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ARTICLE

Is Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal for Postcolonial Women?

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Abstract

This paper examines whether relational autonomy can serve as a plausible ideal for postcolonial women despite persistent critiques that autonomy functions as a vehicle of liberal imperialism. It aims to reconstruct relational autonomy in a way that disrupts the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. To this end, it introduces the "axis of imperial imposition," an analytical dimension that assesses how liberal-imperialist institutions condition the formation of volitional commitments and the exercise of agency in contexts where liberal normative frameworks are encountered through foreign imposition. Through the hypothetical case of "Western-oriented woman," the paper argues that internalist accounts, which address epistemic hierarchy primarily through individual authenticity, are insufficient for this axis. It instead defends dialogical accounts that shift the focus to dialogical reflexivity and answerability, showing how postcolonial women can retain autonomy through local justificatory dialogue grounded in concrete socio-historical contexts. The paper further argues that self-regard in "creative appropriation"—the competence to reconfigure life-constructing materials from one's situated knowledge—is necessary for the proper functioning of such dialogue. It concludes that postcolonial women's autonomy is secured not by passively adopting liberal normative frameworks as universal standards but by actively reconfiguring them through locally grounded justificatory practices.

1. Women's autonomy in postcolonial contexts

Autonomy—especially when defined in opposition to religion and culture—has been treated as a poisoned chalice for postcolonial women. Critics have argued that assuming all women will eventually seek autonomy in the same way as Anglo-European women reproduces a logic of saviorism, marginalizing diverse voices of women in postcolonial contexts (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013; Khader 2019, 2020; Mahmood 2005; Mohanty 1988; Narayan 2002). This line of critique represents a feminist variation on the broader charge of liberal imperialism (Mehta 1999; Pitts 2005): autonomy is described as a

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"Western" parochial ideal whose diffusion constitutes an integral part of cultural imperialism. The critique exposes the epistemic injustice that has structured Anglo-European scholarship, wherein postcolonial women's own perspectives on their lived experiences are often dismissed or rendered unintelligible.[1]

Feminist theories of relational autonomy have not been exempt from these critiques. The literature on relational autonomy has offered valuable insights into how social relations and power structures shape women's autonomy, and considerable attention has been devoted to women's autonomy in postcolonial contexts. Nevertheless, like other conceptions of autonomy, relational autonomy has been criticized for marginalizing the voices of postcolonial women whose views diverge from Anglo-European perspectives (Herr 2018; Khader 2019, 2020). This criticism arises in part because relational autonomy often continues to operate within the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts, which defines autonomy primarily in terms of maintaining sufficient reflexive distance from local norms that prescribe hierarchical social relations. Can relational autonomy, then, serve as a plausible ideal for postcolonial women? The aim of this paper is to provide a positive answer to this question. However, I argue that this is possible only if relational autonomy is conceived in a way that *disrupts*, rather than reproduces, the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. In other words, rather than abandoning relational autonomy as an inherently imperialist ideal, I suggest reconstructing the concept in a way that *resists* liberal-imperialist institutions.[2]

The question of whether relational autonomy is inherently imperialist has been discussed along what I call *the axis of local oppression*: an analytical dimension that assesses autonomy in terms of how local norms, especially those that prescribe hierarchical social relations, affect a person's formation of volitional commitments and the exercise of agency. Here, the focus of the debate is on whether women's autonomy is constrained when they internalize these local norms. Those who believe that women's autonomy is constrained argue that certain contents of cultural and religious traditions can be outright oppressive and seriously impair women's autonomy (Oshana 2006, 2014; Stoljar 2000, 2014). Postcolonial feminists typically criticize this line of argument, highlighting how postcolonial women exercise meaningful agency by bargaining with local patriarchy, and how some may even lead morally fulfilling lives through prescribed social roles (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013; Herr 2018; Khader 2011, 2019, 2020; Mahmood 2005; Narayan 2002). While I acknowledge the importance of this debate, I engage with it only insofar as it provides the necessary contextual background, since the paper has a different focus. Instead, the paper aims to highlight the terrain that existing literature

[1] I use the term "postcolonial" in a broad sense, extending beyond societies that experienced direct colonial rule to include those integrated into liberal-imperialist frameworks without a formal history of colonization by Anglo-European powers. Also, while I refer primarily to "women" for expository simplicity, my discussion is intended to encompass a broader range of gendered subjects whose experiences of autonomy and subordination are shaped by comparable patriarchal and imperial structures.

