" were being used by MOVE members, I conceived of a concrete version (literally the release of MOVE members from prison), a psychological version (the feeling of "freedom" that is felt by members even when incarcerated), and, very closely related to the psychological one, an existential version (the "freedom" of nature as an absolute that exists eternally). If John Africa was teaching about different types of "freedom," it was never articulated as such. So I wrote to Debbie Africa, one of the MOVE 9, and asked her about this. She had written about how the system had taken her and her family's "freedom." If there "ain't no freedom in this system," then what does it mean to demand their "freedom"? This was Debbie Africa's response:

The issue about "Freedom" is this—John Africa explain to Move that Freedom is not an "act of being free" it is the natural god given right to be free, just as we have the natural

⁹⁰⁷ Blizzard Africa et al, "Seeds of Wisdom: *The Network Magazine* Interview," *FIRST DAY* 19, 10.

⁹⁰⁸ Letter from Debbie Africa to author, 27 July 2014.

instinct in us to be able to breathe, eat, drink. It also is supposed to be a natural state of being, period. These are not the words of John Africa, but the principle of John Africa coming from the belief of John Africa who have given it to we of Move. Freedom is the principle of being unrestrained, ungoverned, and uninhibited. Mike was right when he told you that John Africa teach that there ain't no freedom in this system. He is right, freedom does not exist in this system.

The minute you are born into this world, you are in a hospital, under bright lights, strapped with a diaper, needles, all sorts of things that are not natural. We are forced to do things we don't want to do, whatever it is, going to school, to work, to war, to jail etc. We are not free from restraint. People govern this system and people are restrained all the time, whether to a term in the army, a term in the navy, bills you don't want to pay, or restrained to some other debt, bill etc. People are not free, they are controlled. I only used that statement I used about this system taking my freedom, my husband freedom, my children's freedom ...because that is what you and people can relate to when making the point about what this system has done and is doing to us. No, freedom don't really exist in this system, but there are levels to everything that exist.⁹⁰⁹

Debbie then went to explain how the different levels meant various crimes of abuse or theft, planned murder and self-defense are different levels of crime. The same with different levels of "freedom" but they are not different categories —just terms that make it easier to communicate to outsiders:

...So you see there is no contradiction; there is not freedom that exist in this system, but what people see as freedom was taken from us. Just as the so called freedom we have in prison is not freedom, they are diversions so that people can forget they are in prison especially if they are in prison unjustly. The system want you to forget that you have no freedom so they give you things to divert your attention from the fact that you are not free.

Do you understand. John Africa doesn't talk different kinds of freedom, John Africa talks in absoluton. We of Move just has to make categories, an talk in levels and degrees so that people can understand better the points we make about this system.⁹¹⁰

Then she pointed out what felt like a bitter irony in the idea of "religious freedom":

This country was founded on religious freedom, Anthony, but what and why have they not accepted MOVE as a religion. This country was founded on the fact that the fore fathers of this country was tired of being under one rule, having to pay higher taxes, and being poor while the rich stayed rich. They broke away from England, and wrote the

⁹⁰⁹ Letter from Debbie Africa to author, 27 July 2014.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

declaration of Independence, yet who can really make the choice that they want to be free to choose the religion they want, and not be harassed and harangued, and persecuted, by the very people who fought against this kind of restraint.⁹¹¹

It can be worth observing here that when Judge Adams ruled that MOVE did not qualify as a “religion,” he wrote: “MOVE does not appear to take a position with respect to matters of personal morality, human mortality, or the meaning and purpose of life.”⁹¹² His ruling has yet to be overturned. It is quite true, however, that “religion,” as MOVE believes and lives it, is very different than the stories of “religion” that informed Judge Adams. As Eddie Africa wrote:

True religion is based on the truth, reality, Life, as opposed to mysticism, blind faith, religion should be clearly seen, felt, realized, if I am to accept it. I don't wanna believe in a heaven or hell story cause it can't be proven. All there is is Life and Life is clearly seen, on this Level or in the dirt!⁹¹³

This type of expression would be very much at home with the religious humanism of Alice Walker but apparently nothing that Judge Adams recognized as religious. From Debbie Africa:

Our belief is in Moma nature the God of life, She is the creator of all of life, including man, and nobody can dispute this. We are devoted to, committed to protecting the source of life. That is our life's work, and we don't need a church to do this in. ... That's what a religion is, believing in a higher power other than human, and being loyal to this belief.⁹¹⁴

From Phil Africa:

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

⁹¹² *Africa v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 662 F.2d 1025 (3d Cir. 1981). Note that a typo stating “human *morality*” instead of “human *mortality*” was written in Washington (1989: 73) and repeated in Ekeogu (2014: 36) who, in turn, mistakenly attributed the quote to Judge Jones. If the reader is mystified by Judge Adams' conclusion then I can say that after reading his entire ruling, I am no less mystified by his reasoning except that it falls squarely within a pattern of white judges who respond to ontological clashes between colonizers and colonized with colonial dissonance. It is also what one would expect a white judge to rule in relation to a black group whose members had recently been convicted of killing a police officer. The words did not need to make sense, they just needed to be written (Frank Africa appealed the case but the Supreme Court refused to hear it) The ruling has never been subject to a proper re-examination. Instead, courts have relied on the ruling to reject each new request by MOVE members for protection of their religious rights.

⁹¹³ Letter from Eddie Africa to author 7 May 2014.

⁹¹⁴ Letter from Debbie Africa to author, 27 July 2014.

Religion in simple terms is a Way of Life and we have been living our religion since day one and always will! Our religion is lived believed in, not studied or practiced. “The presence of truth is the power of GOD!” LONG LIVE JOHN AFRICA!⁹¹⁵

And from Mike Africa:

The religion of MOVE is the reverence for Life, Natural Law. It pre-dates any religion modern society recognizes and it will exist when this rotten ass system breathes its final gasp, because the religion of MOVE as exemplified by our founder John Africa is adhered to by all of life except humans, or unless imposed on or interfered with by the degenerative influence of mankind. This is not secular or esoteric. It is a spirit that is embraced passed down and practiced by all living organisms innately, naturally. There are no different sects. Life is instilled with that power of purpose. It is not MOVE belief that is temporal, or have repeatedly had to be redefined throughout its existence.⁹¹⁶

So if we summarize some of the elements that come forth from these statements, MOVE’s conception of “religion” entails that which is simply *is*. It is something “believed in” but this belief seems to mean something *acknowledged* rather than “belief” in the sense of abstract ideas. The belief in a “higher power” that Debbie refers to is not a reference to the supernatural, but a reference to Mama Nature which is something higher than “human” (an idea that is *not* natural) and, at the same time, the same thing as who we are (when we recognize that we are not this isolated body but in fact one with all). “Religion” is a “way of life” that requires “reverence,” “loyalty,” “protection,” and it is uncreated, eternal, and universal.

⁹¹⁵ Letter from Phil Africa to author, 12 July 2014.

⁹¹⁶ Letter from Mike Africa to author 16 June 2014.



Fig. 23
 MOVE members and supporters demonstrate in Philadelphia on May 13, 2015, exactly 30 years since the bombing. The sign on the left had all the names of those who were killed by the police attack. The signs in the middle show Debbie Africa and Edward Africa of the MOVE 9 and a picture of Mumia Abu-Jamal can be seen to the right. Photo by Medan Photography.

At one point, I asked Mike Africa, Jr. about MOVE philosophy and if he felt it was summed up in the pantheistic statement that human beings are “part of the whole.” He looked at me quizzically and pondered back at me: “Part?” he said. In MOVE philosophy there is no “part” because even that would imply a degree of separation and the very idea of separation was the first violation. For him, there was simply “one.” We are life. No more need be said. Any qualifiers were regarded as superfluous.

When I tried to grasp the text by John Africa about “freeing” the metal from musical instruments in relation to how MOVE members interpret it today, I asked him why MOVE members used microphones and electronic equipment to make hip hop. If John Africa said to “free” the minerals by putting them back in the ground then why would MOVE members use electronics to make music? He repeated a phrase he’d told me several times before, John Africa said to “do what’s necessary.” If one has to use technology to spread the message then so be it. They want to get rid of that technology when it has served its purpose but until then the hip hop they made would be used to spread the teaching. In contrast, the military parade John Africa was critiquing was not a critique against music as such as it was a critique against the use of minerals to make

music for the military and that “goes against life.”⁹¹⁷ Mike likened it to a bridge that you need to get over but once you’ve done it then you can get rid of the bridge. As Blizzard put it, “Our founder . . . taught us to do what’s necessary to put out information around the world” and if making music is what it takes to spread the message, then that’s what they do.⁹¹⁸ When I talked with Mike about “freedom” not being a word in many languages and how most philosophers tied it to the state, he said “That makes perfect sense. . . why should a language have a word for freedom if it doesn’t have a word for slavery? Freedom is just the natural way of being. You can trick a cat into going into a cage but that’s not because it’s stupid. It’s because the idea of a cage, of slavery, doesn’t exist in its world.”⁹¹⁹ In this sense then, “freedom” for MOVE is not a separate word from “life.” When I asked Eddie Africa (via written letters) about “free will,” it was interesting to hear that the concept, the question, clearly made no sense to him. There was no “free will” to do anything other than what was right.

One of the difficulties for outsiders to understand MOVE’s message has been the fact that the meanings that John Africa taught for various words is different than most people are used to thinking. So, for example, “revolution” is conceived of as something violent in conventional usage whereas in the language of MOVE, it is the opposite. Often MOVE draws comparisons to the American Revolution in order to demonstrate that it was neither a revolution nor was it about “freedom” and “equality.” As Mumia Abu-Jamal wrote: “The American Revolution was a white Revolution—for **white** freedom, **white** wealth and **white** POWER. . . period.”⁹²⁰ Delbert Africa wrote:

Are you independent (free) or are you dependent (a slave, addicted) and what are you gonna do about it, one way or another.

First off, despite all the boasting and bragging of its politicians and historians, this country **never** took a revolutionary path to independence. The only thing they did was exchange forms of government. They got rid of the old “godfather” (King George) and replaced him with a ruling council of gangsters and slave owners who decided they were gonna split up the “pie” equally among themselves and those that were in their camps. Obviously the Africans stolen from their homeland and the natives of this land that was being stolen from them weren’t included in that split, nor were poor whites for that matter! So, with that kinda historical perspective what yare you celebrating during “independence day”? You celebrate a **heist**, rejoicing over **murder**, **genocide**, and **slavery!**

...And if you people truly wanna taste some independence you got to throw off the stranglehold that external government, big business and **mis**-education has put on you.

⁹¹⁷ Interview with author 11 May 2013.

⁹¹⁸ Blizzard Africa et al, “Seeds of Wisdom: *The Network Magazine* Interview,” *FIRST DAY* 19, 10.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ Abu-Jamal, “Revolution For The Rich,” *FIRST DAY* 6, 1.

If you really wanna know about freedom, taste some independence you got to break your **dependency**, your addiction to **all** the tricks this system push at you to make you **hallucinate** that you're free and independent.⁹²¹

Similarly, Edward Africa wrote:

“George Washington” didn’t have no revolution in this country, the French, Cubans, Russians didn’t have no revolution, all they had were wars where one side was changed for another, both basing belief o the same oppressive system, the purpose of revolution as taught by JOHN AFRICA is to eliminate all that has you wanting to revolt in the first place, so now, if “George Washington” had a revolution to gain freedom, equality and peace for the people, why wasn’t it passed on to the Indians, how come Blacks didn’t leap for joy?...Blacks, Indians and poor white folks are still crying for equality.

...When you talk about revolution how are people gonna understand when their reference is “George Washington”? The system teaches revolution to mean a violent overthrow of one group for another, explaining why people are so hesitant, afraid of revolution, but true revolution ain’t violent. True revolution is the understanding of peace, the commitment to get peace and the strength to maintain it. JOHN AFRICA teaches MOVE folks that the understanding of revolution starts with self, each person doing the work to correct themselves, joining with others who are working to understand revolution and spreading the understanding to others thru any means needed, people need to understand revolution before they can apply it...

Revolution don’t separate people, it joins people together, ain’t no such thing as a Black revolution, a Spanish revolution, true revolution encompasses all peoples. How you gonna give Black folks the healing understanding of revolution and leave white folks sick and expect a healthy environment? How you gonna revolutionize Indians and leave Orientals confused? The purpose of revolution is to end all confusion, to eliminate all sickness, oppression, correct all problems, Black, White, Spanish, whatever! ...Revolution will correct all those tainted by this system and instill the reality of freedom regardless of race, sex, color, or creed”⁹²²

Along with the critique however against the U.S. government, there is also a tendency to show that if one believes that the Founding Fathers were resisting tyranny, then MOVE is simply doing the same thing:

⁹²¹ Delbert Africa. “What Independence You Talkin’ About?” *FIRST DAY 24*, 4-5.

⁹²² Edward Africa, “When the Revolution Come.” *FIRST DAY 24*, 6.[periods added to replace commas, bold removed, and unnecessary apostrophes were removed to make this reading more legible]

...This government is corrupt and according to **the constitution**,⁹²³ people have an **obligation** to get rid of a government once it is found to be corrupt. But just like the British government did in the 1700s, this country will beat, jail, kill anybody who tries to exert this right. Like they are doing to Move, like they have done to all those who fight for justice.⁹²⁴

In 1999, several years before Michael Moore had produced the documentary film *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and drawn a link between arms manufacturing and personal gun violence, Chuck Africa drew on the teaching of John Africa to make the same explicit claim:

There are more people killed by guns in America in two years than there was in Vietnam!⁹²⁵ Murder, maiming and suffering caused by bullets is the order of the day. Just sitting back thinking about this is incredible! Murder is legalized by a bunch of hypocrites, morality and claiming christianity! This system could actually **save millions** of lives **right this instant** if they simply **outlawed guns! Prohibit manufacturers from making them!**

...You see, this system (government, interest groups, assassin squads (CIA), Political Police (FBI), cops, etc.) promotes gun violence and murder. As well as the movie industry and television! Many many people profit and they don't give a damn about peoples' suffering. So the next time you hear somebody saying "guns don't kill people, people do," stop and think. The people who are behind all this violence is the educated professional gangsters, the politicians... All their ruling class bosses who make billions off of the gun racket and the arrogant idiots of the National Rifle Association. These people are behind the waves of killing!

People do kill people, but they do it because they are **coerced** to do it by the maniacs who have all these guns and **make them available**. This system plants the seed in peoples

⁹²³ Janine Africa is actually referring here to the Declaration of Independence where it states "when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

⁹²⁴ Janine Africa, "America the Free?" *FIRST DAY* 24, 10.

⁹²⁵ Studies this claim. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, there were 30,470 gun-related deaths in the United States (about two-thirds of those were suicide). As approximately 55,000 U.S. soldiers died in Vietnam, that would mean two years of gun deaths in the U.S. are in fact more than all that were killed in Vietnam. Gun-related suicide and homicide rates in the U.S. dwarf that of the any other industrialized country. In the words of a recent meta-study: "During the ten years from 2003 to 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, 313,045 persons died from firearm-related injuries in the United States. These deaths outnumber US combat fatalities in World War II; they outnumber the combined count of combat fatalities in all other wars in the nation's history. The total societal costs of firearm injuries were estimated to be \$174.1 billion in 2010" (Wintemute 2015).

minds that guns are right and it is indeed honorable to kill people to solve problems and they schizophrenically turn around and attempt to teach the young that having guns is wrong.

America is always at war with a country or supplying a country or a factional leader with billions of dollars worth of guns (and tanks, copters, gun ships, bombs, and shells) to kill people. Didn't they just kill three hundred thousand Iraqis a little while ago? Don't cops continuously shoot people in the streets of America? So what America is saying is guns and killing is only cool **when you are doing it for government interests.**⁹²⁶

Furthermore, MOVE's conception as to what constitutes violence is more nuanced than conceptions such as Steven Pinker's which emphasize personal attack and injury. Debbie Africa wrote:

...society **never** indicts the automobile with the mangled bodies of its victims. If a person kill only **five** people—society label that person a mass murderer and **demand** that person's removal from society **and** their execution, yet **technology, industry** kill **thousands** of people daily and nothin' is done about industry, it's accepted.⁹²⁷

Such nuances have rarely been observed by outsider including scholars and judges. In the case of judges, it has sometimes been difficult to even get to first base in terms of communication. If a MOVE member becomes insistent on speaking MOVE language, the members of the court tend to become both confused and irritated. In a court case that had devolved into a dispute about whether a MOVE member ought to be allowed to represent herself, she insisted on responding to basic questions such as name and age through MOVE language. Instead of "Consuewella Dotson," she declared her name as "Consuewella Africa" and instead of 25, she declared her age to be "one". For her, these responses were a matter of principle and ultimate truth. For the judge, she was being obstinate, problematic, and non-compliant. As the tension between them increased, she burst out in condemnation:

Look, goddamn it, I ain't got to answer the questions the way you want me to answer them. Talk to me about John Africa. I told you I don't believe in your laws, I don't believe in your system and I'm answering the way I been taught to answer. I'm old as life. As simple as that. You the one that's —that believe that system of confusion, one, two, three, four, up, down, back, forth, this is the dog, the cat, the bird. Separation. I don't believe in that bullshit. All I know is life, one life, one system, one God, one universe, one existence.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁶ Chuck Africa, "Society's Approval of Guns," *FIRST DAY* 21, 7.

⁹²⁷ Debbie Africa, "The Killer," *FIRST DAY* 6, 6.

⁹²⁸ *Consuewella Africa v. Judge Levy Anderson*, 1982.

Although the idea of “oneness” is often tossed around in New Age circles and even understood by scholars to be applicable to Vedanta, Daoism, and other Asian traditions, there is little experience with traditions who interpret that concept of “oneness” in pragmatic ways that conflict with mainstream social structures.

One of the functions of having white supporters has been to be able to express MOVE belief in ways that white people can more readily comprehend. A MOVE supporter, Maiga Milbourne, who also happens to be a Universalist minister, wrote a poem on her blog entitled “We’re Wrong.” She described her travels through Central and South America and how NGOs worked in tandem with corporations, how drilling companies financed schools after contracts had been signed, and how well-meaning people from the North who look like her could find jobs teaching the locals “how to live” after the “jungle is gone” and the “mountains are blasted.” She wrote:

*The world is finite and bounded and I look
out the window of a bus traveling the
country from jungle to Andes in Ecuador
and I see companies from my home and I
know that earth, mineral, plant, substance will
be robbed here and mined and sold and
taken to where I live*⁹²⁹

She noticed a manicured lawn. It was the first one that she had seen on the trip. It was in a town named “Shell.” This reminded her of oil, Nigeria, South Africa, and massacres.⁹³⁰ It also reminded her of the only manicured lawn she’d seen in all of Cuba: at the U.S. interest section of the Swiss Embassy “where dark-skinned people served iced tea on trays to light-skinned people.” She also saw in the town named “Shell” in Ecuador, the first gated community she’d seen on the trip. She’s traveled a lot she said. And across the world she has seen devastation in the wake of “Shell and other

⁹²⁹ Maiga Milbourne, “We’re Wrong.” 21 May 2013.

<http://maigamilbourne.blogspot.com/2013/05/were-wrong.html> Accessed 12 July 2013.

⁹³⁰ Shell has had a long-standing involvement in Nigeria and South Africa. During the international boycott of apartheid South Africa, Shell was one of the only companies to continue to do business with the regime. In Nigeria, Shell’s environmental damage in Ogoniland sparked a widespread protest movement which the government brutally crushed. Ken Saro-Wiwa was an Ogoni organizer for human rights, democratization, and ecology. Shell withheld an oil contract with the government until Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists were executed by the government. When later sued by Ken Saro-Wiwa’s son for torture, execution, and crimes against humanity, Shell settled out of court days before the trial. Jad Mouawad, “Shell to Pay \$15.5 Million to Settle Nigerian Case.” *New York Times*. 9 June 2009.

multinationals busy drilling for copper and oil or pharmaceutical companies looking for drugs in the rainforest.” At the same time, she has witnessed an amazing resilience where Vietnamese rebuild farms from milk jugs and people in Guatemala use litter to build houses.

*We're wrong. How I live (a life based on drugs, extracted from
these jungles, with technology, made from minerals in these
mountains, from exploitation, from globalization, from NAFTA)*

is wrong

the story I was told that well-meaning people know

how to live can teach others

(in the jungles, on farms, in the mountains, in

the cities, in ghettos)

how to live is wrong.

...

I want to live differently. I saw rain barrels on roofs in Panama

...I see teachers everywhere.

People live in scale out of necessity and sometimes by choice.

Not saints, not sinners.

The way to not see scarred earth & starved

inhabitants is to stop stealing.

That's the cost of making iPhones and

cars and drugs and toys.

I want to break my own addictions.

... We can live differently

I can live differently

I can learn and be thankful and watch

and observe and

Stop taking from

or allowing the taking from

or permitting the taking from

and simply be here

(and let others be there)

This section saw that the central text of John Africa is manifest in subsequent texts by MOVE members and supporters. The concepts of “freedom,” as with the central text, are entwined with the concept of the unity of life. Underlying themes then are compulsions to resist violations against life in the form of prejudice, weapons manufacturing, incarceration, indoctrination, and so on as well as personal commitments to live in alignment with principles of life, eating healthy, exercising, taking care of one another, giving birth at home, avoiding fabricated medicine, and generally living as independent from the “system” as possible.

Living Words in the MOVE Organization

This brief overview of some observations drawn from the context of MOVE ought not to be confused with ethnographic study. I have not studied MOVE in that manner and these observations are drawn from interviews and encounters with MOVE members and supporters usually in association with one of the annual events around the 13th of May or 8th of August. The purpose of MOVE as coordinated by John Africa was to “put out information” (akin to what Christians usually call “evangelize”). As they regard the Teaching of John Africa to contain all of the answers necessary to heal people and heal the planet from all of their ailments of racism, war, alcoholism, disease, and so on various MOVE members (often Ramona Africa, Minister of Communication) give public presentations at universities or activist events. Campaigning to free Mumia Abu-Jamal (headed by Pam Africa) and the MOVE 9 has been their major focus for the few decades. At one point Mike Africa, Jr. wrote and directed a children’s performance entitled “Animals Are People Too.”⁹³¹ At the same time, they have to face many preconceptions that people have had about MOVE through what they have heard through mainstream media. Blizzard responded:

⁹³¹ “Animals Are People Too,” video uploaded by CelebrationMoon, 6 August 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCriW25fTWg> Accessed 10 April 2014.

The news media told people that Move people are being forced to stay in the Move Organization, that Move's youth is being forced to stay in the organization. Well, that's a lie. Ain't nobody being forced to stay here. That's one of the most important things I want people to understand. We tell people to do the work, but we can't make nobody do nothing. We tell them what will happen if they go into the system and what will happen and what will happen if they stay here. If they want to listen, then they will. People do what they want. We give information and people listen if they want to and if they don't, they won't.⁹³²

One of the most common misconceptions that outsiders have of MOVE members is that they are a "cult" in which all members must think and behave exactly the same.⁹³³ The unison of MOVE members in regard to belief does not mean that they are all at the same level in terms of their "work." To the contrary, John Africa had taught that each person had to work from where they were and this meant that different people would have different needs and different types of work depending on where they were at. In fact, John Africa would often provide personalized Guidelines directed toward specific members in relation to where they were at in their work. Each member is expected to go at their own pace so there can be a range in terms of where each member is at in their relation to living in accordance with the teachings of John Africa.

For example, MOVE members differ in terms of how strict they are with their own regiment. The ideal is the same but each person approaches it according to their own needs and abilities. Mike Africa (Sr.), for example, has more or less adopted a vegan diet (yet having fresh, raw food would be prioritized over having strictly vegan but processed food).⁹³⁴

Despite the different levels at which each member operates, there are still boundaries for what is seen as right and wrong. Some boundaries are, within the group, clear and uncontroversial (for example, MOVE members would not join the U.S. military). Other boundaries are either less clear or easier to cross. When a member crosses a boundary, then another member can correct them. According to former members such as Sharon Cox, "meetings" were the primary means for MOVE members to negotiate their differences. That is, if a member deviated or did something that others recognized as wrong (in her case she gave the example of accidentally leaving out food that the children were not supposed to be able to reach) then they would "call a meeting

⁹³² Ibid, 11.

⁹³³ In the only film footage of John Africa that I have seen (shown in Jason Osder's documentary), he briefly responded to journalist questions after he had won the trial. A journalist asked him if he planned to stay in Philadelphia and "continue the MOVE cult." To this John Africa responded: "It's not a cult. It's an organization."

⁹³⁴ As Mike, Sr. wrote to me: "As for me personally, no I no longer eat any animal products whatsoever. Nor do I eat any junk foods. I guess I would be considered a vegan. But this is just a continuance of the influence and teaching of our founder John Africa for any MOVE person. Always striving to move away from the influence of the system." Letter from Mike Africa to author, 15 July 2014.

on” that person and correct them. The sessions have been described as something in which the member in question would sit in a chair and listen to others take turns telling them why and how they were wrong. The session would end when the person owned up to their transgression and re-committed to doing what’s right.

When I asked Mike Africa, Jr. about meetings in MOVE, he indicated that I had not understood what meetings were or how they functioned. He said, for example, that anyone can call a meeting on somebody else and it can be just two people—it doesn’t have to be a group. Nor did it have to be an extended affair. I asked if it was more often older members calling meetings on younger members and he said it could be anybody. He told me a story of when he was in a big appliance store shopping with his family. His wife had the bigger children and he had their youngest daughter who was about 3 years old at the time. The little girl started running around the store and misbehaving so he told her to stop. He said, “You’re being a bad girl.” She looked at him and said, “You’re being a bad boy!” So he reacted to that. He thought to himself that she was right. He was trying to keep her behaving a certain way indoors when she was doing simply running around which is what children do. She was behaving naturally and he was behaving unnaturally by bringing her into an environment wherein she could not act natural. So he corrected himself and took her outdoors where she could run around freely. In effect, she had “called a meeting” on him.

Indeed, the image projected by the media of MOVE members as “cult-like” has not been resonated with my own experience of MOVE members and their children. Several MOVE teens could with their dreadlocks (now a more popular hairstyle) and skateboards could blend into any public setting. Young members are however encouraged to give public presentations and some of them put John Africa’s teaching to rhyme in rap songs.

Around 1999, Nimrod Africa was involved in Seeds of Wisdom, doing rap with had just gotten back from speaking in California and Blizzard Africa had been speaking at black colleges in Alabama. As Blizzard, then 16 years old, said, “The young kids when they are old enough to travel start doing that work. They start traveling like myself.”⁹³⁵ Not only do they talk about issues of pollution, racism, and animal liberation but they also share information about MOVE lifestyle:

First of all, nobody in the Move Organization is hooked onto drugs, hooked onto alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and that’s mainly what you see in the system. You see 15, 14, 10-year-old kids shooting up, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, drinking beer, smoking. It’s nothing to walk down the street and see a 10-year-old boy or girl smoking. In the Move Organization we don’t do none of that. We do physical exercise. We start off everyday walking our dogs. We get up early every morning. We run when we can. We clean up the yards. We’ve got babies so that’s WORK watching babies everyday. Our

⁹³⁵ Blizzard Africa et al, “Seeds of Wisdom: *The Network Magazine* Interview,” *FIRST DAY* 19, 9.

main diet is raw food, vegetables, fruit, and things like that. That's what we concentrate on more than anything, we eat more raw than cooked food. We are working toward eating all raw food because that's what our founder **John Africa** taught us.⁹³⁶

One of the major lifestyle changes that characterized MOVE from the beginning was that they would give birth to their children at home without midwives, painkillers, or medical equipment. According to Ronna Africa, this is still practiced today:

I also had my baby at home without no doctors. While I was pregnant with my baby I ran every day, did 400 sit ups every day, ran 5 miles every day, and I did it with no problems. I was born and raised on the raw food diet, and that was basically all I ate when I was young. I didn't start eating cooked food until I was older. Like my brother Blizzard was saying, all the things that happened to us like the babies being killed, the bombing, we do eat some distortion, but Move is strong and Move is getting stronger.⁹³⁷

Ronna Africa's story indicated two details about the lifestyle of MOVE members. First, having babies at home is an essential attribute that has remained unchanged since the founding of MOVE. The second is that diet is a more flexible matter. Due to the traumatic effects of the bombing, MOVE members do not expect one another to hold as rigid a standard in regard to diet as they had back in the 1970s but that they nonetheless strive toward eating a raw food diet.