[2] By "liberal-imperialist institutions" or "institutions of liberal imperialism," I refer not only to the legacies of direct colonial rule but also to more indirect forms of cultural imperialism sustained through international institutions and global power structures. This follows Iris Marion Young's notion of cultural imperialism, defined as "the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm." Under cultural imperialism, a person experiences the dominant group stereotyping one's group, rendering the particular perspective of one's own group invisible, and marking it as the Other (Young 1990, 58–59).

overlooks, because it has primarily framed the question along the axis of local oppression.

The axis of local oppression typically structures the debate on autonomy around two contrasting views: either local norms are the source of oppression because they are fundamentally incompatible with the ideal of autonomy, or autonomy is an imperialist concept because it denies the moral significance of local norms that contradict its ideal. In my view, structuring the debate in this way largely neglects the situation of local feminists who employ liberal values, including autonomy, as a conceptual tool to resist certain forms of local oppression. Are their efforts inherently imperialist? It would be overly simplistic to answer this question with a simple "yes," as doing so would fail to do justice to their genuine efforts to improve women's lives. Nevertheless, I argue that their commitment to liberal values raises unresolved problems that warrant further analysis, which can help illuminate why existing theories of autonomy have been inappropriate for postcolonial contexts. This motivates me to introduce a new axis to the debate, namely, *the axis of imperial imposition*: an analytical dimension that assesses autonomy in terms of how liberal-imperialist institutions condition the formation of volitional commitments and the exercise of agency, particularly where liberal normative frameworks are encountered through historically structured relations of power, such as colonization, cultural imperialism, and global epistemic hierarchy. The axis of imperial imposition focuses on analyzing the relationship between liberal imperialist-institutions and the autonomy of postcolonial women, especially those who adopt liberal values, including autonomy itself.[3]

To illustrate my point, I introduce excerpts from the writings of Taeyoung Lee, one of South Korea's pioneering feminists, who led reforms of family law that had restricted women's basic rights in the name of preserving Confucian heritage.[4] Like other early Korean feminists, she faced difficulties in dispelling the imperialist character of this enterprise, given that liberal normative frameworks entered Korean society through foreign imposition, a process often described as "Westernization."

> *Namjonyeobi* (male supremacist ideology) has been deeply embedded in perceptions of women throughout the 500-year history of the Joseon Dynasty. Consequently, Korean social institutions and family organization have been structured around the male-centered extended family, and *Mipungyangsok* (good traditions) has primarily served to keep women in bondage. . . . Just as French

[3]I am well aware that the alignment between feminism and liberalism has always been uneasy in Anglo-European scholarship. Anglo-European feminism has been cautious about subsuming feminist agendas under a liberal framework, as liberalism has often been a male-centric philosophical and political framework, cloaked in universalist claims on individuality, neutrality, and impartiality. Therefore, it is important to note that the interchangeable use of autonomy, liberalism, and feminism in this paper only reflects a popular view—often shared and reproduced by postcolonial subjects themselves—that struggles for women's basic rights are, in general, understood as advancing a liberal conception of human rights, a notion regarded as distinct from their local traditions.

[4]Taeyoung Lee is a prominent figure in South Korean feminist history who initiated the family law reform movement in the early 1950s. The movement continued for 60 years and encompassed a wide range of major and minor legal reforms, including marriage equality, the right to divorce, women's inheritance rights, women's parental rights, and adoption rights. Lee is best known for playing a pivotal role in the abolition of the *hoju* system, which legally precluded women from becoming the head of the family. The primary opponents of the reform movement were *yurim*, the Korean Confucian community dedicated to researching Confucianism and practicing Confucian rites (Lee 2009).