Another aspect regarding MOVE behavior, especially in relation to group autonomy, is how they have established themselves as social force in Philadelphia. In light of their history of conflict with city authorities, MOVE members now carry a clout that few other organizations could claim. A MOVE supporter told me two stories that demonstrated MOVE's ability to assert itself in the face of the state. In one instance, this supporter had been harassed by police in front of a MOVE home for a traffic technicality. When MOVE members saw this, they rushed out to his aid. As they stood and argued with the young officer, Albert Africa, in particular, John Africa's widow, a short black woman, shouted down the young white police officer. Soon the new officer's colleagues arrived on the scene and instructed him that this was not a matter that they were going to pursue. They pulled him back and they left.⁹³⁸ Direct volatile confrontation between white police and black citizens does not usually end that way. MOVE's reputation enabled them to do that.

Similarly, when Pam Africa was leading a demonstration in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal in downtown Philadelphia some construction workers on the top of a building heard the demo and threw down a brick. Pam told the police that MOVE was not going anywhere until the entire building was shut down and those men were forced

⁹³⁶ Ibid, 9-10.

⁹³⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁹³⁸ Interview with author 6 August 2013.

off the roof. After a long struggle MOVE won out and the men had to come down.⁹³⁹ Again, this was something few organizations could do. In relation to their size, MOVE members have developed clout and the ability to wield it skillfully.

Yet the concerns that MOVE members have faced, even in prison, have been applicable and relevant to people living in the heart of mainstream population. One of Mike Africa, Sr.'s major concerns was that the water in Montgomery county where his prison is located is contaminated with trichlorethylene and tetracloroethylene. He's been at this particular prison in Graterford for 19 years. He told me that the guards had been warned by the staff not to drink it: "This same poison brew was served up to the [M]arines, who they now admit that exposure to these chemicals for as little as **30 days** can cause lifetime illnesses as well as death." Mike Africa sent me a newspaper article confirming his assertions and said that he is forced to buy bottled water as often as possible.

Their experiences and insights as prisoners are also relevant to the other couple million people in the United States who are bound to the courts and prisons through probation, jail, or prison incarceration. I asked them about their schedule. Waking up at typically at 6 AM, MOVE members are counted, they are released to do eat, exercise, and they work. There are small amounts of time for library or watching news. Several —such as Debbie and Eddie— take leading roles in exercise classes for others in prison. Eddie's job in prison earns him \$14 a month.⁹⁴⁰ In the words of Phil:

Unlike how people are made to believe from TV, most of us in prison spend very full days. The only time I have to respond to letters is during 'count times' and at night, when I should be sleeping I'm almost every night till 12-12:30 answering letters. Believe me I'm not complaining, there is nothing I'd rather be doing then being a part of JOHN AFRICA'S REVOLUTION and keeping HIS information flowing to those who seek it is part of that revolution. This is just to let you know how busy we in MOVE stay even in these prisons and the huge demand from those on the outside for all kind of information from us.⁹⁴¹

As the court noted in *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Phil Smith Africa et al* "The defendants ...contended throughout that they wished to be tried together and treated as a group and not as individuals."

An accomplishment that might be easy for outsiders to forget is the dedication that has kept every single one of the original MOVE 9 loyal to the Teaching of John Africa. This is apparent if we look at other groups who had been targeted or jailed by police during the same time period. The Black Panther Party were destroyed by internal fighting and the FBI's COINTELPRO operation which fueled the feuding, spread

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Letter from Eddie Africa to author 7 May 2014.

⁹⁴¹ Letter from Phil Africa to author, 12 July 2014.

misinformation, infiltrated the organization, and assassinated leading activists such as Fred Hampton in 1969. The BPP had been effectively dismantled by the time MOVE began their public demonstrations. The Weathermen, later the Weather Underground, led a bombing campaign across the United States as protests against the U.S. war against people of South East Asia and also as a means to spark revolution domestically. They have long since disbanded.⁹⁴² All seven members of the Symbionese Liberation Army who had been jailed for the murder of Myrna Opsahl left the organization, effectively dismantling it altogether, and were released from prison.

Another way to look at MOVE people in prison is to look at the impact that their example has set for supporters and family members on the outside. When I read about Michelle Obama's own "Move" organization designed to promote healthy diets and exercise to combat obesity, I could not help but think of how John Africa critiqued junk food and inspired inner city residents toward a rigorous exercise program. The MOVE children I met seemed like regular teens (now that dreadlocks have become fashionable) and I thought about how, in any other circumstance, a group that managed to raise children in a mixed-ethnic, drug-free environment with a strong work ethic would be praised from all corners ...if they had been white. Yet, in common with a disproportional part of black America, MOVE children have had the threat of incarceration hanging over their heads all of their lives. They have known that their family members have been killed with impunity and they have visited the MOVE 9 some of whom are their parents, aunts, or uncles. Spending decades behind bars, those members set an example and a standard of the meaning of dedication.

In 2013, I visited the home of two MOVE supporters, Kevin Price and Maiga Milbourne (see Fig. 24). They had re-designed their backyard into a large permaculture/hügelkultur garden. Indoors they had crafted their own dry compost toilet which they emptied into large bins in the backyard. After about six months the "waste" had turned into useful soil, a resource for life. The idea of transforming toilets—prisons for our waste—into channels that led back into the cycle of life captured my imagination. Visiting the home of Mike Africa, Jr. the next year, I saw a similar arrangement of organic gardening in his family's significantly smaller backyard. In a manner that reminded me of how colonialists had described Native American gardening, much of the fruit and vegetable plots were unweeded. When I asked him about this, he replied that if a particular plant needed to be cleared of weeds in order to thrive then they would pull up the weeds but, barring that, they would not weed just for the sake of weeding because weeds too are life.

⁹⁴² Also, according to a 1978 interview with Gerald Africa in *Hera*, MOVE had been in contact with activists from the Weather Underground in Philadelphia but rejected their tactics of "blowing things up." Moore, K. and J. Lacey. "Million \$ MOVEMENT?" *Hera: A Philadelphia Women's Publication* 4, no. 1 (1978).



Fig. 24

Maiga Milbourne (MOVE supporter), Boots Riley (rapper in *The Coup*), Pam Africa (MOVE member), and Kevin Price (MOVE supporter).

Taqwacore Primary Text

Taqwacore is relatively easy to demarcate in terms of central text because there is only one text —the text that gave both the fictive and real life scenes their name: *The Taqwacores* (2004). There is no dispute about the authorship (Michael Muhammad Knight) and although there are slightly different versions (the British version was censored by the publishing company), there is no dispute about what the text is. It also made it possible to do a little quantitative examination that might help exemplify where the thematic “center” of the book lay and what lay beyond its margins. For example, in the book’s 254 pages, the word “Catholic” appeared four times as often as the word “jihad.” While there ex-Catholics were represented alongside Rastas, Five Percenters, and a wide variety of Muslims, there were no Hindus, Baha’is, Sikhs, Buddhists, Daoists, or ex-members thereof. The various types of Muslim sub-types according to national, ideological, subcultural, or theological distinctions were more than 20 altogether. Mentioned by name (not an exhaustive list) were: Nation of Islam, Sufis, Uwayysi Sufism, Shiah, Sunni, Ahmadiyya, Sudan, Saudi, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia,

Kazakhstan, Bosnia, Turkey, Malaysia, United States, Hashishiyya, Taliban, Wahhabi, Tabligh Jamaat, taqwacore, and liwatiyyah/Gay Muslim Conference.⁹⁴³

Clearly, punk was a starting point for the novel (the terms “straight edge” or “Minor Threat” appeared 21 times in the novel) but the main thrust was a grappling over what it meant to be Muslim and how to negotiate that meaning with others. The word “Quran” or “Quranic” appeared 47 times, “Muhammad” or “Rasullah” appeared 73 times, and variations of “Allah” (Insha’Allah, Allahu Akbar, etc.) appeared approximately 269 times. Members of the book recounted a prayer ritual or engaged in prayer 21 times.

Examples (not exhaustive) of figures/symbols not directly related to Islam or punk which are mentioned more than once: Wesley Willis, Johnny Cash, Mark Twain, the Confederacy, Andrew Jackson, Tori Amos, George W. Bush, Star of David/yahooda (reference to Jews), Desmond Dekker, Costa Rica, Frank Sinatra, the I-90, and 4:20 (marijuana reference).

Interestingly, new technologies barely played a role in the novel. Nobody ever used or mentioned a cellphone. Except for one instance of Internet use at the end of the novel, the entire drama could just have as easily unfolded in the 1980s in terms of technologies used. Although the book has been associated with a pushback against the War on Terror and 9/11, the former received only brief mentions and 9/11 is not mentioned a single time during the entire novel.

The same central themes shall be highlighted here: inclusivity, “freedom” and “unfreedom.” The easy demarcation of the central texts makes these themes relatively easy to demarcate as well: the intended audience was that of punks, Muslims, and/or punk Muslims. Issues of narrow exclusivity in both punk and Islamic contexts were highlighted as issues and negotiated by the participants who, while largely American kids of South Asian background, also included people of European and African descent, male and female, straight, queer, and in between.⁹⁴⁴

Subsequently, Knight matched up a variant of Islamic tradition with a variant of punk tradition into each character:

Qalandariyya (deviant dervish) + Skater punk = Fasiq

Islamic vegetarian activist + Indie rocker = Fatima

Ska-punk and Rastafarian ex-Muslim = Dawud

⁹⁴³ The book also included Moorish Science Temple and the Five Percenters. However I did not include them in the list because the former self-identifies as “Moors” and the latter deny being Muslims (although they did develop from Clarence 13X Smith, “Allah,” who had left the Nation of Islam).

⁹⁴⁴ However, those who lived at the house constituted the core of the taqwacore scene in the novel. There were no members of the household identified as “white” or “black” living in the house —one was identified as Sudanese. All others were Middle-Eastern- or South Asian Americans.

Queercore + gay Muslim = Muzammil

Strict Sunni + straight edge = Umar

Freewheeling Sufi + charismatic drunk punk = Jehangir

Burqa-wearing feminist Muslim + Riot Grrrl = Rabeya

Shiia + skinhead = Amazing Ayyub

Vegan + ex-Catholic/ex-Muslim white girl with dreads = Lynn

Conventional college student + doubting but conventional Muslim = Yusef

Whereas Yusef was the protagonist, a newcomer to the collective (that consisted of Umar, Rabeya, Jehangir, Amazing Ayyub, and sometimes Fasiq), it was Jehangir who was the definitive center as to what constituted the spirit of taqwacore. Jehangir was the Sufi “street punk anarchist” who celebrated Johnny Cash and Malcolm X and made the call to prayer on his guitar (244). He had come from the West Coast where, in “Khalifornia,” there was something called a “taqwacore” scene. Out there were “legends” such as Harun (a half-bearded nomadic zine writer), Bloody (crazy Muslim punk), and Dee Dee Ali (Jehangir’s role model and singer for One Trip Abroad).⁹⁴⁵

Amidst all of these characters, Yusef struggled to find his place both in the house and to simultaneously negotiate a connection to the Islam of his family that he grew up with. He felt that his family, his heritage, and his South Asian identity were all “inextricably connected” to his spirituality. Changing one of them changed all of them.

At one point, when he asked Amazing Ayyub about the Confederate flag t-shirt, Amazing Ayyub began by saying “I love the South,” and ended up giving a lecture to Yusef on how there is no Shia-Sunni distinction: “These are the types of things that divide us.”⁹⁴⁶ Both follow Allah. Period. Amazing Ayyub continued:

...every time you connect to one thing you disconnect with another thing. You can’t help it. You can’t be connected to all things at all times. ...as a Muslim, you connect with Allah. He alone is the Connector. A Muslim submits to Allah. Allah sends you the rain, the sun, the health and sickness...and you must submit. That is all. No Sunni or Shiah.⁹⁴⁷

Largely through Jehangir, Amazing Ayyub, and Lynn, slightly different versions of this welcoming, universalist, and radically anti-sectarian Islam are presented to Yusef who struggles internally between being drawn more toward Umar and more toward the universalists. At times, he felt drawn to leave all of them to return to the more

⁹⁴⁵ “Dee Dee Ali” was a wordplay on punk legend G. G. Allin and Dee Dee Ramone.

⁹⁴⁶ Knight 2004: 108.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

traditional Islam of his family. Yet, the very fact that Umar's version of Islam and Jehangir's version can respectfully co-exist (more or less) was a powerful pull. Here was an atmosphere of acceptance that transcended anything he had experienced in Islam prior to entering that house. Here was a place where everyone "had the freedom to be whatever kind of Muslims they want."⁹⁴⁸

That said, there remained a constant tension in particular between Umar and Jehangir who functioned as "opposing poles, each hoping to pull the collective psyche in his direction with his own method. While Umar pulled with his unending stance, a drunken Jehangir Tabari fell in love with everyone in the world."⁹⁴⁹ While Jehangir had respect for Umar, his essential view of Islam challenged the rule of formalities which for him were merely tools to be used at whim. Whereas Umar feared things breaking down into chaos, Jehangir was more concerned about people giving up their souls to blind faith in rules and fear. In Jehangir's words,

"...we have plenty of Muslims who aren't afraid to die. Mash'Allah – but now the Muslims are afraid to *fuckin' live!* They fear life, yakee, more than they fear shaytans or shirk or fitna or bid'a or kafr or qiyamah or the torments in the grave, they fear Life, they fear *this* –" He raised his bare arm to grabbed and slapped the skin to indicate *this*.⁹⁵⁰

His vision of Islam did not exclude anybody who wanted to be included. Those who agreed with him in their quest for a more inclusive Islam found legal backing in a *fatwa* by Shaykh Mahmu Shaltut, head of Al-Azhar University in Cairo who (in the book as well as in real life in 1959) declared Shiia law to be acceptable and called on all Muslims to "free themselves toward unrightful prejudice toward specific sects" (109). On the other hand, the very "constitution" of Islam seemed to be negotiable in the house. Yusef noticed that Rabeya had crossed out an *ayat* (verse) in her Qur'an. It was 4:34, the verse that is usually translated as meaning that a man has the right to beat a disobedient wife lightly with a stick. Yusef was shocked that she could cross out a verse from sacred scripture. But Rabeya was unapologetic. She had already tried to rationalize the verse, contextualize it, listen to progressive scholars interpret it. But "the gymnastic tap dancing around that verse" was too much for her.

Finally I said, fuck it. If I believe it's wrong for a man to beat his wife, and the Quran disagrees with me, then fuck that verse. I don't need to stretch and squeeze it for a weak alternative reading, I don't need to excuse it with historical context, and I sure as hell

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid, 73

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid 39-40.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid 41.

don't need to just accept it and go sign up for a good ol' fashioned bitch-slapping. So I crossed it out. Now I feel a whole lot better about that Quran.⁹⁵¹

Lynn was not as radical as Rabeya but just as insistent that “Islam was universal”⁹⁵² and, for her, this meant that she could worship as she saw fit. She told Yusef:

I believe in Allah, you know, though I don't always call it ‘Allah’ and I pray the way I want to pray. Sometimes I just look out at the stars and this love-fear thing comes over me, you know?...Sometimes, every once in a while, I get out my old rug and I pray like Muhammad prayed. I never learned the shit in Arabic and my knees are uncovered, but if Allah has a problem with that then what kind of Allah do we believe in?⁹⁵³

It was difficult for Yusef to reconcile Lynn's words with his background. It was as if she felt like she could do with religion what she wanted, thought Yusef. Still, her views fit more in the house than his did it seemed. And he did want to fit in somehow. He wanted it so badly that when the opportunity arose, Yusef volunteered to take over the payments for the heating of the house. This would give him a concrete role in the Muslim punk household. He drove to the National Fuel office to place the bill in his name. After a long drive, he an immense need to relieve his bowels, yet no toilet was in sight. But he found the office and signed he papers. He was uncomfortable but gleeful: “I walked out of there refreshed and bursting power, despite the physical discomfort of all my waste still inside me. Now responsible for something, my name would go on bills. My legacy in the history of that house had been sealed.”⁹⁵⁴ Still, as much as he wanted to fit in, he found himself consistently stunned by some of their views. He conversed with Jehangir about scripture and was stunned to hear what sounded like heresy— including the act of referring to Allah as a woman:

[Jehangir:] “And the Quran, bro, it wasn't even a book in Muhammad's own lifetime. It had to be collected off stones and leaves and animal ribs, revised in Uthman's khalifah... with suras shortened, parts lost or switched around, subject to faulty human memory, opposing versions destroyed, and a thousand variant readings. There's a lot of human-ness in that divine text. After all is said and done it's a tiny little book for tiny little men, and Allah is BIG. You want to be Muslim? I'm so Muslim I can take a shit on Bukhari and wipe my ass with the Muwatta. I can say that Muhammad ate a fat dick and it doesn't even matter because he's dead and Allah's alive.”

[Yusef:] “How can you—”

⁹⁵¹ Ibid 132.

⁹⁵² Ibid 97.

⁹⁵³ Ibid 43-44.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid 183.

“Because la ilaha illa Allah, that’s how. I’m so Muslim, fuck Islam.” He did not speak in a mean or cynical way—to the contrary, fuck Islam danced out his lips with the same romanticism as his deep drunken spiels. “I’m so Muslim, fiqh is worthless. No madrassa of imperfect human beings can claim ownership of my deen. Allah’s not entrusting the alims with shit. Let them give their jerk-off fatwas about how long a man’s beard should be, fuck all of ‘em.”

“So what are you,” I asked, “an agnostic?”

“No, I’m a Muslim. But if anything, agnosticism is the real Islam; because you’re waiting for answers from Allah Herself, not Imam Siraj Dickhead.”⁹⁵⁵

This was not helped by the fact that sometimes Jehangir did not have spiritual concerns behind his blasphemy. It was sometimes *just because*. It was as if upsetting people had a value in itself. In Jehangir’s own words:

A lot of taqwacore is just to throw shit out there and really piss people off...People are so uptight and emotional about religion and take it so seriously, sometimes you need a punk to say “fuck you ...fuck everything you stand for, you’re full of shit and there’s sperm in your hair.” Nobody needs to be on a high horse about themselves.⁹⁵⁶

Umar kept the boundaries when he could. It was not easy but it was not always conflictive. At one point when Yusef joined a group of them on a road trip and they slept that night together on the floor of a mosque. Umar said “gentle but firm” to Jehangir “Brother, it is good to lay with your head facing qiblah.” To which Jehangir replied, “Right,” and he turned around “with no tinge of hostility. It was a good night like that.”⁹⁵⁷ Those were the moments that Yusef cherished. And even Jehangir seemed to have boundaries — or at least respect them. He said: “Islam is fuckin’ surrender. ...That’s it. Being aware that you don’t run the show, staying mindful of it in everything you do.”⁹⁵⁸

Living at the house, Yusef had a taste of what it meant to be “free in this present life” but he was not completely sure if he liked it. Sometimes it seemed as if “Umar was the only *real* Muslim” and even he was covered in tattoos which was haram.⁹⁵⁹ At the same time, there were other concerns looming the background that were not just matters of theological dogma or inclusivity, but matters of justice. Fatima, for example,

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid 103.

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid 129.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid 172.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid 184. The rest of this quote has already been cited in the section on UUA Secondary Texts above by UU minister Meredith Garmon.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid 169.

was an activist who had reels of film footage from demonstrations as described by Rabeya approvingly, “like thousands of hours of footage. Palestine protests, Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan, W’s inauguration, WTO, Iraq...”⁹⁶⁰ Alongside implicit critique of U.S. foreign policy, there was another sense which, in regard to inclusiveness, “The United States can save Islam.”⁹⁶¹

Eventually, Jehangir got the idea of organizing a taqwacore concert at the house and bringing in bands from Khalifornia to perform. The event finally took place and the bands performed. However, one band was controversial in the scene: Bilal’s Boulder. They were the equivalent to punk rock Wahhabis. They were strict in their interpretations of faith and ritual, demanded separation of males and females, and condemned homosexuality. Jehnagir, however, defended his choice to invite them because “this isn’t a sect.”⁹⁶² To be all-inclusive meant welcoming even those who were exclusive. The concerts took place and Jehangir was invited onstage to perform with his idols. Fasiq too was onstage and in defiance of Bilal’s Boulder, Rabeya gave him a blowjob spewing the subsequent juice on the members of Bilal’s Boulder in the audience. Jehangir tops it off with a hardcore song starting a mosh pit. A fight broke out in the pit and Jehangir jumps in to intervene. He never returns. With the death of Jehangir, Yusef continued his thoughts about where to go with the house left behind him and an uncertain future ahead. Yusef never had a clear role in the house beyond that of observer. So when it was all over he found himself being interviewed by zine writers wanting to know all the autobiographical details about Jehangir, if, how, and when he prayed, what he thought of liwaticore and so on. Yusef felt like a Sahaba—an early believer who transmitted hadiths about the Prophet. His concluding thoughts on Islam nonetheless defined his stance as pure taqwacore:

Fuck the local imam, fuck the PhDs at al-Madina al-Munawwara ... give me the Islam of starry-night cornfields with wind rustling through my shirt and reckless *fisabilillah* make-out sprees that won’t lead to anything but hurt. Knee-deep in a creek is where I’ll find my kitab. If Allah wants to say anything to me He’ll do so on the faces of my brothers and sisters. If there’s any Law that I need to follow, I’ll find it out there in the world.⁹⁶³

Then Yusef reminisced about his times at the house. Then he put on a burqa that he had been given by Rabeya, he masturbates, and has a homosexual fantasy. He thought about a girl he met online named Zuhra and the story is done.

The obvious message here was a call for more inclusive conception of Islam and what it can mean to be Muslim. This message was hardly lost on any reader. The idea of opening up the punk scene to be more inclusive of “brown punks” was also a message

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid 76.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid 72.

⁹⁶² Ibid 224.

⁹⁶³ Ibid 252.

that was received even if racism in the punk scene was not addressed directly. Few commentators however have noted that it also challenged the definition of what it can mean to be “punk” in a *musical* sense. That Jehangir was a big fan of country musician Johnny Cash and Amazing Ayyub wore a Confederate flag t-shirt also raised questions about who could be a country music fan and what the Confederacy could mean to someone from a Shiia background.

The range of concern in regard to inclusivity was relatively narrow: questions of punk and Muslim identity but the spectrum for inclusiveness was made as broad as possible with. Prototypical centers remained (South Asian/Middle Eastern Americans involved in some sort of recognized DIY punk subculture) and certain people did not appear (for example, no persons with disabilities appeared) but the outer boundaries were theoretically non-existent. In regard to “freedom,” the dominant meaning here was one of “acceptance.” That is, “freedom” as a negotiated norm of acceptance which demanded that boundaries were constantly discussed and debated by everyone without any central authority making a final decision. The “unfreedom” that this demanded ranged from the patience required to deal with others who somehow crossed the boundaries of one’s own preferences to the willingness to die in order to protect somebody else’s right to life and well-being. In the medium range one found Yusef’s great joy over being able to claim responsibility for the bills. This “unfreedom” of both being responsible and obligated to pay money was a cost that Yusef happily paid in order to be accepted, to be a part of that “freedom” where he saw the others. In the background, the also could be seen a type of “freedom” that involved resistance to U.S. imperialism and capitalism. Although these were not in the forefront of the text, they were, in the spirit of punk rock, an obligatory presence in the novel. Likewise, in the background, there was also a sense of Islam as “surrender.” This “unfreedom” of one’s self and personal ego enabled a person to recognize that one does not have control — not even over the cells in one’s body. Relinquishing the need for control also enabled one to better connect with others and God’s voice in nature.

Secondary Taqwacore Texts and Interviews

It wasn’t that The Taqwacores book created a scene - we already existed, spread across the country. The Taqwacores simply helped us to find each other. It helped us to realize we were no longer alone. My name is Taz. I’m a Taqwacore skater punk chick and I write about the scene. But really, it’s so much more. Alhamdulillah. Welcome to The Taqwacores.⁹⁶⁴

⁹⁶⁴ Tanzila “Taz” Ahmed, “I am Taqwa to the Core.” 14 January 2010. <http://punkislam.tumblr.com/post/335281523/i-am-taqwa-to-the-core> Accessed 18 April 2014.

If the study of taqwacore's central text is relatively easy, the choice of material is, relatively speaking, a logistical nightmare. The collection of online texts through blogs and social networking profiles would be, in itself, sufficient material for an entire thesis.⁹⁶⁵ Simply picking out what is or is not "taqwacore" would be an arduous task. As this thesis work aims to draw selections from texts that somehow relates to *The Taqwacores* or people who self-identified with the scene at some point, no restrictions were applied and, in order to make it manageable, no systematic processing of the material was applied. Simply put, texts that somehow related to the themes at hand were drawn out —particularly if they felt representative even if the purpose here is not to outline representations. One guideline for selecting texts however was to keep an eye out for the margins and those who had been under-represented in previous media and academic exposure such as women, African Americans, and those who simply did not fit the idea of "brown Muslim punk" that had become the prototypical image.

Several things become clear when one reads the book and looks at what became labeled a "taqwacore scene." First, the Internet was almost non-existent in the book. Intimate person-to-person relationships were what constituted the bulk of the taqwacore story. In real life, it was the reverse. Most relationships between people who identified with the scene were developed online. Similarly, there was almost no music released in physical formats in the real life scene. While there have been numerous vinyl releases of punk bands in predominantly Muslim countries, I do not know of a single band related to taqwacore who has pressed a vinyl record.

Second, the characters in the book, as reflections of Knight's own concerns, were deeply interested in discussing the Quran and what it meant to be a Muslim. In real life, the interest was not nearly as strong. This was however exaggerated by media representations which seemed to be drawn both toward the idea of "Muslim punk" and the idea of "fiction becoming reality." For both of those ideas to be relevant, the real life scene had to be depicted as "religious" whether they identified as such or not. One common response to the book was a sense of relief:

...now, thanks in part to the book *The Taqwacores* by Michael Muhammed Knight, I'm able to come to terms with who I am- and I fucking love who I am. I love my culture, it's beautiful and amazing and everyone should see that about it. And if some assholes can't see that and want to be islamophobes, I exist to prove everything they believe about Islam wrong.⁹⁶⁶

So, in this sense, the book provided many people with a sense of closure to existing prejudice rather than a beginning to involvement in something called a "taqwacore" scene. This theme was shared by journalists who could use a real life taqwacore as proof that Islam was not monolithic but just as broad as anybody's conception of what it

⁹⁶⁵ Murthy (2010) and Hsu (2013) have already delved into this terrain with focus largely on The Kominas.

⁹⁶⁶ Donna Ramone, "Punk Muslimah," *Taqwacore Journal* 30 May 2011 <https://taqwacorejournal.wordpress.com/2011/05/30/punk-muslimah/> Accessed 15 September 2015.

meant to be “American.” In turn, a common response to the media’s image of the scene and even the scene itself was that few people felt at home. Knight didn’t party much. While he enjoyed the friends he had met in the scene, he felt like he was on the margins. Arjun Ray of the Kominas was in the middle of the fray but hardly felt represented by the media who avoided people like him and Pady Cakes who only appeared to be “Muslim punks” but were not in fact Muslim nor did they come from Muslim backgrounds. The only female band associated with the scene, Secret Trial Five, felt so unsatisfied with the scene and the media portrayal that they disavowed it altogether. Marwan Kamel had already started Al-Thawra as a noisy “raicore” band prior to taqwacore. Anarchism and anti-corporate/anti-war activism was more important to him than discussing the Quran. Nonetheless, the prototypical images that journalists have had about “Islam” affected how they approached people associated with taqwacore. In a posting from 2005, Basim Usmani posted a conversation he had with Mike Knight about an encounter with a journalist from MTV:

Mike, I’m having second thoughts about letting Liz Nord do the documentary. [...] In all seriousness, she asked me ‘What’s it like to be Muslim and know that there are terrorists out there that claim to be Muslim as well’”

“Dude... that’s fucked!”

“Yeah, man. So I shot back ‘What’s it like to be white and have to sleep at night with the blood stains of Haliburton and Enron on your hands.’”

“HAH HAHA! Hell yeah.”

Seriously, the nerve... “What’s it like to be Muslim and know there are muslim terrorists out there?”!? Well, what’s it like to be White and read about slavery?⁹⁶⁷

Third, the license that seemed to be granted in the book to adopt one’s own identity seemed to combine with the anonymity of the Internet to produce self-created identities, serious and spoofs, and spoofs that became serious, that, in some cases made the case of Rachel Dolezal, the genetically white woman who worked for the NAACP in Spokane, Washington and claimed to be black, seem mild in comparison. Not only were personal identities obscured but so too were boundaries about what constituted a band. Vote Hezbollah, for example, was a young man who recorded two songs by himself and released through the Internet. His first song was also the first explicitly taqwacore song because he put music to the lyrics of “Muhammad was a punk rocker” that Knight had printed in the book. Do two songs by one person make a band? Texas-based Kourosh Poursalehi, who made the music was at least (a) a real person (I actually met him) and (b) he grew up in a Sufi-oriented Iranian American household. His fascination with bands like Fearless Iranians from Hell (also from Texas and with an

⁹⁶⁷ Attolino 2009: 35.