> women became exemplars of enlightened efforts to achieve gender equality, Korean women must also find the courage to awaken from their deep slumber and cry out at the top of their lungs. Let us cast off our lazy, ignorant, and superstitious ways of living … (Lee 1963, 12, 15)[5]

What is problematic about this statement? From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Lee's statement could be criticized for adopting an elitist and orientalist stance—one that devalues the lives of ordinary women who follow Confucian customs by portraying them as backward compared to their European counterparts. She appears complicit in cultural imperialism insofar as she assumes the Enlightenment tradition to be inherently superior to local traditions. As an autonomy theorist, however, my concern lies elsewhere. I partly sympathize with Lee's view that certain elements of Confucian customs profoundly restrict women's lives and that liberal normative frameworks can, at times, serve as a useful resource for revising these oppressive elements. Nevertheless, I argue that Lee's statement fails to articulate a promising vision of autonomy for postcolonial women. This is because, within the framework of "Westernization," Korean women may exercise autonomy vis-à-vis Confucian customs, but remain bound by liberal-imperialist institutions.

Drawing on this observation, several questions arise along the axis of imperial imposition concerning the autonomy of postcolonial women. In contexts where liberal normative frameworks are introduced through foreign imposition, how do liberal-imperialist institutions influence a postcolonial woman's development and exercise of autonomy? Although liberal-imperialist institutions undoubtedly exert substantial influence on postcolonial women's psychology, their implications for these women's autonomy remain underexplored. In my view, this gap is partly due to the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts, which continues to shape how autonomy is theorized. Autonomy theories often assume that postcolonial women who develop volitional commitments to liberal values—and who thereby come to resemble Anglo-European women—are sufficiently autonomous and thus require no further analysis.[6] As a result, postcolonial women are relegated to a peripheral position within discourses of autonomy: either as potential victims of cultural oppression or as mere subscribers to Anglo-European liberalism, that is, as those who are already "like us." I suggest that relational autonomy can serve as a plausible ideal for postcolonial women *only if* it provides them with a way to move beyond these peripheral positions.

The remainder of the paper is organized into three sections. In section 2, I further articulate the axis of imperial imposition by introducing a hypothetical example, the *Western-oriented woman* (*WW*). I then explain that internalist accounts of relational autonomy, which address the problem of epistemic hierarchy primarily through the notion of individual authenticity, are largely insufficient to address the dimension of epistemic hierarchy illustrated in *WW*. Section 3 turns to dialogical accounts of relational autonomy (Benson 2005; Westlund 2003, 2009, 2012, 2014) and demonstrates why shifting the focus of autonomy to dialogical reflexivity and answerability is better suited to addressing *WW*. More specifically, I argue that the notion of critical interlocutors, as

[5]This translation is my own. The original text is in Korean.

[6]For instance, in her discussion of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Marina Oshana contends that, despite Hirsi Ali's troubling views on Islam, she nonetheless exemplifies an autonomous person (Oshana 2014, 146–47). In my view, further analysis is needed to determine whether figures like Hirsi Ali can be considered autonomous *in relation to* liberal-imperialist institutions.

developed in Andrea Westlund's answerability model, can be particularly useful because it can be extended to highlight the role of local justificatory dialogues in postcolonial women's autonomy. However, unlike Westlund, who primarily understands autonomy as a formal procedure that does not require a notion of self-regard, I propose incorporating self-regard in what I call *creative appropriation*: the reconfiguration of existing life-constructing materials from a perspective that emerges from one's concrete circumstances and experiences. I then show why this modification is important for the proper functioning of local justificatory dialogues that support the autonomy of postcolonial women, and why this is crucial for developing an account of autonomy that resists liberal-imperialist institutions. The final section concludes by underscoring the broader contributions and implications.

2. Axis of imperial imposition

2.1 Western-oriented woman

There have been numerous criticisms of portraying postcolonial women as victims of their cultural traditions. Critics have demonstrated that postcolonial women are not merely constrained by cultural traditions but exercise meaningful agency in negotiating them (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013; Herr 2018; Khader 2011, 2019, 2020; Mahmood 2005; Mohanty 1988; Narayan 2002). While I find this line of argument largely persuasive, I also think that it addresses only one dimension of postcolonial women's lives. Through excerpts from Taeyoung Lee's writing, I intend to foreground a particular relationship between liberal-imperialist institutions and postcolonial women that has been largely underexplored; that is, the relationship between liberal-imperialist institutions and postcolonial women who adopt liberal values as part of their volitional commitments.

Postcolonial women, like other postcolonial subjects, typically live through radical historical ruptures marked by complex interpenetration, illicit blending, and the mutual transformation of local and foreign cultures. As Jane Gordon (2014) highlights with the notion of creolization, in the context of radical historical rupture, previously unconnected people "whose mutual recognition was unprecedented, were thrown suddenly together in ways that abruptly disrupted previous more coherent and discrete orders of collective meaning" (10). Various responses to such historical contexts exist in postcolonial societies: some may seek to reassert the distinctiveness of their local cultures, some may become complicit with imperial power, and others may develop hybrid identities in which multiple and competing forms of belonging coexist within a single individual. These diverse members of a postcolonial community inevitably interact with one another, generating new terms of social cooperation and political legitimacy that often blend local and foreign cultures. Theoretical approaches that focus solely on recognizing the distinctive features of local cultural traditions are, therefore, inadequate to fully address these diverse lived experiences.

I argue that a complete assessment of women's autonomy in postcolonial contexts must consider the *axis of imperial imposition* alongside the axis of local oppression. As noted, the axis of imperial imposition is an analytical dimension that assesses autonomy in terms of how liberal-imperialist institutions condition the formation of volitional commitments and the exercise of agency, particularly where liberal normative frameworks are encountered through historically structured relations of power, such as colonization, cultural imperialism, and global epistemic hierarchy. Along this axis, a person's autonomy is examined *in relation to* institutions of liberal imperialism: how a

person engages with liberal values encountered through foreign imposition; what effects liberal-imperialist institutions have on a person's perception and judgment; and how she navigates the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. To further illustrate my point, consider the following hypothetical example, *Western-oriented woman* (WW):

> *Western-oriented woman (WW):* Minji, a Korean woman raised in a traditional Confucian family, was taught that a woman's virtue lies in fulfilling her familial roles as a good daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law. In her youth, she accepted these teachings without question and imagined herself content in that role. However, after gradually being exposed to various media portrayals of "Western" women as independent, successful professionals, she was struck by these portrayals and began to aspire to a similar life. Determined to change her path, she entered college, where the academic curriculum was largely shaped by "Western" liberal scholarship, and met a new circle of friends who shared her views. As a result, Minji eventually grew frustrated with the predominant patriarchal norms of her society, which, in her view, restricted her personal freedom. She came to regard anything associated with Korean cultural traditions with disillusionment, believing that they were the roots of patriarchal oppression. Now, she firmly believes that progress requires "Westernization." When such a change seems hopeless, she longs to leave her country, finding little worth in its culture or its people.

Minji is a postcolonial woman who has internalized an idealized image of Anglo-European society that overrepresents particular racial, class, and ideological sectors while obscuring its internal hierarchies, diversity, and colonial history. She simultaneously internalizes negative cultural stereotypes attached to her social identity, understanding Confucian cultural traditions as the primary source of patriarchal oppression that must be abolished. As many postcolonial feminists have pointed out, the idealized image of the Anglo-European woman and the negative stereotype of the postcolonial woman mutually reinforce and constitute each other (Abu-Lughod 2013; Mohanty 1988). Minji's volitional commitment to liberal values is clearly shaped and constrained by this process.

If one uncritically follows the narrative of *WW*, Minji appears to be an autonomous person. Isn't she, after all, critically reflecting on the constraints she finds oppressive and directing her life toward personal freedom? However, if we remain content with this narrative, we are accepting that an autonomous woman is someone fortunate enough to secure independence from local norms by gaining access to Anglo-European culture; that she becomes autonomous only by being *derivative* of something else—Anglo-Europeans, white people, the First World, and so on—by putting on the "white mask" (Fanon 2008), in Fanonian terms. This would certainly make it difficult to counter the critique that autonomy is an inherently imperialist concept. But should we be satisfied with such a depiction of the autonomous person?