Iranian American on lead vocals) certainly qualified him as somebody who could have appeared in the novel. Yet, what about Sagg Taqwacore Syndicate, run by Randall Harris, a white man who was supposedly an ex-Mormon and jumped in the scene, trolling people left and right? Or what about Hussein Malik who went to Catholic school when he grew up in the U.S. wore a cowboy hat, played experimental country-blues, and started a profile on MySpace entitled Muslim Punk Foundation... as a joke? Or Al-Qaynah, a music project of “Middle-Eastern metal” that appeared on the first taqwacore CD compilation—a middle-aged Danish man who is not Muslim but has collaborated over the Internet with various people to produce music that showed influences of Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, and Jello Biafra. Are these bands? Are they taqwacore? So, at some level, rather than simply opening up more space for people to be who they were, the idea of “taqwacore” made a new category that nobody could definitively define, few seemed willing to fight for, and the media seemed to have hijacked.

What follows here are a few selections from various persons through various medium that address the questions of inclusivity, “freedom,” and “unfreedom.” Material has been selected from throughout the last ten-year period even if between 2012 and 2015, there were few people left claiming to identify with taqwacore. They were the band Fedayeen who switched from punk to hip hop and changed the name to Atari Creed and the blog *Taqwacore Journal* run by a group of fashion designers from Seattle (recently relocated to New York).

On September 20, 2015 the *Taqwacore Journal* posted online: “God did not create us to live for society, He created us to live for humanity.”⁹⁶⁸ This call for inclusivity was well within the parameters of the type of taqwacore as expressed in the novel. However, in real life when the people behind the blog had attended the Sundance festival in 2011, they were hardly welcomed with open arms. The festival had drawn in people associated with taqwacore from across the country for the premier of *The Taqwacores* film. A large chunk of what had been called the scene was there: Mike Knight, the Kominas, Al-Thawra, MC Riz, Taz, Daniela, all of the actors in the movie, the director, and many others. Yet when the people from the fashion company, Neodandi, brought in specially made clothes labeled “The Taqwacores” as gifts, they were met with skepticism. None of these people looked, talked, or dressed “punk.” Instead, it seemed to some in the scene as if it were a further commercialization of what they had. The fashion designers in turn felt shunned, dissed, and rejected. “It was just like the book!” said NiiLartey De Osu.⁹⁶⁹ That is, people (namely them) were being arbitrarily judged and rejected. Although they strongly identified with the message of the book, they did not fit the outer attributes of what a “taqwacore” was supposed to look like or act like. In a sense, the scene had done to them what many in the scene had felt that the media had done to them: taken a caricature of what it meant to be “Muslim

⁹⁶⁸ *Taqwacore Journal*, @taqwacore_jrnl https://twitter.com/taqwacore_jrnl Accessed 22 September 2015.

⁹⁶⁹ Interview with author, New York, 18 August 2015.

punk” and applied it as a litmus test to determine who was worth including in the story or not.

Another person who had been left out of the studies and media articles about taqwacore was Yassin of the band Fedayeen. Yet, even though he had been largely left out of the scene, his complaint was not that the scene was too restrictive but too inclusive. He felt that taqwacore had been watered down to become all-inclusive and therefore mean nothing. He wrote:

To be all inclusive is the death not just of a sub-culture, but any culture. It [is] our separateness that defines us as apart from any other culture. Universal oneness would be great. I'm all for it, but it doesn't work out for scenes and subcultures.⁹⁷⁰

Interestingly, in two separate parallel lives, both he and Mike Knight came to adopt the term “Salafi” to describe themselves.⁹⁷¹

Knight's own departure from the scene, while multi-faceted, may in part have been due to the sheer attention devoted by the media to his first book while overlooking the nine that followed. He has been “tagged” as the “taqwacore” author even though his other books have continued to challenge “Islam,” “America,” and language itself in many different ways. Refusing to match the prototypical image created of a “Muslim punk novelist,” most of his subsequent work has been neither in novel form nor particularly “punk.” One of his most recent books detailed his personal odyssey through the process of engaging in a group psychedelic trip using the South American plant ayahuasca. In his recounting of that journey entitled *Tripping with Allah*, he philosophized about a number of arbitrary constraints and processes and the roles that words can play:

Are any words natural? Along with the various invented categories that produce knowledge and thus create our world as we know it —“race,” “religion,” “sexual orientation,” and so on—we could also include “drug.” As with those terms, we no treat “drug” like a self-evident reality, a word that no longer needs to be defined; even if we can't define “drug,” we're sure that we would know a drug if we saw it, just as we know a “religion” or a “race.” But all those terms have histories; there were times in which people did not use these terms, or they used them in different ways. The category of “drug” as we use it now, with its implied meanings of legal and moral regulation, can only be what, a century old? And just what is covered under this term can change, with items falling in or out based on politics and economics, similar to the way that Irish, Italian, and Jewish people have been at times excluded from or included in the “white race.” The ground beneath our terms is always moving.⁹⁷²

⁹⁷⁰ E-mail interview with author, 29 November 2013.

⁹⁷¹ See Knight 2015; For Yassin, e-mail interview with author 19 November 2014.

⁹⁷² Knight 2013: 36.

That paragraph, together with his quote above that, manifest the crux of the (un)freedom being discussed here: if you are *not* an individual and you *are* one with Creation/Creator, then how do you negotiate a stable perspective when language itself flows like the tide? Knight continued a critical approach to language in his most recent book, asking “Why do *Star Wars* characters speak English?” This simple question in itself raises the specter of colorblind racism. As Knight noted, this story that took place “long, long ago” in a “galaxy far, far away” has to be made intelligible for its audience. But there is more to it than that. Colorblind racism (my term here, not Knight’s) enters the picture when we take for granted that we need no translation for Obi-Wan Kenobi but we do for Jabba the Hut:

Species such as Wookiees, Ewoks, Jawas, and Hutts are othered and exoticized in part through their unique indigenous languages, but Luke Skywalker, his friends and family, and most of their key allies and opponents speak my language. Because of the long-ago/far-away thing, they can’t call it “English”; they speak English where there is no English. ...the movies never actually name Luke’s language [and] they never explain why the protagonist in this galaxy far, far away looks like a white boy from our world...⁹⁷³

Returning to Knight’s earlier remark that the “ground beneath our terms is always moving,” we can see that *Star Wars* is a drama that unfolds on the background of a static status quo precisely because there is no language analysis or development in *Star Wars*. They cannot be self-critical about a language that they cannot even name. The effect, however, is hardly dissimilar from the effect of colorblind racism in which terms and “truths” are often imbued with an uncritically accepted essence.

As part of his investigation into the life of Nation of Islam founder W. D. Fard, Knight cited a quote from Fard purportedly speaking to Einstein on a radio show. I noticed that virtually the exact same words appeared on page 159 of Jiddu Krishnamurti’s *Think on These Things* (1970). To capture its new location, the entire context is cited here with the section matching Krishnamurti’s words in italics:

One of the NOI offshoots claimed to possess a book called Wallace Fard Muhammad vs. Albert Einstein, which contained a transcript of their debate at a Detroit radio station. According to the group, there was no information in the book regarding its author, copyright or means of contacting the publisher (Malik Publishing Inc.). As the story goes, their copy of the book came from a sister who had gotten it from a brother who told that it was taken from a phonograph recording that was owned by a ninety-year-old man who had since died. The meeting of Fard and Einstein was said to take place in early 1933 at WCNB Detroit 1440 AM, on a program called “Religion in Brief” with host Keith Brandon. ...

⁹⁷³ Knight 2015: 303.

This is the beauty of Truth: it must be discovered from moment to moment, not remembered. A remembered truth is a dead thing. Truth must be discovered from moment [to moment], because it is living.

—W.D. Fard to Albert Einstein, 1933

There was no reason to believe that he ever really said it, and if he did, I don't know that he said it to Albert Einstein on a Detroit radio show. But a man who had over fifty aliases and nearly as many nationalities, whose birthday fell somewhere in a thirty-year span and who had in the course of one lifetime been a pistol-branding café cook, convicted drug dealer, door-to-door silk salesman, prophet of Allah, Allah in person, Supreme Ruler of the Universe, Mahdi of the Muslims, Messiah of the Christians, Chief of the Voo-Doos and Head of the Japanese Army could be said to have found his truths by the moment.

Fard used to sell his followers new names to replace their old “slave names.” In his absence, however, no original names could be issued, so applicants that had been approved prior to Fard's disappearance were granted the surname of “X.” The policy later extended to new members of the Nation. X represented the Unknown, as in the black man's true name that his ancestors had lost in slavery—but on an esoteric level it expressed the loss of Master Fard, the Savior.⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷⁴ Knight, *Blue Eyed Devil*, 2006: 142-143, 171-172. The quote by Fard (not cited by Knight) continued in the original text that Knight sourced and can be found at: <http://memberfiles.freewebs.com/21/30/69333021/documents/32580326-Wallace-Fard-Muhammad-vs-Albert-Einstein.pdf> Accessed 12 April 2014. Bold sections show significant departures from Krishnamurti's text:

“(MR. MUHAMMAD): ...It is never the same; yet each time you discover it, it is the same. What is important is not to make a theory of Truth, not to say Truth is permanent in us and all the rest is an invention of the old who are frightened of both life and death. **It is the Skunk Race, who are decaying, and their philosophies have no validity.** The fact is that Truth is Life, and has no permanency. **It cannot be taken for granted that you know life.** Your amusement and your thinking process; that dull, repetitive process, is not life, **nor Truth, neither religion.**

(MR. BRANDON): Mr. Muhammad, I'm sure me, as well as our listeners have a lot of questions concerning that last statement you made. So let me begin with this: You said Truth is not permanent, nor is it continuous; then how can it be infinite, if it does not possess those two qualities?

(MR. MUHAMMAD): Life is something to be discovered. You cannot discover it if you have not lost it; if you put aside the things that you have found. Do an experiment with what I am saying. Put aside your philosophies, your religion, your customs, you[r] racial taboos, and all the rest of it; for they are not life. If you are caught in those things you will never discover life; and the function of education (knowledge) surely is to help you discover life all the time. ...

It is noteworthy that the original Fard text both agrees with and differs from the Krishnamurti text in relation to knowledge and certainty. According to Krishnamurti: “the man who thinks, ‘I don't know'...such a man is living...” This was deleted from the Fard version. The Krishnamurti text

Knight's own quest to uncover the history of Fard and find his "true" name was a way of grappling with the Unknown and only when he finally reached dead ends with no conclusive evidence was he forced to accept the unknown for what it was. His reference to Fard's "truths by the moment" paralleled his own quest that has seen him go from Sunni to Shia, from Malcolm X to Peter Lamborn Wilson, from taqwacore to Five Percenter, from Sufi to ayahuasca; from finding his religion in the faces of his friends to finding it in cut-up pieces of the Quran. If anybody ever imagined that taqwacore could either in "fiction" or "real life" become a sect with Knight (or anyone else as its guru), the fluidity of transitions that Knight and others associated with the scene never even gave it much chance to take root. In fact, Knight's refusal to take a leadership role and defend taqwacore as an ideal was critiqued by NiiLartey De Osu who argued that he ought to heed his calling, care for the child that he birthed, and live up to the spirit inherent in each of his three names "Michael" (the angel), "Muhammad" (the Prophet), "Knight" (the warrior).⁹⁷⁵

Knight's ambitions were more modest. He had repeatedly stated that his aim was simply to create a space where somebody like him could exist. After identifying with the Five Percenters, he had a public falling out with them over the question of prejudice against homosexuals. Again, he resisted the arbitrary exclusion of minorities. Yet in this case, he was a prominent white heterosexual male writing for a popular Internet news source, *VICE*, and the group he was rejecting, the Five Percenters, consisted largely of African Americans with little access to the mainstream media (even if the particular members of Brand Nubian whom he debated had arguably more of a public voice than Knight). Racial issues and the dynamics of exclusion have been complicated with taqwacore ever since the real life "scene" that materialized was covered by the media (mostly from 2006-2011). Indeed, Knight himself has critiqued the phenomena of the "white converts" (as he exemplified with Henry Steel Olcott and Alexander Russell Webb):

emphasized the transitory nature of truth and the necessity of meeting that truth with admitted ignorance and agnosticism. While the transcribers seemed to welcome Krishnamurti's first proposition (transitory nature of truth), the second one (admitting ignorance) would have been out of character coming from Fard. It is this second step that Knight could not have read because that part was not included in Fard's version. Yet Knight himself took that step in embracing his own confusion. Later quotes in the debate between Fard and Einstein seem to have been lifted from Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health* (1875), p. 99 ("Those individuals who adopt theosophy, spiritualism, or hypnotism, may possess natures above some others who eschew their false beliefs, therefore, my contest is not with the individual, but with the false system"); Einstein originally quoted in the *New York Times* 25 April 1929, p. 60, according to Paul Arthur Schilpp's *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* (1970) p. 659-660 ("I believe in Spinoza's God"); and Avtar Singh Dhaliwal's "Consciousness and Gurbani," in *Understanding Sikhism* 5, no 1 (2003) p. 44 ("there is no division between the person, who is aware, and the object of, which he is aware").

⁹⁷⁵ Interview with author 18 August 2015.

When people assume that “religion” and “culture” exist as two separate categories, culture is then seen as an obstacle to knowing religion. In this view, what born-and-raised members of a religious tradition possess cannot be the religion in its pure, text-based essence, but only a mixture of that essence with local customs and innovated traditions. The convert (especially the white convert, who claims universality, supreme objectivity, and isolation from history, unlike the black convert, whose conversion is read as a response to history), imagined as coming from a place outside culture, becomes privileged as the owner of truth and authenticity. People forget that these white guys aren’t simply extracting “true” meaning from the text, but bringing their own cultural baggage and injecting it into the words. When a white guy wears the hats of brown guys and talks about “reviving the Islamic spirit,” it might be time to run fast.⁹⁷⁶

Yet that did not hinder the only female taqwacore band Secret Trial Five from rejecting him in 2010, singing in “We’re Not Taqwacore”:

what the fuck
is a muslim punk?
rather hang with taliban
than dick around with drunks
muhammad wasn’t white and neither is this fight
and we weren’t birthed
by michael knight

Secret Trial Five posted their song about a month after the openly lesbian singer Sena Hussain engaged in an online dispute with other members of the scene (in particular the white, heterosexual, non-Muslim male behind Sagg Taqwacore Syndicate). The dispute had arisen during a lengthy debate among various members of the scene. It had been initiated through the online profile of former Kominas guitarist Arjun Ray where he challenged the very description of taqwacore as “Muslim punk” (a question Hussain raised in her song as well). His family background, like the rest of the Kominas, was Desi but he and his brother Karna (the drummer) did not have a Muslim background. Calling them “Hindus” (as some journalists did) could be comparable to calling Richard Dawkins a “Christian.” A number of other people who identified with the scene were not Muslims either nor had a Muslim background and some, even if

⁹⁷⁶ Michael Muhammad Knight, “The Problem with White Converts,” *VICE*, 13 March 2013.
http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/the-problem-with-white-converts-to-islam Accessed 30 March 2013.

Muslim, did not particularly identify with punk. The spectrum of characters in the real-life scene departed in significant ways from the spectrum of characters in the novel but the idea of “fiction becoming reality” was as Kominas bass player, Imran Malik, put it “a sexy narrative.”⁹⁷⁷ The blending of Islam with punk was like an exotic spice to an old dish and this was the image that journalists tended to emphasize heavily. One of the ironies however was that Arjun Ray’s critique was, in part, directed not only at mainstream media but the film “Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam” which was produced by Omar Majeed who viewed himself not as an outsider but as part of the scene.

Another thing that disturbs me in this thread, if I’m totally honest, is the implication that the films exist outside of Taqwacore. Eyad and I are both brown disenfranchised Muslims ourselves, you know and the films are not merely comments on Taqwacore – they’re Taqwacore as well. They’re just as much Taqwacore as a Kominas song, or Omar Waqar’s poetry, Michael’s writing or Kim [Badawi]’s pictures. Why does it feel sometimes, that our voices are labeled ‘outside’ as opposed to ‘inside’ what constitutes Taqwacore?⁹⁷⁸

Indeed, Majeed participated in the online debate directly with Ray, but in the film Ray’s voice had been excluded (as was the experience of other scenesters who were not Muslim such as Pady Cakes). Being brown, journalists would show initial enthusiasm until they realized that the “punk” was not “Muslim” and therefore did not fulfill the prototypical image of what “really” constituted taqwacore.⁹⁷⁹ It did not seem to matter

⁹⁷⁷ Imran Malik’s full quote on the topic: “There never really was a scene. A few bands came together for that documentary, but the film crew was paying for it, so it was fabricated and forced by someone trying to sell a narrative, a sexy narrative. Since then, a lot of those bands have either ceased to exist, or said they’re not Taqwacore after all” (Bhattacharya 2011).

⁹⁷⁸ Omar Majeed posting on Arjun Ray’s Facebook homepage, 28 October 2010 https://www.facebook.com/arjun.ray3/posts/165140273504418?ref=notif¬if_t=feed_comment Accessed 18 June 2013.

⁹⁷⁹ Interestingly, it could be added that MOVE had an indirect connection to taqwacore as well. The first “Muslim punk” scene had nothing to do with taqwacore. It was rooted in a vegan straight edge scene called hardline (with bands such as Vegan Reich, Raid, and Racetractor). With a focus on Abrahamic religions, Daoism, Rastafarianism, anarchism, and animal rights, they also drew inspiration from MOVE (see Fiscella 2012). In the words of Sean Muttaqi: “There was a certain core group in the beginning [of hardline] and we all brought different influences to the table. There were people from an anarchist background, from straight edge backgrounds, from Rasta backgrounds. I also had a fairly strong background of Liberation Theology, Black Power and Indigenous Rights struggles influence me. I was really impacted by groups like MOVE, as well” (Peterson 2009: 484). Eventually a number of hardline activists, most prominently Sean Muttaqi (author of the hardline manifesto), converted to Islam and formed loose groups such as Ahl-i Allah (Army of God) and Taliyah al-Mahdi (Vanguard of the Messiah). Knight mentioned his encounter with Naj One, a Taliyah activist vegan straight edge rapper in one of his books and eventually came into contact with Muttaqi but none of these “Muslim punk”

much to journalists that even the Kominas' relationship to Pakistan was more important than "Islam"⁹⁸⁰ which would make them more like Pakistani-punk in the way that Dropkick Murphys was Irish punk. The ethnic rather than Islamic aspect has tended to be more evident when listening to the Kominas or attending a concert yet, at the same time, they shouted at a concert, "Muslims come to the front!"⁹⁸¹ Does that make them a "Muslim punk" band? The question is not an interesting one to pose precisely because of reasons Knight outlined in *The Taqwacores*—neither term "Islam" or "punk" were clearly defined so the combination of them had no clear definition either and few people in the scene stood up consistently to defend their own vision of what it *ought* to mean.⁹⁸²

More important for them seemed to be to create space for themselves to be themselves in a public forum: "the idea of three to five brown kids making music...you can use your own vocabulary, so that's what we're doing, talking about things that we talk about between ourselves. That was the idea and it continues to be the idea of the things that we do."⁹⁸³ As Marwan Kamel of Al-Thawra wrote:

In reality, we were all very different, but we were glad to be creating a space where we could create dialogue and be complicated—or at least I was. And because of very sexy headlines with "Muslim-American," "rebellious" and "punks" as the favored buzzwords, the media ran away with it and created the illusion of a cohesive genre. But these are some of the same reasons why my relationship with the whole thing was kind of complicated and why we've both embraced and distanced ourselves from the genre at different times. First of all, I was reluctant because I started my band before I even knew that Taqwacore existed. I was excited to meet other people who were feeling like the "other," as Edward Said says in *Orientalism*, and I was excited by the prospect of creating a place where we could explore the identity politics of "outsider-ness" (I know I just

predecessors to taqwacore were mentioned by journalists or academic work on taqwacore (much less the MOVE connection).

⁹⁸⁰ Imran Malik: "We don't identify with Islam as much as we identify with our Pakistani heritage" (Imtiaz 2010).

⁹⁸¹ Concert in Philadelphia 16 August 2014. Some of the people who responded to the call in the audience were related to or associated with the Kominas yet, as it turned out, the DJ at the club that night happened to have immigrant Muslim background too and she expressed deep appreciation for their shout-out to Muslims.

⁹⁸² Yet, when I showed the Kominas a copy of an Indonesian zine *SubChaos* (put out by punks theologically/ideologically aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood) that mocked them and labeled taqwacore "fake punk Islam," Basim Usmani was delighted. The attack made taqwacore real. So they were happy to pose for a picture of them tossing the zine in a dumpster. Yet, in reality, Basim knows the people putting out the zine and has friendly contact with them over the Internet. So the "beef" was not as antagonistic as it may seem.

⁹⁸³ Imtiaz 2010.

made that word up). But later I felt like the media coverage was very tokenizing and sensational, which effectively ended up exploiting caricatures of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and, generally, Muslim imagery to subtly imply the West was winning some kind of cultural war. No one talked about the complexities, and instead stuck with the tired, old idea of the “Clash of Civilizations” and the dichotomy of East vs. West. I also felt like I became part of a marketing gimmick. But, as a band, we wanted to explore so much more, so we set off on our own.⁹⁸⁴

Interestingly, many of those who expressed the strongest sense of dialogue with Islam (aside from Knight, Shahjehan Khan, and Omar Waqar) were rarely or never interviewed by the media: Fedayeen (consisting of two white converts to Islam who composed the sarcastic track “I Love Osama bin Laden”), Tanzila “Taz” Ahmed (Los Angeles-based writer and activist), Richael Manisha Karter (now Mani De Osu) and NiiLartey De Osu (Seattle-based fashion designers behind the *TaqwacoreJournal* blog), Yousef (Bay Area Muslim punk who led taqwacores in prayer behind a club and worked with Doctors Without Borders), Daniela (who, as a hardcore punk had converted to Baha’i prior to moving to the U.S.), Sadiya Abjani (Austin/Washington DC-based Ismaili), and Sabina England (St. Louis-based deaf playwright, feminist, and “agnostic Muslim” blogger who perhaps received the most media attention). None of them had live bands and most of them wrote rather than sang and some of them were white. Daniela wrote during the 2010 debate:

what I liked about taqwacore most of all was the sense of community, freedom, and the fact that all of us were doing SOMETHING creative, some of us got noticed more and some less, but we were doing it anyway, and i felt for a while there was some sort of creative interchange going on.⁹⁸⁵

Again, they did not fit the prototypical image that journalists were looking to confirm (that is, a variety of bands who all burn passionately for Islam and punk with a terrific frenzy after being inspired by the novel). Perhaps it is not so strange: the idea of a fictive novel transforming into reality would reasonably have strong appeal to a corps of workers whose job is to write. It is rather self-flattering to both journalists and researchers to imagine that stories can have such impact on people’s lives. In the end, most people who identified with taqwacore drifted away from the label by 2011 even while many continued to appreciate or retain the friendships they developed through the scene. Sadiya Abjani is one of the many people who posted on the online *Taqwacore*

⁹⁸⁴ Nahrain Al-Mousawi, “Punk Devotion: A Conversation with Al-Thawra’s Marwan Kamel,” 8 March 2012. <http://www.aslanmedia.com/music/mideast-music/35-music-artist-profile/809-punk-devotion-a-conversation-with-al-thawra-s-marwan-kamel> Accessed 25 September 2015.

⁹⁸⁵ Arjun Ray’s Facebook homepage, 28 October 2010 https://www.facebook.com/arjun.ray3/posts/165140273504418?ref=notif¬if_t=feed_comment Accessed 18 June 2013.

Webzine (later re-posted on *Taqwacore Journal*). Her contribution amounted to a testimony of how “taqwacore” changed her life.

I am a hated breed. By day one way, by night another. When the sun rises, I put on clothes after morning ablutions and prayer, and make my way to a college campus littered with my kind. I feel entirely alone, but show nothing but a loquacious vibrancy. I employ the day in learning about others like me, but not. I spend the day being out staged by those who are smarter than me, but not. At night, alone in my bed, covered by a veil of secrecy, I listen to music and fly. I have believed, for an excruciatingly inordinate amount of time, that I am alone. Not only am I hated by other Muslims, but I am not well accepted by those like me either. I do not believe that there is a choice, that there are many ways to live my faith. And then one night, I hear The Kominas.

I live two lives, and serve two masters. My ibadaat [practice] is spread between Allah, and Steve Jobs. My Zakaat [charity] consists of buying Ethos Water at Starbucks, and sending money to the Aga Khan Foundation. Yes I am an Ismaili, and yes I know I am not well accepted, or liked, by the majority of Islam. I'm ok with that. I understand why others hate me, and why my people have some of the bloodiest pasts. We are the Hashashin, the Shi'at al-Ali, labeled the Fatimid Cowards, and the human worshipping kafirun [unbelievers]. Al-Ghazali despised us, and Farhad Daftry made us famous again.

...As an Ismaili, I've realized that many of my ilk are incredibly apologetic. We walk up [to] members of the Umma and beg for acceptance. It is a useless waste of time. I now walk into Jamatkhana with a revolving door of hair colors, plans for a tattoo, and more knowledge of Islam than anyone knows. I do so not in rebellion, but in complete and utter submission to my diin [faith]. I can no longer imagine a faith separate from my modern life, there are no problems joining the two. I am an Ismaili, a Hashahiin, a member of the Shi'at al-Ali, a Fatimid Coward and an alleged kafir, I am a Muslim. I am Taqwacore.⁹⁸⁶

In 2012, I interviewed her a couple times to see how she translated this into her daily life and if she felt that the taqwacore scene offered an alternative vantage point to view the United States. She responded:

A faith built for communal life has been uprooted and placed in an alternate reality of sorts, and many of us are unsure what “Western norms” mean for an “Eastern faith.” In a world where every girl on the beach is in a bikini, is “Islamic modesty” wearing a one piece? or a big black cloak instead? Balancing Islamic religious ideals with modernity in the midst of an Anti-Islamic and corrupt America leads to some serious questions, and I don't think anyone approaches them better than the Kominas in their first album.

⁹⁸⁶ Sadiya Abjani. January 20, 2011 “Letter from a Taqwacore.” Posted by neodandi.

<http://taqwacorejournal.wordpress.com/2011/01/20/letter-from-a-taqwacore/> Accessed 12 April 2014.

Abjani was, as far as I know, the only Ismaili involved with the scene. When I asked Abjani about her identification with taqwacore, she told me: “Taqwacore has become a part of the way I live my life, so much so that I don’t really identify with the movement much anymore - but the ideals are still in my heart, in my intellect, and in my life philosophy.”⁹⁸⁷ This comment stuck with me a long time so it is worth repeating: *Taqwacore has become a part of the way I live my life, so much so that I don’t really identify with the movement much anymore.*

Although much energy in taqwacore circles was spent on debating what taqwacore was, what it meant, or the impact that the media had on the scene, there was considerably more energy devoted to other issues. In 2010, in response to the uprisings in Egypt, Mani De Osu wrote on the *Taqwacore Journal*:

The motion has been made clear, all across the globe, that the revolution has not died, it has not disappeared and it will not go away until freedom is obtained. Back to Tahrir Square, we stand strong with all those that are standing for their right to live a life free of those that wish to enslave in an archaic structure where the old ways only wish to stifle the new. But the new will always push and push like a woman in labor a child will be born screaming for air and demanding its individuality be recognized through the documentation that validates the existence. Just like the Declaration of Independence and followed by the Constitution,

We the People of the Planet Earth, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure international Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the global Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United Individuals of Planet Earth.

We are here to stay, and our praise is what you will hear. Alhumdulillah, Alhumdulillah, Alhumdulillah!

Peace and Blessings to all of you struggling for your lives and freedom, and may Allah be pleased with you all!⁹⁸⁸

Marwan Kamel of Al-Thawra also posted about the uprising in the Middle East, writing, “‘They hate our freedom.’ Those were the exact words used by George W. Bush to describe the motivations behind the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001.” Kamel bemoaned the constructed apparition of a bipolar world that consisted of a stark division between “us” and “them,” between “democracy” and “totalitarianism,” “peace-lovers” and “terrorists” with no common ground.

⁹⁸⁷ E-mail interview with author 6 June 2014.

⁹⁸⁸ Mani De Osu, “We Will Not Rest,” *Taqwacore Journal*, 22 November 2011 <https://taqwacorejournal.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/we-will-not-rest/> Accessed 15 September 2015.

It is the same dichotomy that Edward Said so famously derides in his seminal work, “Orientalism.” The truth is, that there is only one “we,” and all people—Arabs included—are part of it, and we all very much have the same motivations. If the wave of uprisings spreading across the Middle East are any indication, Arab democracy is doing better than American democracy. And honestly, they’re proof—once again—that democracy is more complicated than stuffing a sheet of paper into a box every-other year. But the reality is, goings-on in the Middle East are inevitably interconnect with West because of the policies created in the aftermath of that moment, but also the decades of colonialism that preceded it. ...As the US-UK Iraq invasion of 2003 proves, Western intervention is far from being a thing of the past, and didn’t end in the era of independence. The constant meddling in the politics of the region has left Arabs feeling dis-empowered, disenfranchised, and, generally, not capable of true self-determination. Even in these very uprisings, the steel, tear gas canisters shot at the protesters in Cairo read, “Made in the USA” on their sides. ...One thing is for sure, no one in the Arab world will forget these days of rage. As I watched Al-Jazeera, I saw a cordon of heavily-armed police enveloped and overwhelmed by a sea of protesters. People defended their voice in the street, mostly peacefully, but also with rocks and bottles when they were threatened. The protesters recognized that those who control them are in the minority. Police officers abandoned their posts and joined the crowd. I’ve never seen anything like it. It was truly an awe-inspiring sight that reminded me that true people-power does exist. ...All it takes is courage.⁹⁸⁹

Daniela, based in Oakland, California, was one of those present at Sundance and also one of the ones who existed on the margins of the scene. Writing about the scene during the 2010 debate, she posted, “with regards to identity politics of the group, I am not quite punk, and I am not Muslim, but as a Baha’i I do believe in the Quran, and love Islam.”⁹⁹⁰ In the study cited earlier by Kantorová, she stated:

I identify as an activist who has been supporting the Palestinian struggle against the occupation since 2009 through writing, photography, and various events and protests, I am aware of my anger and helplessness in the face of the oppression of Palestinians, as well as my admiration of their resilience.⁹⁹¹

She also cited a Baha’i quote as one of her inspirations in her social activism: “Justice demands universal participation.”⁹⁹² No less involved in social justice than Kamel, she identified with anarchist politics and anti-war activism. Yet, being female, white, a

⁹⁸⁹ Marwan Kamel, “Visceral Revolutions: Egypt, Tunisia, the Middle East and sustainable change.” Al-Thawra homepage 29 January 2011. <http://althawrapunk.com> Accessed 8 September 2015.

⁹⁹⁰ Arjun Ray’s Facebook homepage, 28 October 2010, cited above.

⁹⁹¹ Kantorová 2014: 82.

⁹⁹² Ibid 127.

writer/photographer rather than a band member, “not quite punk and . . .not Muslim,” she carried few of the qualifications that would match her to the prototypical image of “Muslim punk” and “taqwacore.” She did, however, document the scene in word and image. She has also written material that has already been quoted extensively in this dissertation —drawn from her own dissertation about activists doing solidarity work with Palestinians.⁹⁹³ In case the reader has not already noticed, Daniela, the former hardcore punk Baha’i, is the same person as D. Kantorová, the psychologist who interviewed various activists involved in solidarity work already cited earlier. She is also the photographer who took the photos on the following pages (see Fig. 25 and Fig. 26). From her work, she concluded that there is a need for solid relationships and community care if people are to withstand and cope with activist traumas. From her personal work with Palestinian solidarity we can see that this concern for social justice in general and Palestine in particular is significant for her.



Fig. 25
Demonstration in San Francisco on 20 July 2014 against Israeli occupation of Palestine and attacks on Gaza. Photo by Daniela.

⁹⁹³ The reason for placing her material in the “wrong” section was two-fold: first, it functioned well as theoretical frames and empirical data to outline some of the issues to come later in the thesis and second, it was an exercise for the reader: what image comes to mind when one reads “former hardcore punk” and what image comes to mind when one reads “psychology scholar”? If the reader is as influenced by dominant American white male images as I am, then it would be safe to say that the two images that the terms elicit would not lead to the actual person in this case, Daniela Kantorová. I found her dissertation work inspiring yet, would identification with the label “taqwacore” hinder or help readers appreciate her work as a psychologist? Perhaps, if taqwacore had been associated primarily with academics rather than, say musicians, Pady Cakes (psychology), Arjun Ray (biochemistry and neurology), and Daniela Kantorová might have found themselves much closer to the center of what it meant to be “taqwacore.”

Another person who has been highly outspoken on issues of social justice is New York rapper Immortal Technique. The *Taqwacore Journal* posted a link on their blog to an interview with him wherein he stated:

And then when they gave us what they called “liberty,” everything we had was still owned by *them*. Our governments told us that socialism was the real enemy and that we would have “freedom.” But the foreign powers and corporations were the ones with the real freedom. The freedom to take all the wealth generated by our work and our land and give us only a small percentage of the scraps from the table.⁹⁹⁴

A selection from the interview was transcribed by the *Taqwacore Journal* wherein he was cited as follows:

What’s important to realize is that we need to evolve to a point where we consider [ourselves] a human race, not different races of people that we can demonize and use things about their culture so that we feel less guilty for killing them. No, look at them. Say this is a person just like me. Who had a mother just like I did, who wants the same things I want and I killed him because I was ordered to do so. Now, if you find that justifiable, then the person you are looking at in the mirror is not a human being any more. You’ve become a machine. And we need to get away from that. We need to embrace our humanity more.

To this, the *Taqwacore Journal* followed up:

I do not know if this intelligent man is a Muslim or not, but I will tell you that his idea of humanity [is] certainly Islamic in principle and he is Taqwacore through and through by bringing about the message of Peace in everything he does.

-Bismillah

Living Words in Taqwacore

Practices in the taqwacore scene stretch the meaning of practice along with the stretched meaning of “taqwacore.” As the “scene” manifested largely online and at concerts, it would seem that those contexts would be the most obvious place to look for “practice.” Yet it would seem strange to completely detach participants and their own lives from the idea of practice. Limitations here means that such avenues can only be skimmed, yet can hopefully a little texture to add to the texts.

⁹⁹⁴ Interview with Immortal Technique, RT, re-posted 29 December 2012 by *Taqwacore Journal* <https://taqwacorejournal.wordpress.com/2012/12/29/interview-with-immortal-technique/> Accessed 15 September 2015.



Fig. 26

Nyle Usmani (brother of Kominas vocalist and bass player Basim Usmani) and former Kominas guitarist Arjun Ray in 2009. Photo by Daniela.



Fig. 27

Logo of the band Al-Thawra (“Revolution” in Arabic).

Online activity can be seen through a number of ways. Sabina England has been active in Punks against Apartheid and posted a video calling on former Dead Kennedys singer Jello Biafra to respect the boycott of Israel. Yassin of Fedayeen posted a petition on the White House homepage calling for support to U.S. citizens who wanted to travel to the Middle East and fight against ISIS. The Kominas have posted updates about Black Lives Matter news and protests as has Daniela who continued her work of

documentation through photography. Al-Thawra (see Fig. 27) posted a free song dedicated to Gaza in response to Israeli bombings.

Worth focusing on in particular is the activity of Tanzila Ahmed. Whether or not taqwacore ever existed, for Taz Ahmed, the struggle for social justice has continued today as it did before the scene took shape. In early 2014, a Bangladeshi-American model (identified as “Maks”) posed naked for American Apparel with the words “Made in Bangladesh” pasted over her breasts. A sub-text explained that she “is not content to fit her life into anyone else’s conventional narrative. That’s what makes her essential to the mosaic that is Los Angeles, and unequivocally, a distinct figure...” Yet, despite the company’s claim to fair wages and benefits, the tragedy of 2013 at Rana Plaza which killed more than 1,100 people (Bangladeshi garment workers and their children)—and which the ad seemed to implicitly suggest by contrast—was not mentioned.

Ahmed responded by posting an open letter online to Maks wherein she asserted that while it is important to support radical art and express that “brown is beautiful” there is “a fine line between self-expressive and being exotified and commodified.”⁹⁹⁵ That is, in helping to sell both clothes and darker shades of beauty, she was also selling a familiar type of sexualized image which both confirmed *gender* stereotypes as well as *racial* stereotypes: “*Burka*-ed Muslim women are bad, and bare-breasted ‘former’ Muslims with newly found American freedoms are good. Right?” As Ahmed later summed up her feelings in an interviewer who asked why the ad was problematic, she responded that it was “morbid, nationalistic and xenophobic. It commodifies the death of brown women with the image of a naked ‘acceptable’ brown woman: about as problematic as it gets.” She continued: “I question companies that use sex to sell products. In this case, Maks was selling a product. Her free will to reveal her breasts should not be confused with using her breasts to sell a product. So, really, what kind of agency is there?”⁹⁹⁶

In addition to the public letter, Ahmed launched an online campaign against American Apparel for an ad that “—in one fell swoop — both indicted the international garment industry while completely invisibilizing the countless women who are forced to work in the supply chain.”⁹⁹⁷ Here she demanded

that American Apparel executives have a sit-down meeting with South Asian women activists, and for the company to donate to the International Labor Rights Forum (a

⁹⁹⁵ Ahmed, Tanzila “Taz.” “I Am Made In Bangladesh Too: An Open Letter to American Apparel’s Now-Famous Model.” 12 March 2014. <http://theaerogram.com/im-made-bangladesh> Accessed 19 March 2014.

⁹⁹⁶ Russell Morse, “Made in Bangladesh, protested in USA: Topless ad sparks action at American Apparel factory in LA.” LinkTV 14 April 2014. <http://news.linktv.org/bleakonomics/made-in-bangladesh-protested-in-usa-controversial-ad-sparks-action-at-american-apparel-factory-in-la> Accessed April 15, 2014.

⁹⁹⁷ AMERICAN APPAREL: WE’RE SAYING NO TO #AMERICANEXPLOITATION, http://act.engagementlab.org/sign/18mr_americanapparel Accessed 15 April 2014.

group that supports and funds the Bangladeshi Center for Worker Solidarity). If American Apparel wants to run a marketing campaign that profits from the dangers posed to workers in the Bangladeshi garment industry, the least they can do is donate money to help those same victims.

Though she personally went to the company's headquarters, the executives refused to meet with her. At the same time, her call for a boycott was ambiguous. It seemed that she did not want to outright call for such a boycott. In her interview with LinkTV, she said,

When Western society says "boycott" or "decrease carbon footprint" it is essentially a loss of freedom for the working class in Bangladesh, many of them women, to access the economy. The workers organizing on the floors of these factories in Bangladesh have stated that, first and foremost, they want the ability to work in a safe environment. They know this is the first step to achieving fair labor practices and living wages.⁹⁹⁸

The question then is how to pressure companies into owning up to what many perceive to be responsibility that they owe those upon whose labor their profits are garnered. While Ahmed raised awareness, the work remained incomplete. Not to be deterred by corporate power, Ahmed co-produced a CD compilation in 2013 called *Beats for Bangladesh*, a "Benefit Album In Solidarity with the Garment Workers of Rana Plaza" where proceeds would go to the Bangladeshi Center for Worker Solidarity. Along with two dozen other mostly Desi artists, taqwacore scenesters, the Kominas and EVILARTFORM (Omar Waqar), each contributed a track to the compilation (more than two years after the scene supposedly died).

In one instance, Taz Ahmed seemed to miss a sense of solidarity found elsewhere in the face of American Islamophobia. In the middle of a several-day workshop on Islamophobia in which she was instructing youth, the news came about the bloody attack against Sikhs in Wisconsin on August 5, 2012 that left 7 people dead (including the gunman). Positioning it alongside a list of attacks against Muslims she wrote in an article on *Racialicious*:

I realized this weekend that, with all my organizing and activism, maybe the real revolutionaries were immigrants of our parents' generation—building community with Islam and creating places of worship despite all the fear and racialization and otherizing put on them in this new world. Solidarity is needed now more than ever before. We are four days away from Eid, a month away from September 11th and 3 months away from Election Day. Islamophobia escalates around these key days. As isolated events, the events of the week were intimidating—but as a collection of events it is reflective of the systematic oppression that is fueled by the right-wing Islamophobia machine. We must stand together to counter these actions. We must push the mainstream media and policymakers to bring light to these stories, as Naunihal so eloquently stated here. We

⁹⁹⁸ Morse, "Made in Bangladesh, protested in USA," 2014.

must all visit mosques and gurdwaras and have interfaith dialogue. And we as a South Asian community, we need to continue to educate and our new generation about legacy, building unity, and real solidarity.⁹⁹⁹

Whether or not she has always felt enough community, she has been persistent in expressing it. Solidarity for her has not been limited to Asian Americans or Bangladeshis. During the protests in Ferguson, Missouri —close to Sabina England’s hometown —Ahmed joined in the protests taking place in Los Angeles. In a blog post entitled “Love in Protest,” she wrote:

Do you know what to do when tear gas is flying at you? You grab a scarf, douse it in vinegar, and cover your mouth.

Your hijab doubles as a revolutionary tool to help you breathe. ...

When I used to train youth organizers, at the end of each training everyone would hold hands and stand in a circle. We would repeat this poem by Assata Shakur¹⁰⁰⁰ three times – first in a whisper, then in a normal voice, and finally, a shout.

“It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

It’s powerful to stand in a circle yelling this at the top of your lungs. It reframes social justice to not just be about the strength and militancy of a freedom fighter. It also centers the movement around “love” and “support.”

We must protest. We must take these streets. We must let the world know we are not going to accept this anymore. We must dismantle the violent militarization of our police force, and we must smash the white supremacy that holds all these systems in place.

But we must do it all with love. Or else this cycle will never break.¹⁰⁰¹

⁹⁹⁹ Ahmed, Taz. “Hate Crimes.” *Racialicious* 15 August 2012 <http://www.racialicious.com/2012/08/15/hate-crimes/> 13 March 2013.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Assata Shakur was a former Black Liberation Army activist now living in exile in Cuba. She was broken out of prison by allies in 1979. She is the sister to Mutulu Shakur —rapper Tupac Shakur’s stepfather. Tupac’s godfather was Black Panther Geronimo ji-Jaga Pratt who spent 27 years in prison before being released. Pratt finally received \$4.5 million for false imprisonment a few years before he died.

¹⁰⁰¹ Taz Ahmed, “Love in Protest,” 3 December 2014. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/loveinshallah/2014/12/03/love-in-protest/>

This, in a sense, captures a major distinction between the novel and the people in real life. If theological concerns and dialogue about the Quran was a central feature in the novel and social justice issues, while present, were less central, the real life taqwacore seem to have those roles reversed. Here, social justice for several scene participants was a more prominent. However, the two are certainly not mutually exclusive and Taz Ahmed has been one of those for whom both Islam and social justice have been important issues.

Another person associated with taqwacore who continued to work on both theological and social justice concerns was Sabina England. She continued her theater work through her writing and video work, developing both her art and her theology. Ultimately, the “agnostic” Islam that she proclaimed was brought into unison with paganism: In 2013, she posted a video she composed with images, performance with American Sign Language, and text that stated:

Mother Earth, ye take my breath away, I feel so free, so radiantly alive. As I dwell in the beauty of nature, I am bathed in Noor, the glorious light of Allah. Dancing among the spirits of Forest, Flora, and Fauna. Allahu Akbar. She is Great. Allahu Akbar. She is Great. I thank thee for sharing thine beauty and the Earth. Earth, in all its awesome beauty, Allah has bestowed upon us her blessings, all creatures great and small, nature in all her expressions, Cultures, Religions, Languages, Tribes, Nations, Diasporas, Diverse, Exquisite. Bountiful are the different creations. I celebrate, I enjoy. I immerse my soul in the beauty of diversity. ...Allah, Earth. One and the Same.¹⁰⁰²

In an interesting parallel to England’s ritual/performance, Knight underwent an experiment with the South American psychedelic plant ayahuasca. He described the story in his most recent novel *Tripping with Allah* (2013). During the vision that he experienced, Fatima —the daughter of Muhammad— appeared to him as Allah and She placed his open palm on her vagina:

“*This*,” she tells me, “is all that it is. All of the religion, the books, the mosques, it’s just *this*. It’s men trying to replicate this power.”¹⁰⁰³

Allah’s vagina blanks the pages of my Qur’an. There is no need for text, no words to be used like Legos to build a mystery god from nothing, and no endless chain of signifiers point to what cannot be seen with my own eyes. I give up the Book because this is a

¹⁰⁰² “Allah Earth,” <https://www.facebook.com/SabinaEngland> accessed 23 January 2014. She commented on it 22 October 2013: “I am Deaf, so it’s very hard for me to hear sounds / music but I understand that music is VERY important, and plays a vital role in PERFORMANCE. So I practiced, and learned to COUNT the beats to music while performing. So eventually I was able to recognize the Adhaan, sounds of WATER, the music, the Islamic prayers.” At the time, this video had been viewed 2,800 times. Her most popular video “Teaser trailer for ‘Wedding Night’” had more than 48,000 views.

¹⁰⁰³ Knight, *Tripping with Allah*, 2013: 223.

divine command from the Mother of the Book, and I have touched the sacred lips with my own hand. That was all that it could be, as Allah as I'd ever get.¹⁰⁰⁴

The message was framed with new words and through autobiography rather than fiction, but the theological content was still building on what he started in *The Taqwacores*. It was almost like hearing Rude Dawud speak again when Knight wrote ten years later: “There’s no distinction between the natural and the cultural... we’re all the earth, no reason to see one as contrary to the other.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Finally, with that in mind, one could see writing and media production itself as a form of praxis. As Taz Ahmed wrote in her tagline, “Writing is rioting.” As Omar Majeed, director of the *Taqwacore* documentary and Omar Fadel (who composed the soundtrack to dramatization of *The Taqwacores*) identified with taqwacore, their work *about* taqwacore can be seen as practices of self-representation even if some people felt excluded by the documentary (see Fig. 28).¹⁰⁰⁶



Fig. 28
Promotional picture from the documentary *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam* (2009).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid, 225.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Knight, *Tripping with Allah*, (2013: 236).

¹⁰⁰⁶ When asked “Are you taqwacore?” by Taz Ahmed, Omar Fadel said, “...If taqwacore is an abandonment of dogma then yes I am.” Taz Ahmed, “Omar Fadel talks to us,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR5BBQxIHSQ> Posted by tazchic303, 5 February 2010. Eyad Zahra, the director said he supports taqwacore but regards it undefinable and does not identify as taqwacore (Hosman 2009: 124).

Summary

This chapter presented overviews of written and living texts related to “freedom” from three distinct contexts, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the MOVE Organization, and taqwacore. For Unitarian and Universalist traditions, these conversations—rooted primarily in European white minority conceptions—have been brewing and morphing for centuries. They took a radical turn in 1961 through the merger of the two institutions. They took another major step by embracing pagan traditions and eliminating male dominant language from their central texts in 1985.

For MOVE, a new conversation was started in the U.S. on their own terms in the 1970s. The conception of “freedom” as articulated by John Africa has been carried on in the work by surviving MOVE members and younger generations. Even when MOVE adapted their language and use of “freedom” to facilitate communication with outsiders, this conception was at its fundamental core in conversation with ideas of “freedom” in both Zen and decolonialist contexts.

For taqwacore, these conversations began with a novel which in itself was in conversations with centuries of dominant and minority voices within Islamic and American contexts. While much in the underlying conception seemed to be compatible with J. S. Mill’s individualist “negative freedom,” many of those people associated with taqwacore combined this with anti-racist, anti-war, anti-Zionist, and pro-queer perspectives.

It is worth recalling that we could hear various elements present in these conversations that have been articulated earlier. Voices within each of the contexts grappled with language and struggled with the violence inherent in language often aimed at them or people with whom they were in relationship. This idea of relationship was prominent in the context of the UUA where covenant and community was heavily emphasized in contrast to previous emphasis on the individual. MOVE conversations assumed the idea of existential unity as a starting point for their conception of “freedom” and centered their practice on their own “family” created under the auspices of John Africa. With taqwacore, the idea of “community” was articulated yet in practice appeared predominantly online. Finally, in regard to obligation, in both the UUA and with Taz Ahmed, we heard the voice of Assata Shakur recited which recalled “It is our duty to fight for freedom.” With MOVE members, for whom Shakur has expressed her support, that duty has been manifest in practice through decades of enduring incarceration and attacks by police.



4. *other* Ecologies of (Un)Freedom

Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference.

-Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Neibuhr

In 2012 an anonymous commenter posted a picture online forum Reddit (in the section label labeled “funny”). The picture was of a person wearing a turban and yoga pants. That person seemed to be female but also had a beard. The person who posted the picture commented briefly: “I’m not sure what to conclude.” What followed was a storm of comments including plenty of ridicule. When the person in the photo finally found out about it, she posted a response on Reddit. She introduced herself as Balpreet Kaur, a student at Oregon State University, and she wrote:

...I’m not embarrassed or even humiliated by the attention [negative and positive] that this picture is getting because, it’s who I am. Yes, I’m a baptized Sikh woman with facial hair. Yes, I realize that my gender is often confused and I look different than most women. However, baptized Sikhs believe in the sacredness of this body - it is a gift that has been given to us by the Divine Being [which is genderless, actually] and, must keep it intact as a submission to the divine will. Just as a child doesn’t reject the gift of his/her parents, Sikhs do not reject the body that has been given to us. By crying ‘mine, mine’ and changing this body-tool, we are essentially living in ego and creating a separateness between ourselves and the divinity within us. By transcending societal views of beauty, I believe that I can focus more on my actions. My attitude and thoughts and actions have more value in them than my body because I recognize that this body is just going to become ash in the end, so why fuss about it? When I die, no one is going to remember what I looked like, heck, my kids will forget my voice, and slowly, all physical memory will fade away. However, my impact and legacy will remain: and, by not focusing on the physical beauty, I have time to cultivate those inner virtues and hopefully, focus my life on creating change and progress for this world in any way I can. So, to me, my face isn’t important but the smile and the happiness that lie behind the face are. :-) So, if anyone sees me at OSU, please come up and say hello. I appreciate all of the comments here, both positive and less positive because I’ve gotten a better understanding of myself and others from this. Also, the yoga pants are quite comfortable and the Better Together tshirt is actually from Interfaith Youth Core, an organization that focuses on storytelling

and engagement between different faiths. :) I hope this explains everything a bit more, and I apologize for causing such confusion and uttering anything that hurt anyone.¹⁰⁰⁷

If we look at this text in the light of analysis based on (un)freedom, we see a number of factors appear. First, Balpreet Kaur was faced with a situation in which an initial limitation existed in the fact that her photo had been taken and placed on the Internet. There was nothing she could do to change that. Attempts by people to retract their photos that have gone viral have not generally met with much success. For many people this might have been a problem because the impulse may have been to change that which a person could not. For Kaur, she had already been come to terms with limitations. The third part of the Serenity Prayer, knowing the difference between that which can be changed and that which cannot can demand exercise in both departments. She was prepared to accept limits.

Second, perhaps contributing to her ability to accept those types of limits (i.e., the photo and comments already being published), Kaur had learned to accept her body—exactly as it was, in life and in death. Rather than perceiving her body as something to be changed, she accepted it. This is where the third part of the Serenity Prayer leaves us stranded. We *can* change our bodies. In fact, there are many ways that we can change them ranging from diet control to cosmetics, from attire to surgical operations, from shaving to fitness. In some sense, our bodies are always changing anyway so the question is more *how* we will change it. With this, the Serenity Prayer provides no guidance but fortunately for Kaur, she had more to build on. Through her faith as a Sikh, she had been taught not just to accept her body as it was, but to cherish her body and its “sacredness” as a “gift” from the Divine. This says a tremendous amount about the power of acceptance to provide a sense of peace, power, security, and satisfaction with oneself. In a society where women are constantly directed through advertisements, television, magazines, and peer pressure to conform to certain images and body types, it can be counted as an incredible victory for mental autonomy that Kaur was not only able to resist those pressures, but to find joy and relief in not even thinking about them. As she wrote: “By transcending societal views of beauty, I believe that I can focus more on my actions.” In other words, her acceptance of limitations and her celebration of herself, as she is, proved to feel empowering for her.

Third, she was faced with an injustice. Somebody had violated her space by photographing her, exposing her image on the net, and mocking her. She felt compelled to respond. Yet this compulsion was not rooted in ill will or anger toward any of those

¹⁰⁰⁷ She added in an addendum: “Also, wearing turbans for women is a sign of inner strength and empowerment because we too are equal to Sikh men. Sikhism advocates total equality for both genders [the only difference between them are the last names] and therefore, it is okay, however rare the occurrence, for a woman to adorn herself with the turban just like her male counterparts. I encourage everyone to go and google and expand their knowledge of the sheer diversity in this nation - as will I; and gain a better understanding of each other.” https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/109cnf/im_not_sure_what_to_conclude_from_this/?sort=top Accessed 28 March 2015.

who had done her an injustice. Instead, she expressed appreciation for all comments “both positive and less positive” (note that she did not even refer to them as “negative” thereby bypassing the dualistic binary of judging them as “good” or “bad”). She recognized this injustice as an *opportunity* to learn. That is, her acceptance of limitations had not transformed her into a passive punching bag. She did not accept the bullying yet she nor did she engage the bullying on its own terms. Her lack of attachment to her body or to the injustices directed toward her body enabled her to respond with equanimity and humility. She transformed the conversation itself into the type of conversation where she was at home and in doing so, she made it her own. That is, through her devotion to her faith and herself, she ruled the confines of that conversation.

Her comment quickly skyrocketed in approval points (more than 6,000) to be the number one comment (the first thing that a person reads when opening the thread of more than 200 comments). Her response was showered with support (“GO YOU. The planet needs more you.” “Is there some way I can join your religion?” etc.). And the original commenter apologized. Her response became a far bigger story than the original thread and has been spread throughout the Internet as an impressive example of how one person responded to bullying. Soon thereafter she raised her voice again when Sikhs in India had responded with outrage to a JK Rowling’s characterization of a Sikh girl being bullied for being “mustachioed, yet large-mammared.” Kaur wrote in *The Guardian*, that this was how people perceived *her*. There was no need for outrage because some people *are* like that and bullying is their experience. Yet one need not cater to bullying nor respond to perceived violence with more violence. Kaur wrote:

I am well aware of how I am perceived by others: is she a man? A bearded woman? Transgendered? These perceptions find their roots both in simple curiosity and ignorance of the sheer diversity of the human race. I cannot stop people from forming convoluted first impressions based on what I look like, but I can stop them from turning that ignorance into misplaced assumptions or even hatred. This is why, having been alerted to the posting of the photo, I replied in the thread, and engaged with the posters discussing my appearance. What I learned from this experience is that building bridges between people isn’t really that hard: an honest conversation, a simple exchange of meaningful words that make up our lives, can change people’s opinions and change the world for the better – one step at a time.¹⁰⁰⁸

Kaur’s story may be seemingly far from the topic of this dissertation. She has nothing to do with taqwacore, MOVE, or Unitarian Universalists (although she did work with Interfaith Youth Core). Yet the reason for inserting her story here was that her response embodied a clear expression of how ecologies of (un)freedom can be analyzed and

¹⁰⁰⁸ Balpreet Kaur, “Sikh protests at JK Rowling’s ‘mustachioed’ girl are misplaced.” *The Guardian*, 2 October 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/oct/02/sikh-protests-jk-rowling-misplaced> Accessed 15 October 2015.

discussed. Without succumbing to an artificial binary between “freedom” and “unfreedom” the material can reveal nuances and facets that might otherwise be overlooked or marginalized in a dominant conversation about “freedom” that only draws from one side of the resource plot (wills, ways, and wars) without recognizing or providing sufficient attention to the other side (borders, bonds, and bondage).

Again, if look at our options as one of shuffling between various types of borders, bonds, and bondages, then the question becomes which borders are we accepting, which bonds are we choosing, and which bondages are we resisting? To these ends, I conceive of a framework to ask those questions with three sub-types of (un)freedom: *Negotiating the limits of language*; *Shouldering incalculable responsibility in partnership*,¹⁰⁰⁹ and *Feeling obligated to challenge injustice*. These are conceived as broad categories of conversations about (un)freedom, and they conceptually replace the dichotomy of “Wills, Ways, and Wars” on one side and “Borders, Bonds, and Bondage” on the other as separate conversations.

Returning to Philip Berrigan’s remark about prison: he resisted the popular conception of what “freedom” or “law” was expected to mean and found a meaning that suited him (negotiating limits of language). He did this through building community with others in a manner that was based on service (shouldering incalculable responsibility in relationship). Finally, he felt obligated to resist injustice in partnership with (or for) others (feeling an obligation to challenge injustice). Each of these instances contained tensions that pulled in different directions simultaneously or, at least, certain “trade-offs” and exchanges. With the war outside being waged inside each person’s heart, the attempt to acquire “neutrality” amounts to a vote for the status quo and against many of the basic values that many people hold (against racism, against sexism, against arbitrary violence, against unjust prison sentences, against the killing of civilians, or undue cruelty to animals). To gain a sense of peace may require sacrifice in partnership with others. The result in Berrigan’s case was that there was no either/or consequence of “pure freedom” or “pure unfreedom.” Each choice had to draw on, negotiate, apply, or exchange various degrees of values drawn from both categories.

Varieties of (Un)Freedom

One of the initial thoughts that I had had when thinking about how to discuss “freedom” in a coherent fashion was a perplexing paradox around the statement cited earlier by Philip Berrigan. I had read this statement at least a decade prior to beginning this dissertation project and had long wondered what it meant to feel that his “freedom” in prison was “more full and satisfying than any previously experienced.” As prison is

¹⁰⁰⁹ Sometimes I use the word “relationship,” sometimes “partnership,” and sometimes “community.” I am not terribly concerned at this stage about the distinctions. What is important is that these responsibilities are shouldered together with others in a context of mutual respect.

typically regarded to be the opposite of “freedom” and he was not simply talking about an internal sense of salvation, it seemed difficult to describe his feeling purely in terms of either “freedom” or “unfreedom.” By the time I had read conceptions of “freedom” by scholars such as Flathman (who would have characterized Berrigan’s “freedom” with a sense of having successfully and virtuously accomplished something in partnership with a community who recognized and approved of his actions) I had already given up on the idea of being able to speak coherently about “freedom” as separate from “unfreedom” at all. Berrigan’s paradox was not an exception but the rule. Rather, the most prominent participants in dominant conversations about “freedom” seemed to be very skilled at excusing, disguising, or otherwise scuttling away “unfreedom” as essential to conversations about “freedom.” This was done in part by using different modes of distraction in different contexts (state violence was depicted as a necessity as was inequality in many cases, determinism has been depicted as metaphysical, limits have been depicted as meaningful in only a *limited* sense, and many other “non-freedoms” such as responsibility, duty, obligation, and obedience were depicted in many cases as complements to—not opposites of—“freedom”). The practical consequences of these rhetorical gymnastics were narrative violence and the exclusion of minority perspectives—in particular the views, stances, and traditions of indigenous peoples. This thesis in general and this chapter in particular is designed to challenge that.

This chapter aims to use the theoretical outline expressed at the end of Chapter 2 (language-borders, relationship-bonds, obligation-bondage) to organize some of the material that was reviewed in Chapter 3. These are three different but interrelated types of (un)freedom but they are not the only types imaginable. As the term (un)freedom is used to bypass the artificial binary traditionally applied to “freedom” and “unfreedom” within dominant conversations, it can be difficult to conceive precisely because we are so ingrained with the idea that the two are opposed to one another. Yet, one could simply look at this as a starting point for future conversations and the topic is something that one does not necessarily place in a category of “freedom” or “unfreedom,” such as “friendship,” “marriage,” “sexuality,” “body,” “words,” etc. At the same time, (un)freedom refers to the topic of all conversations about “freedom” and/or “unfreedom” and, if applied, would ask in each of those conversations where the presence of the other one is and how are they bound together.

Specific (un)freedoms are as many as the number of specific “freedoms” or “unfreedoms.” The most dominant form of (un)freedom is that of “rights” or “freedoms” that are guaranteed by the state and the “unfreedom” of its monopoly on violence (coercion, bloodshed, execution, incarceration, extortion, torture, and terror). As prominent white sociologist Charles Tilly has stated “Modern states kill and plunder

on a scale that no ‘robber band’ could hope to emulate.”¹⁰¹⁰ Yet, even barring the existence of the state, the standard expression of one person’s “freedom” beginning where another ends is also an expression of both opportunity and limits. In other words, there is no expression or conception of “freedom” that cannot be more precisely understood as an expression of (un)freedom. The same holds true for any conception of “unfreedom” in which the aim is to work with it, through it, or beyond it.

The point with using the term (un)freedom is that once this fact has been recognized, there is no excuse for excluding any people from conversations about “freedom.” As all people understand basic ideas of obligation, violence, limits, and responsibility, so too do all people engage directly or indirectly in conversations about “freedom” even if a particular conversation appears to be based on “unfreedom.” As all people are affected by conversations about “freedom,” the idea of using (un)freedom is so that scholars can better recognize and engage in conversations of “freedom” more precisely, clearly, and inclusively.

(Un)freedom 1: Negotiating the Limits of Language

Have we read any accounts of Unitarian Universalists holding a critical eye to language? Have we heard any MOVE members using words in a manner that was particular to them and the meaning imbued in those words by John Africa? Have we seen any instances of people associated with taqwacore questioning the categories within which they were placed? The purpose of this section is not merely to answer in the affirmative to those questions but to illustrate how voices from each of the three contexts were negotiating opportunities and limitations of language in their own way and what their particular concerns were in relation to (un)freedom.

Among Unitarian Universalists the very formulation of the Six and then Seven Principles were centered around a language concern: they were resisting the power of dogma and creeds. They recognized that the assertion of particular words, definitions, and formulations as normative and required by all to recite was in itself a form of violence that they chose to reject. In response to the call of creed and contract, they answered with the spirit of service and covenant. Subsequently, their central text, shared by all congregations in the UUA remains subject to change by the determination, deliberation, and negotiation of the congregations and their members. Furthermore, the negotiation has taken place in relation to their peers: when a Unitarian group attempted to use the name American Unitarian Association, the principle of covenant

¹⁰¹⁰ Tilly 2004: 1. The de facto acceptance of the monopoly on violence does not however in itself necessarily grant any more legitimacy to a state than any other social actor. As Peter Calvert wrote, “A state is in some senses, as far as internal politics is concerned, merely a non-state actor that has succeeded in gaining recognition as a state. The confused picture we have of the modern state stems from the clash between appearance and reality which lies at its heart” (1986: 29).

and communication gave way to the language of law and contract. The UUA took the matter to court and used the state to implement its power over the smaller group. Finally, negotiation has taken place in relation to the terms of society at large. So when they were in relationship with and hearing the voices of transgender people on one hand and then listening to the voice of hetero/cis-norms on the other hand which supplied them with two types of bathrooms —male and female— the UUA chose to create a third option. They remade certain bathrooms to be inclusive for all people regardless of which category they identified with or which category they were placed in by others.

In the context of MOVE, we saw how the basic meanings of key words were re-negotiated within their central text to the extent that an entire constellation of concepts that were, in their essence, *against the very idea of conceptualization*. John Africa preached “revolution” but the meaning it carried was only fully comprehensible to MOVE members who understood the conceptual configuration within which “revolution” was defined. Revolution was not conceptualized as something violent or as a mere change of government but as a total transformation, a revolving of social order, to the “first reference” —life. It was not, in fact, to be understood as a concept at all but as a movement, an action. All life moves and revolution simply meant to keep moving. Yet to “move” in accordance with life meant to be bound to the principle of life which was to gain knowledge of self. This knowledge was again not a concept but a state of being, an understanding of oneness, a lifestyle of unity in community. So the meaning of the word “life” too was re-negotiated. Rather than being a scientific term categorized and measured, life is *being* beyond measurement, without numbers, and without thought.

The basic ideas and challenges to language constructs within MOVE were heard here also by Zen Buddhists or Krishnamurti. Oneness. Thought as a hinder to understanding. As with Zen Buddhists and Krishnamurti, MOVE members have had to use letters and numbers to point toward a way of being beyond numbers and letters. John Africa’s response to this dilemma was for MOVE members to “do what’s necessary” and MOVE members negotiate among themselves exactly what that means.

Here, “freedom” referred to a state of being that has nothing to do with “rights” or “government” because the only government is the government of self and the only law is natural law. Legislating rights were against “freedom” per definition. Natural law for MOVE members was in conversation with Zen. For Zen Buddhists and MOVE members alike: when you are hungry, eat. When you are tired, sleep. And as MOVE notably added: when you are attacked, defend. Earth and animals were (and are) under attack, so they acted in defense and were attacked themselves by police. Then, after being placed in prison, and MOVE members demanded “freedom” for their fellow members, they negotiated the meaning of that word too. After all, “there ain’t no freedom in this system.” But the meaning here was negotiated to be able to communicate to outsiders. So with two parallel constellations of meanings, that of MOVE and that of the system, it is not always apparent what a MOVE member may intend to mean but usually the context of the statement may help. “Freedom” at its

deepest level, the meaning as taught by John Africa is the first reference: Life. Period. “Freedom” within the context of the system means liberation of people and animals from captivity so that they can continue to do the work that MOVE was formed to do.

Within the context of taqwacore, the meaning of terms such as “Islam” and “Muslim” were challenged in the very beginning. The new meaning that was attributed to them was that of a non-coercive cultural agreement: “Islam” and “Muslim” could mean whatever people who cared about their meaning wanted them to mean. There was no obligation to accept somebody else’s interpretations or rules about what they *ought* to mean. The term “taqwacore” became a negotiation of language by the act of creation. First, the novel defined the term through its multi-faceted characters. Then, when released into the world, the term functioned as a beacon whereby people who felt they could relate to the novel and/or its themes of liberation from constraining terms could find one another. Yet the backside of liberation was that they had a new term, one that suddenly had different meanings: one embodied by characters in a novel, another embodied by characters on the Internet (including how they presented themselves or how people imagined them to be) and, then another embodied by characters in real life who met one another bonded and dispersed. The term “taqwacore” had become more of a burden than it was worth. It had filled its function as a beacon. Being true to its spirit meant relieving themselves of the duty to care for the corpse of the term that had been nailed to the wall by the media—a caricature of itself. By leaving the term, the “collective” committed perhaps a form of semiotic suicide—annihilating their dependency on language. It reminded me of how words provided the original source of (un)freedom: they enable communication and constrain thought in the same motion. So one exercise in resisting constraint was to let go of words. Abjani did it. Sena Hussain did it. Al-Thawra did it. Kourosh Poursalehi did it. Michael Muhammad Knight did it. And many others. They let go of the word that had brought them together. It reminded me a bit of Charles Sanders Peirce who abandoned the term “pragmatism” in favor of “pragmaticism” when he felt that the former had been hijacked by people who failed to apply its technical meaning. In the case of taqwacore, it was, for a time, and for some of the people who associated with it, an expression of their identity. Yet when the media determined the confines of that identity and the violence of the gap between the meaning ascribed to the word and their experience pulled them into places they did not want to be, many of them simply released.

Although such a description is tempting for an academic, it was not quite a “semiotic suicide” either. It was more akin to going with the flow. It would also be misleading because it would, in a sense, confirm the image that people were getting away from, the idea that they “were” anything at all as a group. There was no “they,” no collective action at all. The debate in 2010 was not a collective agreement with a group decision. Instead, they just continued on with their lives. Yet whenever any other group or people determine to claim the term or revive it, whether Atari Creed, Neodandi and the *Taqwacore Journal*, or someone in Indonesia or Malaysia, it can become again the subject of negotiation.

With this functional use of language, the term itself could continue its own life for someone else to pick up and revive it or let it decompose into the pixelated soil of the Internet, the bookshelves of theses and articles, and the fading memories of the thousands of minds who ever read the word. The negotiation with language did not end by releasing their hold on “taqwacore.” Indeed, even the ideas of “God” and “Allah” continued to be re-negotiated by people who had associated with the scene such as Sabina England and Mike Knight. This re-negotiation brought them too to conceptions of oneness already explicit in dominant conceptions of Islam (*tawhid*) and connection to nature and a resource and reference point for the Divine.

(Un)freedom 2: Shouldering Incalculable Responsibility in Relationship

In creating the Africa name, MOVE members instituted a new family order. In designating Africa as the origin of all life as opposed to associating Africa with an ethnic identification, MOVE members essentially instituted simultaneously a new race akin to early Christians. As the race of early Christians attempted to create a more just universal order than their Roman competitors, MOVE similarly found itself in competition with a global American order. Whereas MOVE’s strength was not in numbers or military might, they have argued instead for an ethical superiority tied both to a natural order (staying within nature’s bounds as “freedom”) as well as a dramatically expanded universality that aimed to welcome not just all human life (whom the early Christians evangelized to in a spiritual sense and to whom American messages of “freedom” has been directed in a political sense) but to all life — whether labeled by “the system” to be “humans,” “animals,” “plants,” or “rocks”— and in senses that annihilate the distinctions between “spiritual” and “political.” As Robinson noted about the Tonga, MOVE members’ emphasis on kinship and being “one with all” epistemologically eradicates the “antagonism of interests between individual and community.”

It also reminded me of Louise Africa explaining the response of John Africa and Alphonso Africa to the court hearing. She said that an observer would notice that neither one of them objected a single time to any of the court proceedings or motions of the prosecutor because they didn’t oppose parts of the proceedings, they rejected *all* of it.¹⁰¹¹ That option, the option to reject the entire state of affairs, does not appear on the list of options for many people and it has been difficult to imagine what that might look like. The stories of MOVE members peacefully standing down arbitrary police harassment in recent years was only one example of what is possible through community support.

¹⁰¹¹ James (2013: 79).

Shouldering Incalculable Responsibility in Community, as this (un)freedom is labeled, entails the exploration of such alternatives through the willful tending to responsibilities that are beyond anybody's ability to calculate. Those possible alternative options are found not by individuals but by people banding together toward larger ends. In 1992, twelve-year old Severn Cullins-Suzuki spoke at the Earth Summit conference in Rio de Janeiro. She said:

I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you. You don't know how to fix the holes in the ozone layer. You don't know how to bring the salmon back up a dead stream. You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct. And you can't bring back a forest where there is now a desert. If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it...

I'm only a child, yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on ending poverty and finding environmental answers, what a wonderful place this Earth would be...¹⁰¹²

There is a principle of equality inherent in these conceptions of interdependence. As Rude Dawud in *The Taqwacores* stated, "We all come from the Earth, and we all go back to the Earth."¹⁰¹³ These thoughts coincide with those of Aydin who referred to Charles Sander Peirce's: "belief that we are not detached, atomistic egos living in a separate inside world but 'cells of a social organism,' who discover and develop themselves in an interaction with their environment."¹⁰¹⁴ Community and the shouldering of incalculable responsibilities in community with other people can also lead to a greater connection to animal life, plant life, the land, and the limits of the earth that we are bound to.

UUA members, though based in the United States, have organized around the globe to further the ends of "world community" and their efforts have been made possible by the cultivation of communities locally through committees, fellowships, and collaborations with groups outside of UUs. When I attended a support event for Black Liberation Army activist Russell Maroon Shoatz, an event where the names of each of the MOVE 9 was read aloud to the audience, we were all located in a Unitarian Universalist fellowship in Brooklyn, New York and the event was co-organized by a UU member. When I met a transsexual Muslim who had had difficulties finding a home at the local mosque, he and other Muslims looking for a spiritual home that was not bound by gender binaries, he found that home in a Unitarian Universalist fellowship who would loan out their sanctuary to them every week. These are some of the things that it has meant to develop community in a web of interdependence.

In the case of MOVE, John Africa stated that "Simply because animals are not constituents, animals do not vote so politicians feel no obligation to animals and as

¹⁰¹² Suzuki (2007: 309, 310-311).

¹⁰¹³ Knight (2004: 31).

¹⁰¹⁴ Aydin (2013: 11).

politicians make the law those in law enforcement do not feel obligated to protect animals...” Cox explained how the sense of connection with all life provided a sense of fundamental equality that engendered respect not only across human-to-human boundaries or human-to-animal boundaries but also human-to-plant boundaries:

Basically, The Guidelines say the life is life. Period. No matter what its form. Just because man can read and write doesn't make him smarter. It is smart to build the atomic bomb? When we built our fence before the '77 confrontation, there was a tree in the way. We could have just pulled it up, but John Africa is so sensitive to life that we broke up the concrete with sledgehammers and traced the roots all the way around the house real careful and tedious so we could save every one. We dug for a week.¹⁰¹⁵

The story Cox told seems to allude to the type of feeling that corresponds to working in such a community in which responsibility is not tied to calculation. As opposed to bean-counting, I think of this as *bean-bearing* in which larger loads can seem lighter when carried together. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has created a word to describe the feeling that motivates people to participate selflessly in such circumstances. He calls it “elevation.” He said that it is widely experienced across cultures but that it had not only not been studied, it had not even been given a name in English. Elevation might be described as the feeling you get when you see somebody behaving in the way that represents for you the type of world that you want to live in — it is typically a world in which people give of themselves, share, dare, and care for others around them. To describe the type of feeling that Haidt referred to, he cited a story told to him during his study:

Myself and three guys from my church were going home from volunteering our services at the Salvation Army that morning. It had been snowing since the night before, and the snow was a thick blanket on the ground. As we were driving through a neighborhood near where I lived, I saw an elderly woman with a shovel in her driveway. I did not think much of it when one of the guys in the back asked the driver to let him off here. The driver had not been paying much attention so he ended up circling back around towards the lady's home. I had assumed that this guy just wanted to save the driver some effort and walk the short distance to his home (although I was clueless as to where he lived). But when I saw him jump out of the back seat and approach the lady, my mouth dropped in shock as I realized that he was offering to shovel her walk for her. ...I felt like jumping out of the car and hugging this guy. I felt like singing and running, or skipping and laughing. Just being active. I felt like saying nice things about people. Writing a beautiful poem or love song. Playing in the snow like a child. Telling everybody about his deed.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹⁵ Cox 1986: 171.

¹⁰¹⁶ Haidt 2005.

When people were exposed to these types of encounters, they typically experienced similar feelings including a warm sensation in the chest. Significantly, it also made them want to engage themselves more in that type of activity devoted to others.

(Un)freedom 3: Feeling an Obligation to Challenge Injustice

During one of our talks, Mike Africa, Jr. told me that John Africa said that it could take as long to undo these problems as it took to create them. This one little statement which was delivered rather casually placed things in a whole new perspective. It reminded me of Arne Naess's comment about learning to think like a mountain. And that made me wonder, how would it affect our answers if, instead of (only) asking "What would Jesus do?" we (also) asked "What would a mountain do?" It also brought to mind John Cage's song that he composed to be performed over a period of 400 years. I thought of the types of songs in our lives and which ones we dance to. MOVE members are dancing to a song that lasts approximately 150,000 years.

Challenging injustice can take place in so many ways and we have seen examples here through the UUA, MOVE, and taqwacore where people not only devote their time to standing up to coercion, domination, and violent institutions, they also spend their time trying to figure out how to do so effectively. As with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Mazur's study, UUs have taken risks and been responsible for defending rights up to the Supreme Court that have ultimately affected citizens throughout the country. MOVE members, People associated with taqwacore have challenged stereotypes about "Muslims," "punks," and "Muslim punks," questioning gender binaries, raising voices against militarism, and trying to live lives that are not constricted by language categories.

Similar to the feeling described by Jonathan Haidt, I would describe another feeling that might be regarded as a form of compulsion that is brought about by one's conscience—the *feeling* that one is *obliged* to *challenge injustice*. This feeling does not need to be—but often is—associated inspiration drawn from others. Some people might cite Ali or Jesus; Sojourner Truth or Lydia Maria Child; Guru Nanak or Gandhi as sources of that inspiration. Others some might simply find it some inherent refusal to submit to that which is perceived to be unjust. It is not the source that is important so much as the sensation. This internal compulsion is both "free" (resisting injustice) and "unfree" (submitting to the compulsion of conscience) at the same time. As Hegel's dance, the swaying to the music of the sounds one hears can be seen as "free" even while there would seem to be no other choice.

The questioning of "free will" could be found in Krishnamurti as well as MOVE members and at least one UU. More than 95 % of our thinking is unconscious. Could

perhaps a greater reliance on instinct facilitate a greater communication between the fraction of our thinking that is conscious and the vast majority which is not?

Jourdan Imani Keith, despite her dreadlocks, is not associated with the MOVE Organization but her ideas, like those of Alice Walker, are not very far from the ideas of MOVE. Like MOVE, Imani connected the identification of oneself with oneness: “Humans *are* nature.” She similarly connected this thought with the need to protect oneself. She formed an organization to re-connect urban youth with wilderness. MOVE had different methods but they were clearly part of the same conversation that Imani later articulated. They challenged what they perceived to be injustice. They became the first group to hold protests based on the principle of animal liberation.¹⁰¹⁷ They are also the first group that I know of to specifically target circuses and pet stores (about a decade before PETA). At one point, a talk show host had handcuffed a chimpanzee during a program and MOVE members later responded by storming the studio and handcuffing the talk show host. How is it that the Berrigans were able to inspire white people across the world to engage in direct action against militarism but MOVE has barely even been credited by white people as having any role in the development of animal liberation and the union of animal liberation and earth liberation.

As with the Berrigans, MOVE’s activities could be seen as expressing all three (un)freedoms in ways that were intimately entwined. They challenged words and, if dominating powers created a “vocabulary” of “illusion and deception” as Berrigan put it, then John Africa created a “vocabulary of de-liberation” (my own term) which employed a rejection of dominant terms of divisiveness to establish terms of community-unity among themselves and thereafter more effectively publically challenge injustice.

“De-liberation” in this sense means a rejection of the dominant binaries between “life” and “death,” “God” and “humans,” “humans,” and “animals,” “freedom” and “prison.” Through *deliberating* together MOVE members could act more forcefully together and speak in ways that communicated to understood truths that made sense outside of the dominant binaries.

“Freedom” for John Africa is not the opposite of “prison” or “slavery” but is the essential condition of life that preceded prisons and slavery. While dominant conversations begin the discussion of “freedom” after the act of enslavement, MOVE begins the conversation prior to enslavement and refuses to engage in any dialogue that insists upon the acceptance of mass state violence as a prerequisite for inclusion in the conversation. This is a significant point between it makes a world of difference. By locating “freedom” prior to rather than post-slavery, MOVE’s conception of “freedom” and the European canon exist in ontologically separate worlds; although the word

¹⁰¹⁷ Demonstrations were reported as early as 1973. If any researcher knows of any group that engaged in animal liberation protests (not just animal rights protests which had been going on in the 1960s and earlier) then I would be happy to stand corrected. Until then, MOVE is, as far as I can tell the earliest instance.

“freedom” is the same, they are not even in the same narrative. This would be the same for all indigenous peoples who did not welcome occupation by colonialists: their conceptions of “freedom” could not begin with narratives that necessarily began with the exclusion of their entire histories, lifestyles, and traditional ways of conceiving themselves and the world. John Africa’s idea of social life’s earliest origins are, along with his conception of “self” and “freedom,” strikingly similar to what we have heard from Zen Buddhists.

John Africa transferred those principles into praxis that was shared by people in community and challenging the state and injustice directly. When I tried to grasp the text above in relation to how MOVE members interpret it today, I asked Mike Africa, Jr. why MOVE members used microphones and electronic equipment to make hip hop. If John Africa said to “free” the minerals by putting them back in the ground then As he told me many times, Mike said that John Africa said to “do what’s necessary.” If one has to use technology to spread the message then so be it. They want to get rid of that technology when it has served its purpose but until then the hip hop they made was used to spread the teachings. In contrast, the military parade John Africa was critiquing was not a critique against music as such as it was a critique against the use of minerals to make music for the military and that “goes against life.”

Mike Africa, Jr.’s explanation suggested to me that, as technology is necessary to survive in an urban environment and necessary to spread information (the primary purpose of MOVE’s existence), its use is regulated according to considerations for the *effects* that it has. If the purpose of using a microphone is to spread the teaching of John Africa then, as with the Amish, that technology would be judged to contribute to the building of community and the achievement of what is right (i.e. “putting out information”). So while a conventional reading of the text might have difficulty placing a call to “free those bass trumpets.... and put them back in the ground” within dominant conversations about “freedom,” a critical analysis could recognize the (un)freedom of “objective violence” lurking the background which was the brunt of John Africa’s critique. The industrial extraction of minerals and military domination are here linked as part of an “unfree” system which cages animals with bars and cages human minds with parades.

Although I found clear examples for instances of all three (un)freedoms in relation to MOVE, they can be seen in taqwacore and Unitarian Universalists as well. Specifically, in the area where MOVE has not engaged in activism (inclusivity toward gays) taqwacore participants (via Muzammil in the novel and via Secret Trial Five in the cyber-live scene) as well as Unitarian Universalists (some of whom have been marrying gays for about 40 years) have been active. Furthermore, feeling the obligation to challenge injustice seems to have been a driving force in general for the anti-war activism of Al-Thawra, Fedayeen, and Daniela, the anti-exploitation activism of Taz and Prop Anon, the anti-racism of Sabina England, Omar Waqar, and MC Riz, and the pro-queer feminism of Sena Hussain and Michael Muhammad Knight.

Milbourne’s poem captured one of the essences of the third (un)freedom. In recognizing the earth as finite, bounded, she also recognized the violation of that

boundedness—the ways that a few were robbing the many in order to build an illusion that transcended the boundedness. But the earth did not get any bigger, resources did not appear from a vacuum, and gold didn't grow on trees. The resources were stolen. Like Ballou, Milbourne recognized that her actions of consumption were bound to theft at the international level. Her local life in Philadelphia was intricately bound to the local lives she witnessed in Vietnam, Guatemala, and Ecuador. She had looked behind the boundaries of the Thélème Abbey. As with *ubuntu*, she saw the larger interdependence, the networks that connected her life to their lives. Seeing that, she felt an internal compulsion to resist, to oppose that. In another posting, she noted her personal habits and which ones were hindering her from living a simpler life. She said the “obstacles are self-created: internet & TV.”¹⁰¹⁸ I have not asked her but within MOVE that statement could have two meanings. “Self” according to “the system,” is you as an individual. Yet Milbourne had already written about how these desires and the products themselves were manufactured by corporate interests and extracted from countries across the world. She knows that she did not create the Internet. “Self” according to MOVE belief is simply One, it's life. There is nothing else. The mission of MOVE is to put out information so people understand that. The self created these addictions, the self can undo them.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter began by suggesting the exceptional status of and dominance of “freedom” as a contemporary social value (as stated by various scholars). After discussing a history and etymology of “freedom” (and “liberty”), showing that historically both of them were tied to obligations and responsibilities, this section went on to review Mortimer Adler's mammoth work on “freedom” which aimed to categorize all (white) conversations on “freedom” into three different types: 1) Circumstantial Freedom of Self-Realization (approx. freedom as *ability*); 2) Acquired Freedom of Self-Perfection (approx. freedom as *virtue*); and 3) Natural Freedom of Self-Determination (approx. freedom as *decision, independent will, or natural ability*). Even Adler's core definition was found to rest on “unfreedom” (responsibility). Other scholars such as G. A. Cohen noted how systems of rights (such as property) constitute the distribution of “freedom and unfreedom.” One of those “unfreedoms,” as Benjamin Walter noted, is the inherent violence of the state that lies behind every legal contract. It was determined that “freedom” could be understood as a legless jockey that takes on different characters according to which concept it happens to be riding (equality, responsibility, violence, virtue, nonviolence, etc.). The first part of this chapter concluded by noting seven

¹⁰¹⁸ Maiga Milbourne. “In Pain,” 17 July 2013. <http://maigamilbourne.blogspot.com/2013/07/in-xscscaspain.html> Accessed July 18, 2013.

different conversations about “freedom” that seem to take place: 1) existential; 2) psychological; 3) physical; 4) social; 5) political; 6) economical; 7) mythical. Special attention was given to this last type of “freedom” in the next part of the chapter. This type is necessarily ambiguous and virtually void of content but can function powerfully to motivate and mobilize people by allowing them to fill in the unspoken blanks. It was this type of “freedom” that Rousseau seemed to refer to when he stated that “man is born free.” Mythical “freedom” typically seems to make sense precisely because it remains unexamined and undefined. As soon as it is defined, again “unfreedom” immediately appear whether in the form of dependency, limits, or coercion. Stephen Clark went so far as to state that enslaved humans constituted the first “individuals” by virtue of them becoming relieved of bonds and connection to community.¹⁰¹⁹ Although this was certainly not an accurate description of all contexts involving enslaved humans, it interestingly conceived the origin of states in the rule of thieves and brigands who similarly had lost their bonds to family and kin.

The next section of the chapter illustrated how the racialization of Europeans and “Christians” as “white” coincided with the development of “freedom” as a dominant value. The use of exclusive rights and ambiguous language enabled a “shell game” in which meaning could shift and rights could be accorded people of color arbitrarily. The systematic perpetuation of conversations of “freedom” alongside racist praxis was facilitated by a number of factors such as: the ascribed fixity combined with practiced fluidity in terms such as “race,” “religion,” and “freedom” as well as legal rights; the use of “science” to justify racist assumptions; the normalization and invisibilizing of whiteness (the white racial frame); and the psychological tendency to downplay or ignore those attributes in one’s own psyche or society that are viewed negatively.

The final part of this chapter brought forth a proposed alternative to “freedom” and “unfreedom” in the form of (un)freedom, a concept that suggests that the two presumed opposites are actually inseparable and incoherent when separated. Although one common type of (un)freedom manifests in the system of rights afforded by the mass violence of the state, three alternative varieties of (un)freedom were suggested here as a means to understand various non-state conceptions. Those three were “Negotiating the limits of language,” “Shouldering Incalculable Responsibility in Community,” and “Feeling an Obligation to Challenge Injustice.” After illustrating each of them through the thoughts of various scholars, thinkers, activists, and non-European traditions, examples were mentioned from each of the three contexts (UUA, MOVE, and taqwacore). Whereas the first (un)freedom addressed the limits and opportunities of language, the second one negotiated the ability to address universal burdens within the confines of community, and the third one referred to the constraints of conscience in relation to struggles for social justice. The second (un)freedom was further nuanced in

¹⁰¹⁹ David Graeber seemed to agree when he wrote: “Since slavery means above all the annihilation of social ties and the ability to form them, freedom meant the capacity to make and maintain moral commitments to others” (2011: 203). In other words, enslavement combined physical chains and mental coercion but simultaneously released captive persons from separate social obligations they otherwise would have had.

terms of the dynamics of “communal” and “imperial” aspects of social organization. The significance of this chapter was that it tied together for the first time the thoughts on “freedom” within each empirical context to broader traditions and schools of thought by using the concept of (un)freedom.

In conclusion, the central argument in this thesis is that in order to optimally understand any conversation about “freedom,” “unfreedom” ought to be sought out and highlighted through the concept of (un)freedom wherein it is assumed that there is no “freedom” without “unfreedom” and that any conversation about (un)freedom ought to be translatable to or from diverse cultural contexts including non-European and indigenous traditions.

Although the three contexts in this study were all predominantly English-speaking and located within the United States, the presence of non-canonical conceptions of “freedom” were found and these were readily connected to and understood alongside non-European traditions or other non-canonical conceptions that either rejected the state, rejected technology, or explicitly embraced certain “unfreedom” at the core of their philosophies.

In order to make more explicit the advantages of applying the concept of (un)freedom as a tool of translation, I shall briefly re-cap three benefits and its relation to the three contexts studied.

1) *(Un)freedom brings clarity to an incoherent concept.*

Whereas “freedom” implies that there is a single concept at the heart of the conversation that is (or can be) isolated from other key concepts, “(un)freedom” brings to the fore essential contextualization by beginning with relationship and assuming that at least two concepts are in dialogue with one another from the very beginning: apparent “freedom” and apparent “unfreedom.”

UUA: The idea of “freedom” for UUs is overtly bound to both UU conceptions and celebrations of community, congregational polity, and individual conscience as well as Universalist and Unitarian histories and heresies (speaking truth to power). The UUA is also bound to the violence of the state through its integration into the legal system (contracts, peer disputes, military chaplaincy, compatibility with imperial society, etc.).

MOVE: The idea of “freedom” for MOVE members is first and foremost associated with recognizing the wisdom of John Africa who explained and demonstrated what “freedom” means and how to achieve it. Submission to doing what is *right* is inherent to MOVE conceptions of “freedom” as it cannot be separated from MOVE members’ understanding of John Africa’s teaching, truth, health, justice, life, oneness, Mama Nature, and MOVE history.

Taqwacore: Any conception of “freedom” with Islamic conversations is immediately faced with the “unfreedom” of submission—the meaning of “Islam” itself. Although people associated with taqwacore may personalize or re-interpret what submission means, it has not completely disappeared as a concept for many of them.

2) *(Un)freedom enables the dismantling of colonial dissonance and the global Stockholm Syndrome.*

Whereas “freedom” obscures the acts of violence that lay behind the creation of “freedom” (e.g., enslavement, incarceration, etc.), “(un)freedom” encourages participants in conversations to look for the broader picture and, in particular, the dynamics of violence that have dominated institutions of “freedom.”

UUA: “Freedom” for UUs has long been associated with a social justice struggle as well as a largely passive (though often active) association with white supremacy and the social institutions rooted in white supremacy.

MOVE: “Freedom” for MOVE precedes enslavement, incarceration, and other systems of violence and thereby de-legitimized the systems of “freedom” that have built on those developments (as well as de-legitimized the accompanying philosophies of “freedom”).¹⁰²⁰ “Freedom” here was equated with simply “life” unadorned by any accessories such as state or technology. The teachings of John Africa aimed toward a complete dismantling of hierarchies (including white supremacy, economic disparities, and social hierarchies) and engaged in direct conflict with agents of the state. Incarceration status remains a prominent price members have paid.

Taqwacore: The very essence of “freedom” within taqwacore is one of rejecting the simplistic binaries of the “clash of civilizations” and thereby recognizes the violence of any narrative that attempts to force people associated with taqwacore, their lives, and their ideas into simplistic boxes. Furthermore, there is also a strong social current of social justice concerns within taqwacore in particular a strong rejection of doctrines and practices of white supremacy.

All three contexts were intimately tied to the Internet and the constraints that such technological dependency implies.

3) *(Un)freedom releases democratic conversations from the confines of white supremacists.*

Whereas “freedom” implies a conversation rooted in colonialist traditions and the reconstructed lineage from ancient Greece through the so-called Enlightenment, “(un)freedom” invites non-European understandings, assumes the possibility of many conceptions outside of those understandings, and enables bridges of understandings by connecting to other traditions.

UUA: The types of “interdependence” expressed by UUs is at least as accessible through *ubuntu* and indigenous traditions as it is through Hegel.

MOVE: The type of “Oneness” within MOVE is at least as accessible through Indian traditions (both from the Americas and India) as it is through Western pantheistic traditions.

¹⁰²⁰ It could be noted if it has not already been made clear: MOVE’s conception of “freedom” would be wholly misinterpreted and misunderstood if read according to the terms of traditional Western philosophies of “freedom.” (Un)Freedom, as outlined here, can help frame MOVE’s conception on its own terms while acknowledging parallels to other anticolonial traditions.

Taqwacore: Articulations of “freedom” within taqwacore while diverse clearly have strong ties to numerous traditions outside of the European canon (mostly notably impacted by Islamic conceptions of *tawhid* and *ummah* but also goddess traditions, ecology, and traditions of anticolonial resistance). Nearly as evident are Western counter-currents such as anarchism and, of course, punk wherein resistance to authority (clerical or governmental) are prominent.

In sum, (un)freedom as a concept provides no answers in itself neither in terms of governance, philosophy, or practice nor was it intended to. If it functions as it was intended, it can help clarify what is being said about “freedom,” suggest how seemingly contradictory concepts can interrelate, and welcome more people into conversations that affect all of us. By emphasizing limits and universal burdens that lurk behind or within all such conversations, it ought to also help direct conversational attention toward our shared ecologies, mutual obligations, and care for those most likely to suffer under the systems of oppression currently designated “free.”

Now one might wonder: Is it possible that “freedom” can someday make an etymological return to its roots and, once again, like *friya* refer to the bonds we share, the ties that connect us to our dear ones, the opportunities as well as constraints of community, and the burdens we share with our beloved?

This thesis has assumed that such a return is neither possible nor advisable in light of the existing associations that surround the term. A word, as splotches of ink on paper, or as a vocal utterance, is a sign that can potentially refer to whatever a group of people agree that it will refer to. As it is, dominant conversations, etched into the edifices of power, laws, constitutions, and textbooks have determined that the utterance of “freedom” and its visual sign are rooted, not in India and friendship, but in ancient Greece, in enslavement, in prisons, in tyranny, and in the so-called Enlightenment of European white supremacist thought. For today, *that* is the “real” meaning of “freedom” because that is what bears impact on our lives and helps structure our social orders. If, at some point, the institutions and organized violence surrounding “freedom” were to be dismantled and the term would sooner be associated with Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Malcolm X, and Philip Berrigan than with John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Isaiah Berlin, it might be possible to imagine that “freedom” could mean our “friend.” It is naturally possible that, at some point in the distant future, “freedom” could point our attention toward the beauty of finitude, the family of universal burdens, and the unity of existence. Indeed, a “de-liberation movement” would move in that direction: toward compassion, community, and the commitment to social justice for all living beings.¹⁰²¹ Until then, the concept of “freedom” is more akin to a virus that replicates the DNA of domination within our unconsciousness and

¹⁰²¹ “De-liberation” here refers both to the destabilizing of “freedom,” including the “liberty” offered by the state, as the center of conversation as well as the collective and egalitarian process of negotiating conversations. The two are interrelated. If conversations that have meaning for peoples’ lives are inclusive (democratic deliberation) then the subsequent changes will necessarily be de-liberating (de-centering “freedom”).

our conversations, shaping in part our daily behaviors, our ideological buildings, and our developmental burial — digging ourselves deeper into economic, ethnic, and technological systems of dependency, denial, and self-destruction. “Arbeit macht frei,” as some German planner well put it.

5. Concluding Thoughts: Toward Critical Inquiries of “Freedom”

Much of this thesis has dealt with language and the need for new vocabularies. Perhaps one way to sum up this thesis would be: Every Qallunaat needs to recognize ubuntu and Mitakuye O’yasin in order to become an effective sani-baat against the wétiko. If this is true, then we may need to learn more about one another’s languages in order to really begin to engage in conversations on more or less equal terms. Real life is not *Star Wars*. As soon as one translates any of those words into dominant conceptions of “English,” one loses their fuller meaning. At what point does a word from one language become a word in another?¹⁰²² At what point does an immigrant become a citizen?

The ancient Greeks formulated a problem labeled the Sorites Paradox (“sorites” being derived from the Greek word for “heap”). The traditional problem goes something like this:

- 1) 1,000,000 grains of sand constitute a heap of sand.
- 2) A heap of sand minus one grain remains a heap of sand.
- 3) How then, if step 2 is repeated 999,999 times, can a grain of sand (or zero grains if repeated one more time still) be said to constitute a heap?

This paradox is particularly relevant precisely because once the word “heap” has been defined as such, one can logically defend the proposition that an empty plot of land constitutes a “heap of sand” when no more than a two grains of sand remain. We could call this act the slippery slide. This slide becomes especially problematic when we apply binary descriptions to gradient reality (such as “grey” mentioned above). That is, when we use binary definitions, the object that is referred to by our definition can slide from one end of the binary to other without detection if there is no specific means of marking the threshold. For example, if we were to mark the limit for a “heap of sand” at 1,000,000 grains then we would know that, despite having a pile of sand on hand, it would no longer constitute a “heap” if there less than a million grains. As difficult as it may be to count a million grains of sand, it is even more difficult to measure abstract concepts such as “equality” or “justice.”

¹⁰²² One of my favorite quotes is of George W. Bush, Jr. who stated that the problem with the French was that they didn’t have a word for “entrepreneur.”

In other words, if one defines a term in a binary sense, let's say "freedom," and we have no means of calculating the threshold of the binary then it may be possible for it to "freedom" to become "unfreedom" without any ability to notice the difference. Addressing this dilemma has been one aim of this thesis. By speaking of (un)freedom, conversations about "freedom" may be liberated from the constraints that habits of domination, structures of exclusion, and inherent violence have weighed upon them.

One of the aims here has been to shed light on the exclusion that the term "freedom" in dominant conversations entails. To my knowledge, such a discussion has not seriously begun.¹⁰²³

There is a story that I have not told here. It's about a woman who grew up in a house with rats and mice who would constantly steal into the packages of food in the kitchen which had been taken from local dumpsters. She was raised on food taken from the garbage. Her parents were in and out of prison on a regular basis. She was young white woman from a prominent Irish-American family. Her name was Frida Berrigan (she has two siblings as well). She is the daughter of Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister and she told her story in a recent book *It Runs in the Family* (2014) that described the challenges of continuing a legacy of struggle for social justice while raising a family—both the one she grew up in and the one she now leads with her husband. Her mother was a nun. Her father was a priest. Today she attends a Unitarian Universalist fellowship. Her story may help disjoint our ideas about who or what a person is when we think we have categorized them.

MOVE members in particular have long been cast in a particular role that has seemed to many people to justify their exclusion. Judge Adams could declare that they did not constitute a religious group because no religious scholar was there to testify the facts. After the ruling that declared they were not a religion, no religious scholars apparently deemed them to be worthy of serious investigation. Despite the fact that this was the most serious aerial attack against Americans since the attacks on African Americans in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921, somehow scholars deemed MOVE to be unworthy of more attention.

Indeed, before the police dropped the bomb on MOVE's home and headquarters, Police Commissioner Gregore Sambor made the oft-cited declaration through his

¹⁰²³ A Swedish newspaper (*Dagens Nyheter*) recently undertook a study of four major history books in Sweden used for middle school (7th to 9th grade) instruction and noted that more Nazis were presented by name than women. This discovery was considered "shocking" and "horrible" by researchers. In contrast, the exclusion of people of color (and women) from conversations of "freedom" is taken for granted. Not are racists here mentioned by name, the entire tradition is *based* largely on the thoughts of male white supremacists. Yet this "revelation" seems to be deemed un-extraordinary and mundane. Although, I have certainly not studied the matter, I have yet to see *Dagens Nyheter*, the *New York Times* or any mainstream news source even raise this as an issue on a level remotely comparable to the article on Nazis and women. (For the DN article, see Mikael Delin, "Kvinnorna saknas i skolans historieböcker," *Dagens Nyheter* 15 January 2015.)

bullhorn at 5:35 AM on May 13, 1985: “Attention MOVE. This is America. You must obey the laws of the United States.”¹⁰²⁴ The point was clear — the police were setting themselves up to kill *foreigners* —not Americans. The police had implicitly revoked MOVE’s rights of citizenship by positing them as something outside of or different than “America,” and the media implicitly followed suit. One irony of this is that MOVE’s insistence on revolution and opposition to the state had more in common with Thomas Jefferson’s insistence on routine revolutions every generation than the U.S. government’s massive expansion and consolidation. The author of the booklet *25 Years of on the MOVE* was aware of that connection and cited the Declaration of Independence. Referring to the people of a nation, Jefferson wrote, “...when a long train of abuses and usurpations...evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.”¹⁰²⁵

Outside observers tend to overlook that fact. Yet if one looked closer at Jefferson’s words, it would not be hard to spot a clear (un)freedom: revolution was not merely a “right” but a “duty.” To feel compelled to pursue that sort of right/duty is the third (un)freedom in a nutshell.

Similarly, the MOVE members who remain incarcerated sit there because (1) they have persisted in their commitment to struggle against injustice and (2) most people have never heard of them or their case. The injustices against them continues in darkness and silence —because of words and how they are used to marginalize certain people.

By casting MOVE members in prototypes associated with terms such as “cult” or “black liberationist” as opposed to “Zen-like philosophy,” “environmental activists,” or “family-oriented community,” white scholars and activists have been able to conveniently ignore MOVE as irrelevant to white-dominant philosophies and activism.

Sometimes it has struck me as strange that the question could even arise: “Why is MOVE interesting? After all, they’re a tiny group. They make no difference. Why study them?” I find myself frequently reminded of their relevance. When my daughter and I went to see a documentary film about indigenous struggles in Central America, entitled *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth* (2011), I heard one of the film’s main speakers, Josefa “Chepita” Hernández Pérez, say, “It seems to me that white people think things are separate, as if there is no relationship between them. In our world nothing is separate. To indigenous people everything is connected.” It began to feel as if anywhere except white America (and those who have bought into the white American dream such as the government of Sweden), MOVE’s philosophy was relevant. And if we looked at those seven people in prison as Zen masters, how much longer would they remain there? How many UU campaigns would have rallied to their aid?

¹⁰²⁴ Washington (1989: 74).

¹⁰²⁵ *25 Years of on the MOVE* (1996: 3).

While we have seen a number of examples of activism in the context of taqwacore, it would be a mistake to characterize taqwacore as such as political or committed to social justice. In fact, while many persons associated with taqwacore such as Sabina England, Taz Ahmed, Yassin Merrigan, Marwan Kamal, Daniela Kantorová, and the De Osus have expressed overt support for Palestinians, Michael Muhammd Knight has consciously declined to take an active stance on Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is therefore worth bearing in mind a comment Arjun Ray posted in regard to popular conceptions of taqwacore:

...let's please not talk about the political point of Taqwacores. There isn't any, at least nothing you can qualify enough to disagree with. The kind of people who will talk to you about a cohesive point will not receive your questions with answers and speak mostly from pages of glossy magazines about how in their minds, four or five somewhat defunct bands of 250 miles or more distance between each comprise a scene. These writings which you have been shoveling onto the embers of this debate are mostly outsiders to punk and uninterested in the real content of taqwacore. They come to us with articles already fully conceived and use the power of selective perception to back themselves up. In that light, you might find it rude that we are "saving Islam from itself", and "putting the Islam back in punk" or whatever horsecrap they talk about. Believe me, I find it deplorable too.¹⁰²⁶

That is why the concern here is only with that which has been heard in voices of people who have been, to various degrees, associated that context. Rather than emphasize analysis of their texts, this thesis has aimed to provide the highest level of inclusion that one could provide in a dissertation that involves many voices, Level 5 (*X* is quoted extensively) and Level 6 (*X* is interviewed by author and quoted extensively). What would new conversations about "freedom" look like? The burden is not upon me to lay that vision out in exact detail. That burden is to be shared.

¹⁰²⁶ From Ray's comment posted to a blog by Taz Ahmed, "Taqwacore. Documented. X2," *Sepiamutiny*, 1 November, 2009: http://sepiamutiny.com/blog/2009/10/13/taqwacore_docum

Epilogue

A Grain of Sand

The Sorites Paradox is a problem that only appears because of words. It is not a problem that exists beyond human communication. The same holds true for “freedom.” If people had determined for “freedom” to mean no more than “friendship” then it could mean that. Now it has a life of its own. The compelling message of “liberation” then, if we are to maintain autonomy, may need to be countered with “de-liberation,” that is, a shouldering of burdens and a deepening of our bonds to one another.

*Do you see this grain of sand
Lying loosely in my hand?
Do you know to me it brought
Just a simple loving thought?
When one gazes night by night
On the glorious stars of light,
Oh how little seems the span
Measured round the life of man.*

*Oh! how fleeting are his years
With their smiles and their tears;
Can it be that God does care
For such atoms as we are?
Then outspake this grain of sand
I was fashioned by His hand
In the star lit realms of space
I was made to have a place.*

-Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

What does it mean to take a step toward shouldering burdens? This thesis has attempted to exemplify several times. Three more examples can be provided through white people who made the choice to take a step beyond the boundary of the Abbey that contains and constrains privileged people: Loren Hedstrom, Fred Pearce, and an editorial collective including Chris Meier, Marianne Mommsen, Serena Woods, Lori Potts,

Peter Weeks, and Priscilla Arnold. Hedstrom was a Republican hog farmer in Kansas in 1982 when his Lutheran church organized a delegation to Mexico and Nicaragua. After joining, he went to talk with farmers in both countries. First, in Mexico, they met with church leaders. They “started talking about this ‘preferential option for the poor’ that the Latin Church had taken.” At some level, it was a familiar language to him:

They were living and working among the poor. That was all well and good but then they started talking about why people were poor, and they said the United States was part of the reason. Well, I was very a conservative Republican—I come from Reagan country, you know—and I got quite upset about the things I was hearing.

Then we went to Nicaragua and I heard more of the same. I didn’t know anything about the history of Nicaragua, and they told us about the U.S. involvement over the years and how it helped keep this small elite in power.

But what really turned me around was listening to the people, listening to their dreams about their future. We talked to a lot of small farmers, just like me, who for the first time in their lives had a piece of land because the revolution was redistributing land to people who needed it. Now I’m all for respecting private property, but I do think there’s a limit on how much land one person should be allowed to own. But you see, they had this small elite who owned most of the of the land and got rich off the backs of the poor—and that’s just not fair.

I listened to what these people were doing. They weren’t forcibly taking over other people’s land. No, they were setting up sensible criteria for how much land a person could have and how to fairly redistribute the rest. So when I saw what they were trying to do, I couldn’t help supporting them.

This kind of experience is a very heavy thing—it shakes up everything you ever learned, everything you ever believed. And of course, it’s very hard to come back home to the same conservative community in Kansas and try to communicate what you have learned.¹⁰²⁷

Yet when he returned home, that was what he did. He was warned that if he began to speak, he would lose his lifelong friends. Yet he spoke anyway. And he did lose a lot of friends. In fact, even his wife and family members thought he had lost his mind. But he got in his car and started giving talks at Lions Clubs and churches all over the Midwest. He said he felt fortunate that after listening to his talks and reading more, his wife joined in: “Sometimes at the talks she’d get so riled up I’d have to say to her, ‘Whoa, mama, take it easy.’”¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁷ Benjamin and Freedman 1989: 12-13.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid 13.

Fred Pearce's journey was a solo quest. He wanted to learn about where all of the things that he owned or used everyday were made, who made them and under what conditions. He revealed a summary of his findings in his book, *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner* (2008). For him, it was not a church group that incited his interest in examining the downward path. It was a scientist:

One scientist I met recently told me he reckoned that the average household in Europe or North America has so many devices and such a variety of food and clothing that to produce the same lifestyle in Roman times would have required six thousand slaves — cooks, maids, minstrels, ice-house keepers, woodcutters, nubile women with fans, and many more. I started thinking about that statistic.¹⁰²⁹

Pearce wanted to discover not only his ecological footprint, but his social one as well. He found it problematic that “we know little about what our footprints are” and it “all happens so far away.” Unlike the white people whom Ms. Wakefield critiqued for magical thinking, Pearce not only knew of the “people and the pollution that sustain us are invisible to us” but he wanted to change it and in order to do, he felt that he had to “discover the hidden world that keeps us in the state we have become accustomed to,” he had to meet that world and the people who lived there.¹⁰³⁰ As he set out to find the sources of the cotton in his clothes, the computer on his desk, the shrimp in his favorite Indian dish, or the coffee in his daily mug, he began to realize what a daunting task it would be. His journey to search for the source of the gold in his wedding ring alone took him miles below the surface of the earth where South African gold miners collect gold in shaky shafts only to return to the surface where the HIV rates are as high as 35% percent. When he went in search of the source of the fair trade coffee that he regularly consumed, he ended up near Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. He sat and listened as an elderly coffee farmer confronted a representative from the British fair trade company. Mgase had asked the buyer how much they sold their coffee for in the UK. And was told that it was about six pounds (twelve dollars). Mgase then asked: “So you buy our coffee for one dollar forty-six. And sell it for twelve dollars. Is that fair trade?” Witnessing the precarious living conditions of Mgase and people like him, Pearce concluded “If we convince ourselves that we are paying a fair price, giving the coffee farmers a proper return, then we are deluding ourselves.”¹⁰³¹ From the clouds of black smoke from Chinese factories to Russian coal mines, it went on and on. The message was consistent. The myriad bonds that connect us are bonds to bondage, bonds of necessity, and bonds of dependency.

¹⁰²⁹ Pearce 2008: 3.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid 2008: 28.

The editorial collective including Chris Meier, Marianne Mommsen, Serena Woods, Lori Potts, Peter Weeks, and Priscilla Arnold was the one that published the first issue of *BLU Magazine*.¹⁰³² Beginning in 1998 and running 13 issues until 2001, BLU had been formed by a group of white activists who, in the words of publisher Chris Meier, described themselves as “politically informed and socially active ...comfortable and middle-class.”¹⁰³³ They were trying to move beyond the phase of “cause hopping,” moving from one issue or cause to another. So they began not with answers but by opening up for dialogue:

How do we, detached from the daily grind of economic repression on our over-furnished shelf in the bourgeois wasteland, become continuous in everything we do? How can we truly confront oppression, first in ourselves and then through the veins of modern society? That is the debate. The answer? We’re working on it. ...The revolution must begin within the individual and our relationships to one another. Then we can transform the community and the nation.¹⁰³⁴

In starting the magazine they opened up their pages for the voices of the EZLN, Assata Shakur, Mumia Abu-Jamal (who wrote the introduction for the first issue), and many others. The publication was published by people living with or affiliated with the Bruderhof “a Christian movement committed to communal living, non-violence, and justice.”¹⁰³⁵ Raised within the Bruderhof, those in the editorial collective did not necessarily begin with a revolutionary perspective. According to Priscilla Arnold: “All of us were pretty clueless. You know, ‘cops are good’—until we met victims on the other side.” According to Akash Goyal in the *Village Voice*:

The friends found their calling to street-level activism through their own life experiences. Features editor Marianne Mommsen, a Vassar dropout, discovered prison injustices during an internship and adopted the cause after leaving college. Arnold, a 23-year-old graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, found inspiration in the struggle to block the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal and in the plight of Puerto Rican political prisoners. Though Bruderhof members don’t necessarily condone the views expressed in *BLU*, they agreed to support the project out of respect for those who seek justice.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰³² According to an article in the *Village Voice*, “BLU” had once been “playfully dubbed” as the “Bruderhof Liberation Underground.” It is unclear if that was the initial Akash Goyal, “Out of the ‘BLU.’” *Village Voice*, 27 June 2000. <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/out-of-the-blu-6418041> Accessed 14 September 2014.

¹⁰³³ Chris Meier, “In gestation...” *BLU* 1, 1998: 1.

¹⁰³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰³⁵ *BLU* 9, no. 2 (2000: 2).

¹⁰³⁶ Goyal 2000.

Ultimately, *BLU* reached a global audience and a regular readership of 12,000.¹⁰³⁷ Each issue was opened to a wide range of activists, largely people of color. Issue 9 (Black August) contained, amongst other things, an article by former Black Panther and incarcerated activist Mutulu Shakur about the FBI and his son rapper Tupac Shakur, an interview with Bob Marley by Mumia Abu-Jamal, articles about Rastafarians, Black Panthers, Marcus Garvey, Geronimo ji Jaga, H. Rap Brown aka Iman Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, Malcolm X, and an interview with Delbert Africa of MOVE. With much of the content dealing with “freedom” (it was dedicated to “a celebration of freedom fighters”) its content was diametrically opposed to the content of the *Freedom* anthology by Carter et al. None of the voices celebrated in *BLU* were celebrated in *Freedom*. As Bob Marley said, “Christ is Rastafari! ...Rome is the enemy.”¹⁰³⁸ If Marley had seen Carter et al’s *Freedom*, it is likely that he would have recognized it as “Rome.” The issue also included an article that seemed to foreshadow some of the elements in taqwacore. Entitled “UK Asians Rise Up Chanting” the article covered musicians such as Fun-Da-Mental and Asian Dub Foundation. Pundit G of the latter group was cited as stating: “It’s very hard to be Asian and not be political. ...Music is a tool—we should be using that tool, it shouldn’t be a means to itself. We’re not the ‘Spicey Boys.’ We’re engaged in semiautonomic guerilla warfare.”¹⁰³⁹ *BLU* was not just a publication that shared voices, they also contact information to those voices that people could get engaged and write to prisoners directly.

In all three of these instances, white people stepped out of their comfort zone. Both Lorne Hedstrom and Fred Pearce transformed their lives by deepening their connections to relationships that already existed but which were in a “hidden world.... So far away.” Hedstrom followed a trail which had been paved with his tax dollars and Pearce sought to trace the global web of his personal consumption. Both discovered “unfreedom” on the other side of the border. The *BLU* collective were already familiar with community but, as with the vision described by bell hooks, they committed to a social justice beyond the confines of their limited community interests. When encountering the brutality that people of color had to face, they felt compelled to engage and resist.

It would seem that only by ignoring these daily “unfreedoms” for so many people in the world that conversations about “freedom” as something isolated from “unfreedom” could make sense at all. By moving toward even one step, we may notice that there are many more people who have been and are moving in similar difficult steps and that when we “clasped hands together,” our “burdens” become “more light.”

¹⁰³⁷ Goyal 2000.

¹⁰³⁸ Bob Marley interviewed by Mumia Abu-Jamal, *BLU* 9, 2000: 55.

¹⁰³⁹ Jason Landsel, “UK Asians Rise Up Chanting,” *BLU* 9, 2000: 42.

Audre, Lorde of the Guys?

During the last weeks of writing my dissertation I happened to stumble upon an article in the *New Yorker* entitled “Politically Correct Lord of the Flies.” Excerpts follow:

By the time Ralph finished blowing the conch, a large crowd had formed.

“Well, then,” he said, clearing his throat. “First rule: we can’t have everyone talking at once.”

Jack was on his feet. “We’ll have rules!” he yelled excitedly. “Lots of rules!”

Ralph explained, “We need to have ‘hands up,’ like at school. Then I’ll pass the conch.”

“Conch?” someone asked.

“That’s what this shell’s called,” Ralph said. “I’ll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it while he’s speaking. And he won’t be interrupted, except by me.”

“Just because we’re stranded doesn’t give you the right to use non-inclusive language,” Jack said.

The littluns muttered in assent.

“Uh, O.K.,” Ralph said. “So he or she can hold this conch when he or she is ...”

“He or she,” a littlun cried, “imposes a binary view of sexuality that excludes the gender-non-conforming.”

...“You are speaking from a position of privilege,” Jack said, “so you have no right to criticize us or tell us what to do.”

“Uh-uh,” Piggy interjected. “My auntie is a constitutional-law professor at Staffordshire. She says that ...”

“Sucks to your auntie,” Jack snapped. “Fatty!”

The littluns giggled.

“I’m not fat,” Piggy whined. “I am a person of size.”

“It’s a fair point,” Roger said. “Can we even call Piggy Piggy?”

“I suppose it depends,” Jack said. “Is it glandular?”

“No,” Piggy replied, sadly.

“Are there oppressive or systemic social factors involved? Are you poor?”

Roger whispered to Jack, “You’re supposed to say, Are you experiencing poverty?”

“Right. Are you experiencing poverty, Piggy?”

“Right now I am.”

...“Mansplain the world to us,” Jack crowed, “oh wise, almighty white cisgendered hetero upper-class man.”

The littluns wiggled their fingers.

“Oh, keep your hair on,” Ralph said.

“Microaggression!” a littlun cried. “My sister has alopecia.”

...“And another thing,” Jack said as he was being eaten by the snake and also a large boar. “This conch of yours. It’s clearly vaginal, but you’re using it as some sort of musical instrument to dominate us. That’s extremely problematic.

“But, by all means, ignore me,” he said to Ralph, who by then had died. “I’m just trying to make this a safe place.”

I had already written my commentary about *Lord of the Flies* in the Prologue when I read this. Although the text was certainly well-written and the author, Joe Keohane, is articulate, I cannot say that I found the piece any funnier than a joke about Jewish people. Instead, it is precisely this type of mocking of people’s attempts to re-negotiate language that belittles suffering and encourages the type of subtle everyday-bullying and dominance that took place both directly and indirectly in the *Lord of the Flies*. In fact, I somehow imagine that most cultures where people raise their voices in resistance are met with this type of belittling of their complaints. This column told me at least one thing about Mr. Keohane. He did not have a sibling or loved one who, as a transsexual, walked into the “wrong” bathroom and paid for it dearly. So I thought I would respond with an open letter of sorts (tucked away as it is in a dissertation that would be no closer to the top of his reading list than *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison*). So here it goes...

Dear Joe,

I read your column about *Lord of the Flies*, or more accurately, about people do things that I do. I hear that you find the whole thing with re-naming ridiculous. It may feel like annoying, like it constrains your life. Ruins the fun in literature. I get that. But how about we go visit Harvey Milk's grave or any other person whose crime was being who they were and living with a name that for some people meant —“This person

deserves to be bullied or even killed.” If you happened to have a child with a woman of color and you’re sitting down with her when she is 13 years old and she is reading *Lord of the Flies* as her school assignment, would it strike you at all as uncomfortable when you realize that she has not been assigned a single book to read where women of color are the protagonists but several on her reading list have consisted of nothing but white people?

I can appreciate why you would feel a compulsion to mock what people like myself are doing. I wish I was the only target. Being a white male I don’t have to deal with this every day and I can afford to take more mocking. But your mocking also hits those who do have to put up with this type of belittling every day. Do you really want to laugh at people who struggle to correct names as they see it in order avoid the violence caused by those names? Is it really that complicated? Abusive names lay the path for abusive behavior.

Do you know the story of Balpreet Kaur, the Sikh woman who had been mocked on Reddit? Did you read how she amazingly put a stop to the bullying? We can’t all respond as intelligently, calmly, and humbly as she did. I’ve just written a thesis wherein I undoubtedly reproduce mechanism of domination many times. But maybe we can use her example to remember that real people lie behind the targets of ridicule. And we might want to connect with them first before we conclude that it is okay to laugh at their expense.

“Freedom of speech,” as Hussein Rashid pointed out, does not appear in isolation from equality and kinship. I know it’s being “politically correct” in your mind to write “kinship” instead of brotherhood or fraternity but personally, I believe any talk about freedom begins with inclusion. As soon as we ever so slightly exclude people, like our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our partners, from the conversation, we may be using the word “freedom” but really we’re speaking elitism. And that’s not a conversation I am interested in pursuing. Like Audre Lorde, I am more interested in challenging violence in deed and in language. As we saw earlier, Lorde wrote, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

Lorde was battling cancer when she wrote that. Have you ever felt oppressed by a black lesbian with cancer? Does her use of the term “warfare” bother you? Her warfare, mind you, is first of all a defensive war. While pretty much all acts of war claim to be defensive they come with varying degrees of justification. African American lesbians are not known for subjecting others to a terrible amount of discrimination, threats, beatings, or killings. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of whites, males, and heterosexuals in their treatment of black lesbians. Secondly, Lorde also talked about the need to battle the oppressor within. Colonialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia all tend to have ways of getting our heads and committing damage of self-doubt, depression, and anxiety toward ourselves as well as conscious or unconscious prejudice against others. Her warfare is against the mentality and structure of warfare. Because she knows what it is like to be on the receiving end.

What would you like to be paid to trade places with somebody like her (black, female, and gay) for a year? In a well-publicized study conducted by Andrew Hacker, most white people, when asked how much compensation they would demand for becoming black, responded that they would want between 1 million and 50 million dollars for every year that they had to be black.¹⁰⁴⁰ How much you request in exchange if you had to give up your whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality? As Hacker observed, the implicit meaning behind the high sums requested was that white privilege does have a cost benefit. Yet even if that were to be acknowledged, that certainly does not mean that whites would want to start doling out millions of dollars each year to each black person. After all, you have felt disturbed enough by literary critique to mock those people who try to make some space in the world for people who do not fit into the prototypical image of what a “real” citizen should be like. If you could not give people of color, gays, or women even that much space, I have difficulties believing you’d voice support for a tax on “white skin/male/hetero privilege.”

But it’s not about taxes. Nor is it about coercion. As a human being, I think you know the feeling of connection with other people and when you are connected to somebody, I think you would be hesitant to mock them. Knowing their pain, I think you would feel concerned enough to do *something* if you knew what it could be. So that is my question to you, Joe Keohane, when you see your neighbor bearing a burden, what part of that burden would you be willing to carry? If you were a kid on the island of the *Lord of the Flies*, when and how would you have stopped the spiral of violence and domination? When you know that gay persons are chased and beat down in the street, what degree of sacrifice would you be willing to make that could lighten their load? Maybe the only burden that you would be willing to carry would be to think twice before writing another column that mocks the struggles of people who are subject to routine violence.

That may be enough. I’m not your judge but I suspect that you could do more than that. Yet, as you (or a different Joe Keohane from New York) wrote in a *Boston Globe* article in 2010, presenting facts may not change your mind.¹⁰⁴¹ In accordance with the study you cited, it can have the opposite effect. Like antibiotics, providing information can actually induce stronger denial. You wrote:

The problem is that sometimes the things they think they know are objectively, provably false. And in the presence of the correct information, such people react very, very differently than the merely uninformed. Instead of changing their minds to reflect the correct information, they can entrench themselves even deeper. “The general idea is that it’s absolutely threatening to admit you’re wrong,” says political scientist Brendan

¹⁰⁴⁰ Hacker 1992.

¹⁰⁴¹ Joe Keohane, “How Facts Backfire,” *Boston Globe*, 11 July 2010. http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/07/11/how_facts_backfire/

Nyhan, the lead researcher on the Michigan study. The phenomenon — known as “backfire” — is “a natural defense mechanism to avoid that cognitive dissonance.”

Your points are equally applicable to what I have referred to (perhaps annoyingly so) as “colonial dissonance.” That is, the kind of thing that makes white males write columns as you did that mock people who challenge violence in language. So I really don’t think anything I write could change your mind. After all, you did not end your article about “backfire” with any hopeful suggestion. But I do have a suggestion. Just an experiment. How about you vastly expand your circle of friends? As your current circle of friends apparently did not signal to you that kicking people who are down might not be a great idea, I think maybe you might have better luck if you widen your selection. Maybe by working with your local Food Not Bombs? Couch-surfing homes in Gaza? Or visiting a homosexual in prison every month for a year? I don’t know. But I do have faith that if you take a first step and genuinely connect with somebody on the other side of privilege, you’ll figure out the rest.

Free Will, Will-Free, or Get Free?

Something is wrong with dominant knowledge systems. We are using them expecting the to lead to something other than dominance and self-destruction. Many things do work theoretically and pragmatically on a small scale but the transfer of these practices and ideas to a massive scale where it needs to happen in order to effect meaningful change just isn’t taking place. The world is no closer to a world without massively destructive war today than it was before or after the 1940s. The choice is not a binary between “peace” and “war.” Instead, the question is about which types of war, for which causes, in which ways? How can we envision practices of effective, non-violent struggle in our daily academic lives?

Existing academic research is failing to stop the destruction of the planet. Much research fails even to stop contributing to its destruction. Likewise with creating massive economic disparity and ignoring people’s needs. I do not see a world of academic research that is closely tied to the interests and needs of most people. I see ivory towers and a lack of accountability because the political and economic institutions that organize academic institutions are not themselves accountable to the interests and needs of most people all claims to “democracy” withstanding.

As comedian Russell Brand stated in response to a journalist demanding to hear his political program, I would similarly state (my own variation written in brackets): “I’ve not invented it yet... But I say, but here’s the thing [academic institutions] shouldn’t do. Shouldn’t destroy the planet, shouldn’t create massive economic disparity, shouldn’t ignore the needs of the people. The burden of proof is on the people with the power, not people [writing their dissertation].”

I have tried here to articulate a means of talking about “freedom” that is inclusive of those who are affected by talk about “freedom.” I have tried to imagine a way that we can speak that is not arbitrarily shackled by language, priorities, and barriers of domination.

Yet I can already imagine what some of my old school friends still working at construction sites might think if they heard it: “So you wanna *ban* the word ‘freedom’? Now if that ain’t the stupidest thing I’ve heard all week...”

And they are right. That is, if I had been arguing to ban anything at all, it would be pretty stupid. First of all, I am not in a position to ban anything and secondly, the very idea of further burdening people who are not responsible for the violence of “freedom” with the additional violence of a “ban” would be pretty “stupidest.” Also, the idea of a ban, implies that there is a group who has the power to enforce it. I’m not a big fan of that idea either. I’m more about communication and trying to open it. Stepping up, stepping back, and listening as well as I can along the way. So my old friends from high school, what would I say? I’d say that this dissertation is written for people whose job is to make simple things complicated. And what I’m trying to say is not that complicated.

“So that word, what’d you call it ‘(un)freedom’? I’ll be damned if I’m ever gonna make sense out of that. (Never did understand what good academics were for anyway.)”

Exactly. Forget I ever said it. Throw it away. What I’d tell you instead is to think of “freedom” as always tied to “unfreedom” like a dancer is to music. First comes the music, let’s say your wife calls you on the phone and wants you to pick something up from the store, or your kids need a ride, and you need to buy some gas. And you’re in the middle of your work so you’ll tend to it when you get off. That’s the music. You may not like the sound of the song but if you are enjoying your life in any way then you are getting something out of it and you are dancing to those songs. You go to work and dance your way through the day so that you can get paid and dance at a club or dance your way to California for a vacation. Or let’s say you want immediate gratification (or denial) and decide to get wasted on 24-case of beer all night. So you figure you’ll make your own music and dance and then when you get fired from your job, you’ve got a whole different song to dance to: a song called “Up Shit’s Creek Without a Trust Fund (No money, bills to pay, and maybe losing your home).”

Or let’s say you are proud of your country, its history, and its “freedom.” You might think that the music is the national anthem, but the music is the sound of you opening the door of a recruitment office for the military because you need the money or education. There is a rhythm to your steps as you walk to the door. There is a whole song and dance that follows up if you get recruited and find yourself taking orders and risking your life without much “freedom of speech” along the way. Perhaps you’ll lose everything you ever had, maybe ending up paralyzed for life like my cousin R.J. who got back from Afghanistan with a new body quite unlike the old one. At that point, when you were so proud of the “freedom of speech” that you had, there will be a lot more music to listen to but you won’t have much space left to dance.

Or maybe you are still a “rebel,” a true Son of the South. And I’ve always appreciated that attitude in you —that you don’t give a shit about what authorities think —least of all, Yankee authorities. So you might feel like your “freedom” is in doing what you want. You drive how fast you want, you date whomever you want, and you smoke pot as much as you want. You put on your moves but you can’t forget the grooves. Marijuana is not legal in Virginia (yet). So the music you may end up hearing is the rhythm of a jail cell door closing behind you every day when you are put back into your cell. Along with all those other people who are locked up without harming anything more than their lungs and maybe some other cells in their bodies, you’ll have plenty of music but the dance floors are pretty cramped.

So what I’ve been trying to say with this thesis and all of these words is that all cultures know what music is. And all cultures know the meaning of dance. So when the music starts playing, let everybody get on the dance floor and shake their thang. That’s what I’ve been trying to say. And I think you’ll get it. No footnotes necessary. And that’s why I sometimes long to be back on the construction site. Framing houses. Painting walls and trim. And knowing when the work day is done.

And dude. I know that it’s messed up but guess what— you know how I know something that I’ve read or written is worth keeping? When it makes me cry. Then it’s a keeper. It’s like a litmus test. Because, like you, I sometimes don’t give a shit about authorities and know that whatever is in my heart is what matters. And then I wake up. And I realize that I was dreaming for a bit. I am accountable to a lot of other people. I cannot simply say whatever I want. I wake up to the music. And I realize that I have some space to work with but my words, my choices are all part of this relationship between the music and my willingness and ability to dance.

Taqwacore 2.0, Violence 0.01, and University Logo 101

Something remarkable struck me about 2014. The Islamic State garnered tremendous attention across the world for incredibly violent acts. I never cease to be amazed over the media’s incestuous relationship with violence, ostensibly covering it but also perpetuating it. Something the media did not notice was Universalist Muslims founded by Anila Muhammad in 2014 and carried on by her colleagues after her death. Vegetarian, pro-queer, non-violent Islam? It’s not been enough to capture headlines but it is a claim to a universal and a Universalist type of Islam —one that is both in conversation with conventional Islams as well as with taqwacore. It is a type of Islam that seems to me to be the wave of the future precisely it is the type of Islam that so many people will find themselves needing as they attempt to adapt two different cultures into one. It is a perfect peaceful fit in stark contrast to their polar opposite: the Islamic State. Universalist Muslims may quietly rise behind the headlines while the Islamic State competes with other states for the monopoly on mass violence.

Part of the point with this thesis is that mass violence begins with nascent violence, that is the violence inherent in language and uncritically perpetuated. For that reason, one of the most helpful tools, I believe, for exposing and discussing violence within language is the system described by white psychologist Marshall Rosenberg as Non-Violent Communication (NVC). Rosenberg listed a number of more subtle techniques for ways that violence integrates itself into our language and behavior such as comparison, denial of responsibility, demands, and making judgments. By comparing ourselves to others or by comparing people to one another, he stated, people become more alienated from compassion. By denying responsibility for behavior people similarly block the pathway to be able to openly share with others (and oneself) what relationship one has to one's own feelings about one's actions.

Rosenberg exemplified with Hannah Arendt's work on Eichmann and the way that he and his fellow Nazis used *Amtssprache* to describe the responsibility-denying language they employed which equated into roughly: "Superiors' orders," "Company policy," and "It was the law."¹⁰⁴² According to Rosenberg, the act of making demands is in itself another form of violent communication because it implies threat of punishment or blame as a result of non-compliance. Most interestingly, the very act of characterizing something as "good" or "bad," (even "violence" itself) is for Rosenberg an act of violence and these judgments sneak themselves into daily conversation through subtle evaluations as opposed to non-charged observations (even when a person thinks that no evaluation is present). For example, words such as "often," "seldom," and "frequently," are ways that something sounds like a simple observation ("My neighbor often parks her bike in the hallway") but which inconspicuously conceal an evaluation ("often" which signifies either a positive or negative evaluation). An observation without evaluation ("I have seen my neighbor's bike in the hallway three times since I moved in") describes observable phenomena in specific terms (and without assumptions). Alternately, one can separate an evaluation from an observation such as the statement "you are too generous" which conflates observation with evaluation can be separated into "When I see you giving all your lunch money to others [observation], I think you are being too generous [evaluation]."¹⁰⁴³ Such moral judgments are better suited toward the forced manipulation of society and resources, he argues, than they are to genuine communication:

It would be in the interests of kings, czars, nobles, and so forth that the masses be educated in a way that renders them slavelike in mentality. The language of wrongness, *should*, and *have to* is perfectly suited for this purpose: the more people are trained to think in terms of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness and badness, the more they are being trained to look outside themselves –to outside authorities–for the definition of

¹⁰⁴² Rosenberg 2003: 19.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid 30.

what constitutes right, wrong, good, and bad. When we are in contact with our feelings and needs, we humans no longer make good slaves and underlings.¹⁰⁴⁴

Not only would a language that minimized judgment increase autonomy and connection with oneself, it would also be more practical. Rosenberg (citing semanticist Wendell Johnson) asserted that language tends to be a relatively static tool to describe the complexity, fluidity, and developing interactive relationships of real life that often cannot be adequately captured by language. Therefore he proposed that people develop a “literacy of needs” in order to develop “the ability to get in touch with ourselves” and be liberated from the cultural conditioning that separates people from one another. Rosenberg wrote about his own initial reaction to these thoughts:

The Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti once remarked that observing without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence. When I first read this statement, the thought, “What ridiculous nonsense!” shot through my mind before I realized that I had just made an evaluation. For most of us, it is difficult to make observations, especially of people and their behavior, that are free of judgment, criticism, or other forms of analysis.¹⁰⁴⁵

According to Rosenberg, moral language, with its emphasis on judgment and judges to determine those judgments, has been developed largely by ruling class interests. Therefore, many language patterns are ill-suited for promoting egalitarian and compassionate connections. “We have inherited a language that served kings and powerful elites in domination societies,” he wrote.¹⁰⁴⁶ This is in line with Korzybski’s observation in regard to the contrast between speedy technical development and sluggish philosophical progress. Korzybski wrote in 1933 that “a conflict is created and maintained between the advance of science affecting conditions of actual life and the orientation of our rulers, which often remain antiquated by centuries, or one or two thousand years.”¹⁰⁴⁷

This brings us to the cover design. Lund University has a seal (we could just as well say “logo”) with a lion, cross, sword, and a book for nearly 400 years. The message in Latin around it is *Ad utrumque*: “Prepared for both.” That is, the book is accompanied by the sword. Its meanings can be interpreted in various ways: the book is dependent upon the sword, the sword is dependent upon the book, the book is an extension of the sword, the sword is an extension of the book, the university as an extension of the nation-state, etc. With a crown and a cross, there is also a theology that can be read into the image. If Jesus said, “He who lives by the sword dies by the sword,” and “if someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn your other,” then how does one

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid, 28.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid 171.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Korzybski 1933: xcii.

interpret the sword alongside the cross? While some might refer to the “Lutheran” background, it can be seen in light of the previous discussion about Faith Community-based Anarchisms that there is a long tradition of Christians who reject the sword altogether. The Christ that Lund University is representing is not the Rastafarian Christ, it is the Christ of Rome if it would be translated into the dichotomy presented by Bob Marley. That a Swedish university, which is no longer bound to the Lutheran faith, should remain bound to violent theology would seem an unnecessary violence. A suicidal “lion” in contrast to the lion with the sword makes the sword visible without engaging in violence against it. Instead, it reveals what swords were designed to do: kill.

If we recall our discussion of prototypical images, then what does this violent image say about what it means to be “Swedish.” Who is welcome here? Who is *more* welcome and who is *less* welcome? What sort of welcoming to Lund University might a Muslim feel upon seeing the sword and cross on every book published by the university? Are Muslim Swedes welcome as equals to non-Muslim Swedes? Is this celebration of violence and constant unconscious commitment to the mass violence of the state something that a university as a presumably “non-violent” institution wants to perpetuate? If we allow space for these little swords, we cut the path for the bigger ones. Sweden today is currently a major arms exporter. What role do Swedish universities play in contributing to the weapons industry? In *Designed to Kill: The Case Against Weapons Research* (2013), John Forge wrote “If it is morally wrong to harm (without justification), it is also morally wrong to provide the means to harm (without justification).”¹⁰⁴⁸ If we recall Adin Ballou’s remarks, we know that he would state that we are responsible for that which engender. This means that if we somehow contribute to weapons research or institutions that support weapons research, we are also culpable for how those weapons are ultimately used. To turn a blind eye and reject our role is to submit to the existing order of domination which thrives on this type of diffusion of responsibility. It is precisely this type of diffusion that requires people with privilege to shoulder considerably more than their own load and everyone who can to shoulder somewhat more if our shared loads are to be carried at all (and, if so, more evenly distributed).

By changing the logo of the university, I mean no insult to any of the administrators, professors, or workers at Lund University. To the contrary, I aim to honor them with honesty by pointing out something that we may daily overlook but which, after deliberation, we may choose to reconsider. We have been educated to cultivate our blindspots. This is why I call for de-education. We have been raised to accept global hierarchies of vastly asymmetrical power relations. This is why I call for decolonialization. We have been separated and constrained by dominant conversations about “freedom” at the expense of universal burdens, shared responsibilities, as well as ecological, social, and psychological limits. This is why I call for de-liberation.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Forge 2013: 302.

Of Burning Men and Women

As I wrapped up this dissertation in the few days left before submitting it, I received a message from an old friend in Virginia. She is living on borrowed time she says. Her condition and compounded ailments have progressed so much that she could die any moment. What words does one send to a person as they move onward? Consolation? Hope? Love? Or, another possibility... are words just various forms of failure? We can send words but being with that person at every moment when one is present with them is irreplaceable. Any word after that is just a reminder of presence. And presence, whether we are included or not, whether we describe it as "free" or "unfree," is unavoidable. Even in death. And so I breathe. And I carry each friend, each family member, each universe with each breath. Because I would not be here without them. There is a moment when breath is suspended. As it turns, is absorbed, re-negotiates what it means to be alive right now. And then I let go. I breathe out. I think of breathing out, every little breath, as a little death. Exhaling is as necessary as inhaling.

In 1968, a young woman named Linda Ault was driven to the desert in a car as she held her dog named Beauty. She had made the mistake of having sex with a young officer in the military who was married and her parents were determined to punish her. When they arrived to the desert Linda's father handed her a gun and told her to shoot her dog as a punishment. She took the gun, put it to her own head, and pulled the trigger. In killing herself, she kept Beauty alive. Her horror- and grief-stricken parents were obliged to report the incident but were not charged with any crime.

How can we make sense of this? Perhaps for most readers, unlike for Linda Ault's parents, the outcome was not terribly unpredictable.

Yet seen in the light of the basic concepts of this dissertation, it ought to be quite explicit. Linda would have rather killed herself than harm her beloved dog. There could be no separation between her life or her freedom and that of her dog. Had she killed her own dog, she would have harmed herself and imprisoned herself with a wracked conscious for the rest of her life. There was no other option for her (except to refuse to fire the gun altogether).

Her death is but one example of how clearly the illusion of the individual can be exposed. Even in relation to one animal, this woman recognized their lives as too tightly bound to be able to commit the dog harm. Beauty. For the parents, who undoubtedly saw the animal more as an object than a loved and living being, this would have been a powerful lesson to their daughter that bad actions have bad consequences. Their assumptions about what it meant to be human were frightfully off-base and they paid for it dearly. The gap between map and territory proved fatal.

The apparent order of life, as Riyad Shahjahan, suggested, may need to be shaken up in order for us to even see the violence around us. The violence that lives through us. Sometimes the change of language can be facilitated by changing environment, creating a new, even tentative community, and experiencing, at least for a moment,

what Haidt referred to as “elevation.” A concrete vision of a different world. To know that it is at least possible not just to “think different,” but to “be different.”

Beginning in the late 1980s, Burning Man took off as a popular phenomenon in the 1990s.¹⁰⁴⁹ It became known as an annual week-long event of music, performances, art, ritual, and carousing, in the desert near Black Rock City, Nevada. Money was banned, creativity was encouraged, and participants—all attendees—contributed something to design a wide range of cultural experiences to share with one another. The spirit of mutual aid and shouldering incalculable responsibility permeates the environment. People often come back feeling transformed.

The stereotype has been that of naked people painting their bodies blue and dropping acid but it has been so much more than that. 25,000 people attended in 2000 and since 2008 the annual attendance has not dropped below 50,000. Initially, there were no police, there were hundreds or a few thousand participants, no official rules, and no entry fee. Over time and after great publicity, the event began to attract 30-50,000 people, police began to patrol the area (even if they generally maintain a hands-off approach), ten principles were formulated for participation as well as a number of other more specific rules, and entry fees exceeded \$300. Among the ten principles conceived were “Radical Self-reliance” (meaning that people need to bring to the desert their means of survival), “Radical Self-expression” (meaning that people contribute their own creativity to the larger collective), “Communal Effort,” “Civic Responsibility” (regard for public welfare laws), “Leaving No Trace” (responsibility to clean up), and “Radical Inclusion” (all people are welcome and ‘weirdness’ is normalized).

Yet to some degree Burning Man has always been based on a certain degree of exclusivity in terms of who knew about it (how information is shared), who will feel likely to recognize themselves in the host of fellow participants (reflecting pre-existing forms of social segregation), and who has the time and ability to make a week-long trip into the Nevada desert (class barriers). Former attendees have furthermore critiqued Burning Man for the reproduction of gender roles, employing double-standards such as permitting the Burning Man Organization the exclusive right to sell products at their onsite café, enforcing the legal ownership of images that take place at Burning man, and the high entrance fees.¹⁰⁵⁰

Former Burning Man attendee Keith Spencer said that although Burning Man sounds like a “socialist utopia,” yet it is also loved “unironically” by capitalists who have used it as a networking event with exclusive “\$16,500-per-head” parties.¹⁰⁵¹ Elite Burning Man attendees can mingle with people like tech-billionaire Mark Zuckerberg who flew in on a private helicopter. Burning Man’s own census showed that the

¹⁰⁴⁹ Doherty 2004.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See Orlando 2007; Zawinski 2002; Hughes 1999.

¹⁰⁵¹ Spencer, Keith A. “Why the Rich Love Burning Man.” *Jacobin* 25 August 2015.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/burning-man-one-percent-silicon-valley-tech/> Accessed 9 September 2015.

number of attendees who make more than \$300,000 2010 to 2014, a year nearly doubled from 1.4% to 2.7%. According to Spencer, the tech-industry presence there is so strong that Tesla CEO Elon Musk, stated that Burning Man “is Silicon Valley.” Whereas participation was originally more or less egalitarian, workers are now paid by wealthy participants “to build and plan their own massive (and often exclusive) camps” and, according to a whistleblower at a camp for Jim Tananbaum, work fifteen- to twenty-hour days at a flat rate. According to Spencer the internal inequality at Burning Man is also informed by and reinforces inequality in the U.S. at large, perpetuating the ideas that “vague notions of participation [can] replace real democracy, ... the only form of taxation is self-imposed charity” and these “mostly white, mostly men ... can remake the world without anyone else’s input.” Citing Zuckerberg’s \$100 million donation to New Jersey private charter schools, by-passing the democratically guaranteed public school system, Spencer argued that this foreshadows a future society in which “the commons are donated by the wealthy, rather than guaranteed” and democracy is undermined by placing it “in the hands of the elite few who gained their wealth by using their influence to cut taxes and gut the social welfare state in the first place.” For Spencer, “the idea of radical self-expression is, at least under the constraints of capitalism, a right-wing, Randian ideal,” in a tech-industry culture that has thrived on unpaid labor and the sale of personal information from online profiles of those who express themselves.

It became a festival that rich libertarians love because it never had a radical critique at its core; and, without any semblance of democracy, it could easily be controlled by those with influence, power, and wealth. ... When ‘freedom’ and ‘inclusion’ are disconnected from democracy, they often lead to elitism and reinforcement of the status quo.¹⁰⁵²

The contradictions of Burning Man—at once both radical and transformative as well as a reproduction of existing power hierarchies— made me think about sacrifice. People attend Burning Man for an experience and to share their art or their message. But do people attend Burning Man to *give* or to *sacrifice*? What conception of “freedom” drives people at Burning Man? The “Man” is burned every year but the “Man,” what in the 60s and 70s meant the “establishment,” is always waiting for each participant as soon they leave Black Rock City, Nevada. What builds social movements and what do we build social movements around? Burning Man is something amazing in many respects and thousands of people have devoted tons of energy into producing magical moments for one another. Yet if the burning only happens once a year, then where does that leave the rest?

Nearly a decade before the taqwacore scene had even assembled or had a name, it found its first martyr: Kathy Change (see Fig. 29 and 30). This is not to say that I have

¹⁰⁵² Spencer, Keith A. “Why the Rich Love Burning Man.” *Jacobin* 25 August 2015.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/burning-man-one-percent-silicon-valley-tech/> Accessed 9 September 2015.

ever heard anyone associated with taqwacore ever mention her name, but I do believe that if she had died in 2006 rather than 1996, many would have claimed her as one of their own. Furthermore, in discussing her case, Joseph Shahadi analyzes variants of suicide as either egoistic or altruistic (Durkheim's terms). According to Durkheim, a person with weak bonds who commits suicide does so without regard for others (egoistic suicide). A person with strong bonds who commits suicide does so in partnership with others (altruistic suicide). Yet Chang(e) clearly did so in a sort of partnership with (or on behalf of) others even though her supposed community (University of Pennsylvania students) did not appreciate her act. Shahadi therefore imagined a third category: performative suicide. "By committing suicide, an egoistic individual advocates self-determination and freedom in the most basic terms: the right to choose between life and death. However, in performatic suicide, that expression of ultimate autonomy is designed as a sacrifice." Rather than egoistic suicide which is private to the person their concerns or altruistic suicide which is private to the community and their concerns, performative suicide, as in Kathy Change's case, is a public act dedicated altruistically for a larger audience beyond one's immediate community. I think people in the taqwacore scene might have understood that.

Here too we see someone engaging in all three (un)freedoms listed in this dissertation: negotiating the limitations of language, (she changed her name from "Chang" to "Change"); shouldering incalculable responsibility in partnership (her quest to bear the burdens of global violence was sustained during lifetime by her comrades, community, and their context); and the third one, feeling an obligation to challenge injustice (she felt compelled to resist what she felt was wrong with the world with all of her life and spirit).

Yet what about the community—how did they react? The taqwacore scene had not, as noted, even started. Yet, let's take another example. There were eight Americans (all European or Asian American) who killed themselves in protest of the war Alice Hertz, Hiroko Hiyasaki, Norman Morrison, George Winne, Roger LaPorte, Ronald Brazee, Florence Beaumont, and Eric Thoen. Two women, four men. Half of them were either Quaker or Buddhist (one of the Quakers, Norman Morrison, was honored with a stamp by North Vietnam). Of the remaining ones, one was a Catholic Worker, two were unspecified Christians, and one was Unitarian Universalist. This act self-immolation by a Unitarian Universalist, Florence Beaumont, was an example of performative suicide. On October 15, 1967, she set herself on fire at the foot of the federal building in Los Angeles. Her act was not even rooted in her closest family (her husband had no idea of her plans) to say nothing of her local Unitarian Universalist congregation. That would not, however, hinder them from embracing or at least honoring her act and dedication. After all, Quakers have been very torn about how to respond to Norman Morrison and Alice Hertz. Yet they remember them. As for Florence Beaumont, I have never seen her name mentioned in a UU context, I have never heard a UU mention her, and her name does not appear in a search of the *UU World* archives. UUs are clearly not torn by her act.

Part of the reason may be sexism. The Quaker Alice Hertz received far less attention than her male counterpart Norman Morrison. Similarly, two UUs were killed in Alabama by racists during the Civil Rights movement, James Reeb and Viola Gregg Liuzzo. Yet a 2015 search for Liuzzo’s name on *UU World’s* archive turned up 64 hits while Reeb’s name garnered more than twice that (142 hits). Also, Reeb had his own entry in *The A to Z of Unitarian Universalism* by Mark Harris. Liuzzo had no entry. Beaumont’s action, however, moved at least one prominent UU: Her minister, and the person who delivered a sermon in her honor following her death, was Reverend Stephen Fritchman.

That said, it would seem that something more than sexism is at work for Beaumont to be completely neglected by Unitarian Universalists altogether. My personal hunch is that, in part, UUs do not want to endorse suicide in any way as a choice for activists. It goes completely against the traditional emphasis on the individual, the tendency to celebrate the body among UUs, and the preference for conventional means of protest (civil disobedience, marching, petitions, lobbying, educational campaigns, etc.). Yet Tim DeChristopher was celebrated as something like a folk hero in UU circles when he willingly went to prison on behalf of environmental justice. His action, by UU standards, was fairly extreme.



Fig. 29 and 30
Kathy Change flyer from 1996 and Kathy Change in action in Philadelphia 1992. Photo by Diane Nemea Laessig.

Subsequently, I suspect there is yet another aspect: many people/UUs are not comfortable dealing with suicide/death —especially not the combination of death as a symbol of sacrifice to the greater whole. After all, if the act of self-immolation by Florence Beaumont could be made to make sense in Unitarian Universalist theology, then what would that say to UUs today in terms of how they might be compelled by their conscience to act as part of “the interdependent web of all existence,” not to mention the “goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all”? One

ought to recall at this stage that UUs tend to be, on the average, among the wealthiest of denominations in the United States and they are, at the same time, the stingiest denomination, giving less of their wealth to their very own congregation. How could people like that make sense of the actions of Florence Beaumont? In a world of severe structural disparity, it would seem that the gravity of colonial dissonance would compel many UUs to simply turn away. And so they did.

UUs in general and the UUA in particular have not chosen to honor the legacy of Florence Beaumont. Her story has been invisibilized even though she was one of them. Likewise, her vision of “freedom” was excluded. Her act seems to have suggested that she too knew of what were then the Six Principles but that her interpretation of the commitment to “affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man” and a “vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace” may have been a radically different interpretation of the same words by many of her fellow UUs. At the time, her widower, George Beaumont stated that she had “lived for the peace movement.” her act was “a religious rite far beyond the hypocritical posturings of orthodoxy.” At a press conference he stated that her act was “a supreme sacrifice to humanity, to peace and freedom for all mankind.” Continuing, he told his audience:

...The barbarous napalm that burns the bodies of the Vietnamese children has seared the souls of all who, like Florence Beaumont, do not have icewater for blood, stones for hearts. The match that Florence used to touch off her gasoline-soaked clothing has lighted a fire that will not go out—ever— a fire under us complacent, smug fat cats so damned secure in our ivory towers 9,000 miles from exploding napalm, and *that*, we are sure, is the purpose of her act.¹⁰⁵³

Two days before her self-immolation, Florence Beaumont had told her best friend — the only person who knew of her plan: “I have to do it because I’m no better than the Buddhist monks who burned themselves alive in Saigon. But they were so far away. It has to be brought closer.”¹⁰⁵⁴

Do I see the actions of Linda Ault, Kathy Change, and Florence Beaumont as exemplary? Absolutely. They devoted their lives to something that gave them meaning. They cultivated a sense of connectedness that acknowledged but transcended the body. We do not need to act exactly as they did but, one way or another, “we need to burn in order to shine.”

Yet, to be clear, when I say “the actions,” I am not referring only to the final act of taking their own lives. Instead, what I see as exemplary and what I see in their model as something that can be followed by other people in similar situations, is their daily practice of commitments that came long before that final act. Through those commitments, they cultivated a sense of being willing to die for a life that was greater

¹⁰⁵³ Dunphy 1968: 220.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid 227.

than their body—a life that was not constituted by a dog, a Vietnamese monk, or a Pennsylvania student but the relationships that each of them had to those beings, the relationships which they died for and the relationships which, in turn, manifest to some degree in the relationship that each of us has to all dogs, all monks, all students, all life. Amongst other things, the stories of Linda Ault, Kathy Change, and Florence Beaumont are, like the stories of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, John Africa, and Balpreet Kaur, stories that talk about perseverance, commitment, and devotion. Whether or not their communities remember them or their lives are forgotten, the marks of their convictions have been made. In the words of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, “Apparent failure may hold in its rough shell the germs of a success that will blossom in time, and bear fruit throughout eternity.”

Each of these people, by committing themselves in their daily lives, they were saying: “This is what love looks like.” It’s a difficult choice in many cases, no doubt. Yet, in doing so, they were also negotiating the confines of conscience and circumstance and saying: “This is what (un)freedom looks like” —choosing without choice, willing without “freedom,” and being without words or form.

I end this thesis as I began it, with the theme of death. Death is not some sort of distant event but rather integrated into our lives with every moment, with every breath that we can take until our lungs take no more. Yet, as with the spirit of Kathy Change, our lives are not restricted to our lungs’ ability to breathe any more than our minds are restricted to the neurons in our brains. Whatever movement we make continues to resonate somehow, somewhere in the interdependent web—whether forces attempt to silence those movements or not. Life, together with death, and through the vibrant relationship between these two ambiguous categories feeds on nothingness as a worm in the soil. In the dark, ever-present.

In 2006 an event was held in Philadelphia honoring the tenth anniversary of Kathy Change’s death. One of the speakers that day was Pam Africa of the MOVE Organization.

De-liberation Movement

I am afraid that my being your slave will prevent me from speaking, even though my case is strong, and that if I win the argument I may for that very reason suffer harm. Those whose pride is great do not take kindly to hearing superior arguments from their inferiors.

-Andromache¹⁰⁵⁵

A just person will ignore his pride when he hears what is right, an unjust person will ignore what is right and hold fast to his goddamn pride.

-John Africa¹⁰⁵⁶

In the year 2000, Antioch College was having a recorded statement by Mumia Abu-Jamal serve as the commencement address to graduates. A few people protested idea of a “cop-killer” being allowed the opportunity to speak from behind bars. One of those protesters was Maureen Faulkner, widow of police officer Danny Faulkner whom Abu-Jamal was convicted of killing. She stated:

Since Danny is not here to speak, I will speak for him. And I also want to speak out for all the victims that are here today and all the police, fallen officers who have lost their lives. What Antioch College is doing is wrong. There is right and wrong in this world. There is good and evil. Mumia Abu-Jamal is evil. ...On December 3, 1981 Danny lost his freedom of speech, his liberty, his pursuit of happiness. Therefore Mumia Abu-Jamal should forfeit *his* freedom of speech.¹⁰⁵⁷

In 2014, she succeeded in pressing Pennsylvania lawmakers to pass the “Re-Victimization Relief Act” (Faulkner sat next to governor Tom Corbett as he signed the bill). The law “allows people to take civil action against criminals for conduct that causes a continuing affect of the crime”¹⁰⁵⁸ and would even hinder journalists from interviewing people such as Abu-Jamal because the public voice of such prisoners could perpetuate the pain of their crime by causing emotional injury to victims or their relatives. Rather than take a stand for or against this law, I would like to ask the reader to attempt to understand the perspective of Faulkner here. As with the example of identification with the oneness of life and cockroaches mentioned earlier, this is a similar exercise.

¹⁰⁵⁵ A quote from ancient Greece, see Alston et al (2011: 65).

¹⁰⁵⁶ John Africa, “ON THE MOVE,” *FIRST DAY* 15, 1.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Maureen Faulkner, Reaction to Abu-Jamal Commencement Address, 29 April 2000.
<http://www.c-span.org/video/?157374-1/reaction-abujamal-commencement-address>

¹⁰⁵⁸ Chris O'Rourke, “Re-Victimization Act Signed,” *SECV 8 News*, 22 October 2014,
<http://www.secv8.com/index.php/11457-re-victimization-act-signed> Accessed 23 November 2014.

If one is so pained by the permanent loss of a loved one and the person who was convicted of their death has been celebrated by world famous actors and musicians and that person's name and image are depicted on t-shirts that one sees on teens in the street, then what sort of escape can there be from the pain of the crime? If the person has been convicted and locked away then should not their voice as well as their body be locked away? Faulkner has been pressing for the execution of Abu-Jamal for decades to no avail.

I certainly have my own views concerning the question but I think it is worth mulling over without any answer or explication for the reader. The plight of Maureen Faulkner goes directly against many of themes that have been discussed in this thesis. A white victim and a black villain. Incarceration, not as inherently problematic, but as *not harsh enough*. "Social justice" as referring to something that one ought to receive in the form of punishment for criminals meted out by the state. "Freedom of speech" as something that the state must curtail to protect the vulnerable. Theories and discussions are far too little. In fact, they are completely meaningless because none of the talk in the world could heal the wounds caused by the loss of a loved one. Even the death penalty would not be enough to heal the wounds but at least it could bring a sense of closure and a sense of justice in the name of her husband. How could she not fight on her husband's behalf with all her might as a way of demonstrating her life-long love for him?

Two months after the "Re-Victimization Act" was signed on October 2014, Abu-Jamal's nearly 37 year-old daughter, Samiya "Goldii" Abdullah, died due to illness. I wondered when I read about her death what thoughts or feelings passed through Maureen Faulkner's mind. After all of these years, she has nonetheless forged a relationship to Abu-Jamal albeit an adversarial one. She would inevitably hear about his loss. Would she feel vindication? Would it bring at least a slight sense of delight? Would she imagine the feeling of losing one's child that one has been unable to raise due to incarceration? Would the loss of his daughter remind her of her own loss and cause her to imagine that his pain at that time might have been similar to her own pain? Would she wonder if he would ever be drawn back to the last time that he saw her as she was ever drawn to the last time that she saw Danny? Would she consider calling a temporary truce to write him or Samiya's mother a note of condolence in honor of the shared pain that two human beings can feel—even across lines of battle? Even now, in October 2015, as Abu-Jamal has been diagnosed with hepatitis C and has been refused treatment by the prison, I wonder if there is any amount of suffering that she would find too great for him or if her own suffering has been so great, a suffering which has been attributed to Abu-Jamal, such a thought would be unthinkable. I wonder how she felt about the reasoning of the grand jury that agreed that no city officials would be prosecuted for the deaths of eleven people because no prosecution would bring them back to life. And why no city officials ought to be sitting on death row.

I don't have answers to those questions but I raised them because I think they touch on some underlying issues of this thesis: they suggest that the lines that shape our relationships to others are the contours of the veins that call us into being. Through

these veins we live and move. We are animated into life even if the shape —from a certain distance and angle— might look something like a solitary individual. The moon calls the tide within our bodies home one day or another, individual or not and our connections —real or imagined—become apparent in the death we all inevitably share. Yet to share death, we also share life and it is here in this life that the difficulties appear.

For the most difficult questions are ones of violence —the nascent violence of language, the narrative violence of stories, the social violence of communities, the physical violence of weapons, and the psychological violence of believing that somehow these weapons are actually the keys to peace.

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to articulate a means by which conversations of “freedom” can be de-liberated in order to become more coherent, more inclusive, less abusive, and less dismissive of ecological limitations.

I have suggested three types of (un)freedom that might facilitate that. I have told stories about others and about myself. And now I’m done.

In the end, I do not have much faith in theories or words. I agreed to a bargain in which I would receive funding to write a book and my intention is to fulfill that bargain. However, I cannot say that the words and phrases matter remotely close to the meaning of a simple moment when one turns off the lights, turns off all cellphones and computers, and turns off the stereo ...to just listen. Listen to the ocean of silence within, filled with the massive currents and rumblings of our unconscious minds. In that silence there are storms to weather and seasons to abide by that no words can match. Silence too is a language and through it we may learn to speak the language of mountains and streams, forests and deserts. I cannot say that I speak that language well. A thesis exceeding 400 pages demonstrates that pretty clearly. But then I may have more faith in words than I sometimes like to believe.

A nagging doubt has clung to my skepticism regarding the impact of words. In part, this doubt (or “hope” if one prefers to call it that) is due to the feelings of transformation that I have felt in reading many of the words I’ve cited here. This impact within me was captured in a series of comments by Reverend Ellen Cooper on June 21, 2013 during a workshop entitled “Occupy Your Faith!” at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. She began her talk by asking the audience how many of them had seen the homeless man sitting on the corner outside of the convention center. Most hands went in the air. Then she said,

His name is Wayne. He’s from Indiana. He gets kicked out of the Salvation Army shelter every morning at 7:30 AM. We had breakfast together. He heard his own name spoken. Now I can’t go by him anymore and pretend I didn’t see him.

Now neither can you.

During her presentation she emphasized the need to develop means of communicating with one another across boundaries (something along the lines of the “universal translator” in Star Trek). Its technology is behavior however —not an electronic device. It requires learning other languages. It requires people averse to the Bible (a

commonality for many in the room) to learn to be conversant in the metaphors and language of the Bible —because that’s the language of mainstream America. It requires stepping out of one’s comfort zone. Cooper emphasized: “Real service means being inconvenienced. ...We are called to actively resist comfort. ...Freedom inevitably means insecurity and responsibility.”

If this thesis has accomplished anything, it would be to provide some names and stories as maps in the world. Words cannot build or share terrain, but they can become maps. Through maps we just might be better able to build bridges to one another and, through our connection, figure out some answers to those difficult questions together. In itself, this thesis has aimed not to provide any answers —only one step of a movement in dialogue and de-liberation toward de-education, de-carceration, de-militarization, and de-colonization.

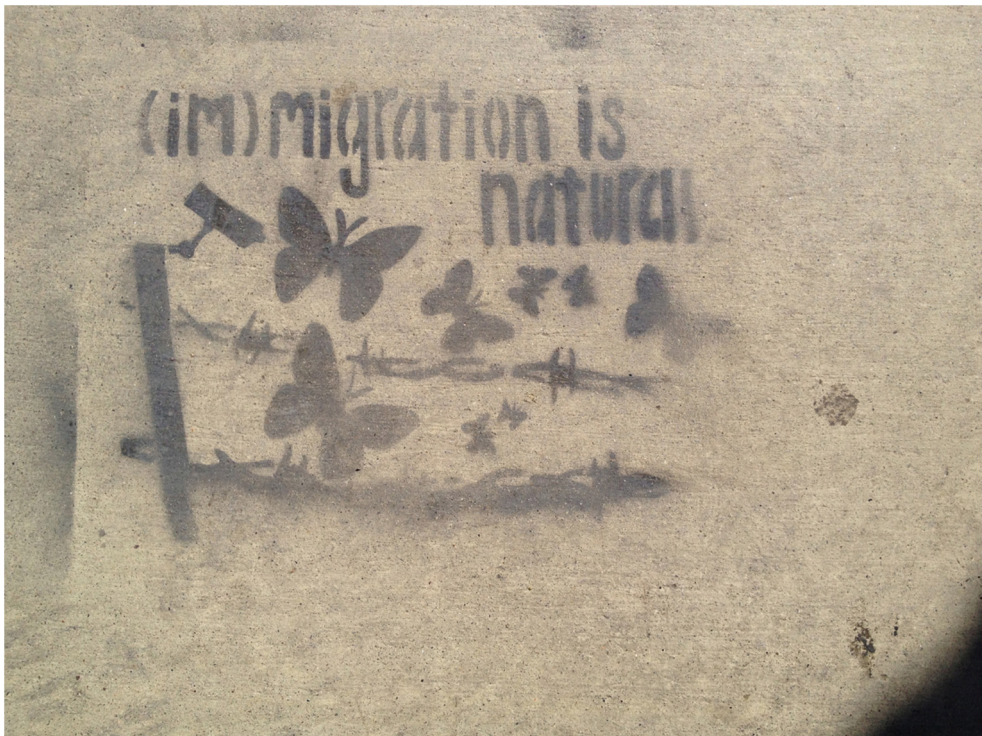


Fig. 31
Street art San Francisco: (im)migration is natural. Photo by Daniela.

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Appendix 1: UUA-related texts

Part 1 Various Principles

The “Five Principles” proposed in 1943 and rejected in 1944:

1. Individual freedom of belief;
2. Discipleship to advancing truth;
3. Democratic process in human relations;
4. Universal brotherhood, undivided by nation, race, or creed; [and]
5. Allegiance to the cause of a United World Community.

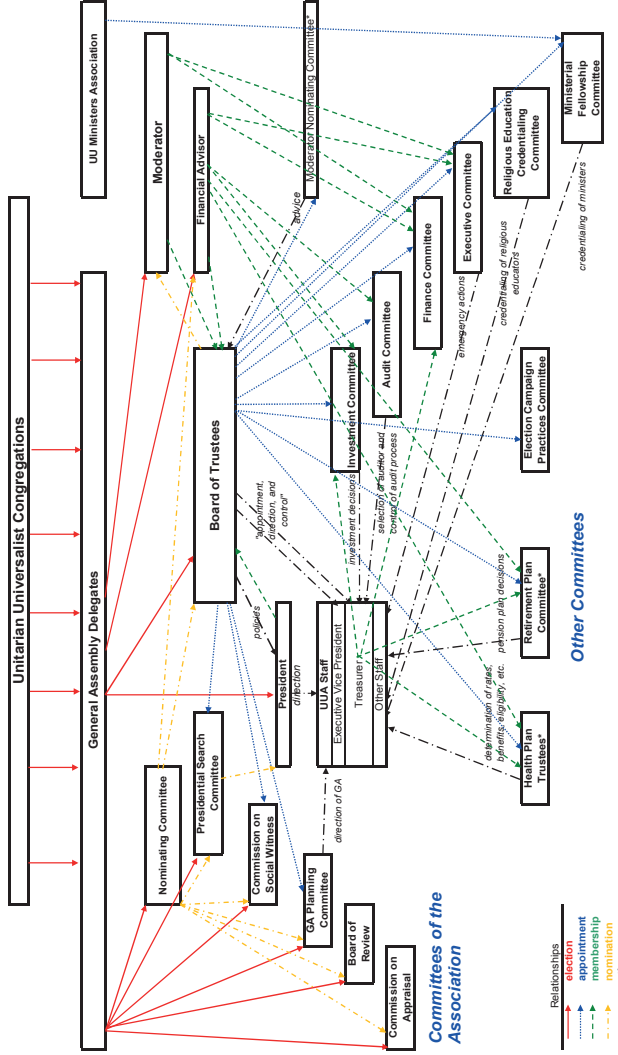
Appendix, Fig. 1

The Six Principles of 1961:

1. To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
2. To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;
3. To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
4. To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
5. To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
6. To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land.

Appendix 1, Fig. 2

**Unitarian Universalist Association
Governance Organizational Chart (as of July 2013)**



Committees of the Board of Trustees

Other Committees

All committees and similar groups created or given authority by the bylaws, rules, or board action.
*Committees with an asterisk following their name were created by board action; others are from bylaws or rules.

Not shown: Board committees, working groups, etc., that advise the board and help it do its work
Staff-appointed committees that advise the president and staff

revised June 2011

Appendix 1, Fig. 3 Unitarian Universalist Executive Governance Chart

LUND STUDIES IN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

GENERAL EDITORS:
ANNE-CHRISTINE HORNBORG
JONAS OTTERBECK
OLLE QVARNSTRÖM
JOHAN ÅBERG

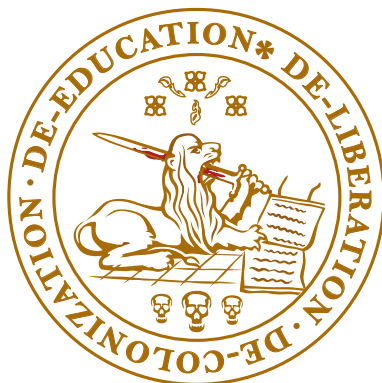
GENERAL EDITOR (1-29): TORD OLSSON

1. Catharina Raudvere. Föreställningar om maran i nordisk folktro. Stockholm 1993.
2. Anders Åkesson. Från Muḥammad till Mu‘āwiya. Utvecklingen av militär strategi och taktik i ett religionshistoriskt perspektiv. Stockholm 1994.
3. Anne Sofie Roald. Tarbiya. Education and politics in Islamic movements in Jordan and Malaysia. Stockholm 1994.
4. Jan Lundius. The great power of God in San Juan Valley. Syncretism and messianism in the Dominican Republic. Stockholm 1995.
5. Britt-Mari Näsström. Freyja - the great goddess of the north. Stockholm 1995
6. Leif Stenberg. The Islamization of science. Four Muslim positions developing an Islamic modernity. Stockholm 1996

7. İlhan Ataseven. The Alevi-Bektaşî legacy. Problems of acquisition and explanation. Stockholm 1997.
8. Garbi Schmidt. American Medina. A study of the Sunni Muslim immigrant communities in Chicago. Stockholm 1998.
9. Arne Wiig. Promise, protection and prosperity. Aspects of the "Shield" as a religious relational metaphor in an ancient Near Eastern perspective. An iconographical and textual analysis. Stockholm 1999.
10. Bodil Liljefors Persson. The Legacy of the Jaguar Prophet. An Exploration of Yucatec Maya Religion and Historiography. Stockholm 2000.
11. Jonas Otterbeck. Islam på svenska. Tidskriften Salaam och islams globalisering. Stockholm 2000.
12. Jonas Svensson. Women's Human Rights and Islam. A Study of Three Attempts at Accommodation. Stockholm 2000.
13. Philip Halldén. Islamisk predikan på ljudkassett. En studie i retorik och fonogramologi. Stockholm 2001.
14. Anne-Christine Hornborg. A Landscape of Left-Overs. Changing Conceptions of Place and Environment among Mi'kmaq Indians of Eastern Canada. Stockholm 2001.
15. Lena Löwendahl. Med kroppen som instrument. En studie av new age med fokus på hälsa, kroppslighet och genus. Stockholm 2002.
16. Jürgen Offermanns. Der lange Weg des Zen-Buddhismus nach Deutschland. Vom 16. Jahrhundert bis Rudolf Otto. Stockholm 2002.
17. Martin Gansten. Patterns of Destiny. Hindu Nāḍī Astrology. Stockholm 2003.

18. Torsten Janson. *Your Cradle Is Green. The Islamic Foundation and the Call to Islam in Children's Literature.* Stockholm 2003.
19. Leif Å Carlsson. *Round Trips to Heaven. Otherworldly Travelers in Early Judaism and Christianity.* Stockholm 2005.
20. André Möller. *Ramadan in Java. The Joy and Jihad of Ritual Fasting.* Stockholm 2005.
21. Ann Kull. *Piety and Politics. Nurcholish Madjid and His Interpretation of Islam in Modern Indonesia.* Stockholm 2005.
22. Mats Bergenhorn. *Öppna universum! Slutna traditioner i Salman Rushdies Satansverserna.* Stockholm 2006.
23. Kristina Hellner Taylor. "Who are you to tell us our history?" *Kultur och religion i hawaiianers möte med amerikansk mission.* Lund 2007.
24. Anna Törngren. *Psychê. Själens antropologi i det antika Grekland.* Lund 2008.
25. Lars Steen Larsen. *Western esoterism. Ultimate Sacred Postulates and Ritual Fields.* Lund 2008.
26. Abdel Baten Miaji. *Rural Women in Bangladesh. The Legal Status of Women and the Relationship between NGOs and Religious Groups.* Lund 2010.
27. Ask Gasi. *Melamisufism i Bosnien. En dold gemenskap.* Lund 2010.
- 28a. Åsa Trulsson. *Cultivating the Sacred. Ritual Creativity and Practice among Women in Contemporary Europe.* Lund 2010.

- 28b. Pernilla Gardeberg. *Mirakel, mysterier och moraliteter. Från puritanism till New Age - en religionshistorisk studie* av Helen Shucman och *A Course in Miracles*. Lund 2010.
29. Simon Stjernholm. *Lovers of Muhammad. A Study of Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufis in the Twenty-First Century*. Lund 2011.
30. Eli Göndör. *Muslimska kvinnor i Israel. Religionens roll i vardagslivets förflyttningar*. Lund 2012.
31. Marte Nilsen. *Negotiating Thainess. Religious and National Identities in Thailand's Southern Conflict*. Lund 2012.
32. Hege Markussen. *Teaching History, Learning Piety. An Alevi Foundation in Contemporary Turkey*. Lund 2012.
33. Johan Cato. *När islam blev svenskt. Föreställningar om islam och muslimer i svensk offentlig politik 1975-2010*. Lund 2012.
34. Martin Lund. *Rethinking the Jewish-Comics Connection*. Lund 2013.
35. Erica Li Lundqvist. *Gayted Communities. Marginalized Sexualities in Lebanon*. Lund 2013.
36. Anthony T. Fiscella. *Universal Burdens: Stories of (Un)Freedom from the Unitarian Universalist Association, The MOVE Organization, and Taqwacore*. Lund 2015.



The Burdens of All

There are Zen students who are in chains when they go to a teacher, and the teacher adds another chain. The students are delighted, unable to discern one thing from another. This is called a guest looking at a guest.

-Linji

What do Zen master Linji, Muslim scholar 'Abbād ibn Sulaymān, and Comanche thinker Parra-Wa-Samen have in common? Among many other things, they share the fact that they are all excluded from the reigning conversations within academia about what "freedom" is, how it can be understood, and how it ought to be applied in the world. They share that place of exclusion with the vast majority of the world. The sword of colonialism continues to strike today from the oil fields of the Middle East to the literature on our shelves. This dissertation aims to begin a conversation about that exclusion and how we might begin to undo some of the massive violence that much of the world is subject to every day.

*The burdens will always be heavy,
The sunshine fade into night,
Till mercy and justice shall cement
The black, the brown and the white.*

-Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