In other words, *WW* is an illustration of how a person's adoption of liberal values often occurs within the constraints of an epistemic hierarchy that undermines postcolonial contexts, raising concerns about the negative implications of these constraints for the autonomy of postcolonial women. In the remaining sections, *WW* is used to assess whether different accounts of relational autonomy are suitable for addressing the axis of imperial imposition. To this end, *WW* foregrounds the following sets of analytical themes. First, what are the effects of liberal-imperialist institutions on postcolonial

women's autonomy, particularly given that they distort and degrade their social identities? What does it mean to maintain autonomy under the historical conditions produced by liberal-imperialist institutions? Second, how have some conceptions of relational autonomy incorporated the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts into their conceptual structures? Do these conceptions provide the conceptual vocabulary needed to move beyond this epistemic hierarchy? How can relational autonomy treat postcolonial women as something other than potential victims of cultural oppression or subscribers of Anglo-European liberalism?

2.2. Authentic self-construction and axis of imperial imposition

Relational autonomy is by no means constituted by a coherent set of definitions. Rather, it is a cluster of ideas loosely tied together by the assumption that social-relational factors are an important dimension to consider in theorizing autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). Therefore, it would be necessary to explain which accounts of relational autonomy this paper primarily engages with and why. This paper limits its scope to what are often called internalist accounts of relational autonomy, which define autonomy in terms of a person's psychological capacities for authentic self-construction, understood as necessary for a self-directed life.[7] This means that I will not directly discuss externalist accounts of relational autonomy, such as Marina Oshana's, which define autonomy in terms of a set of social-relational conditions (Oshana 2006, 2014, 2015; Stoljar 2017). While externalist accounts undoubtedly constitute an important strand of relational autonomy literature, they warrant a separate discussion that exceeds the central focus of this paper. The paper instead focuses on autonomy as a concept that articulates human capacities to engage with the life-constructing materials that shape one's life, capacities through which a person creates and sustains moral and political community with others. Internalist accounts often use individual authenticity to explain why postcolonial women who are committed to hierarchical social relations can nonetheless exhibit these capacities, and thereby partially address the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts that shapes the autonomy literature. Nevertheless, I show why individual authenticity is not suitable for the dimension of epistemic hierarchy problematized along the axis of imperial imposition.[8]

[7]The internalist accounts I refer to largely align with the notion of self-governance identified by Catriona Mackenzie as one of the three dimensions of autonomy. According to Mackenzie, self-governance refers to the idea that to be autonomous is to be capable of making decisions and acting on the basis of motives, values, or reasons that are "one's own" in some relevant sense (Mackenzie 2014, 16–17).

[8]There are several points to note about the categorization I use here. I understand relational autonomy as conceptions of autonomy that explicitly incorporate issues of social relations or social identities as integral to the analysis of autonomy. This encompasses a wide range of theories and approaches, and I acknowledge that there have been different attempts to categorize them. For instance, the recent distinction between causally relational and constitutively relational approaches groups both Oshana's externalist account and Westlund's dialogical account under the constitutively relational approach, since both treat interpersonal or social conditions as part of the defining conditions of autonomy. In this paper, however, I adhere to the term "internalist" for two reasons. The first reason concerns my interest in autonomy, as noted. I understand autonomy as a human capacity to engage with the life-constructing materials that shape one's life, a capacity through which a person creates and sustains moral and political community with others. Second, in articulating the character of this capacity, the paper shows why shifting the emphasis from authentic self-construction, a primarily inward psychological process, to dialogical reflexivity, answerability, and creative appropriation, which are more outward psychological processes or modes of social interaction, is important

An internalist account typically involves two interrelated ideas. The first is the notion of individual authenticity: a person's current volitional commitments must cohere with the conception of self that she has constructed as her own. The second is the notion of procedural independence: the exercise of the psychological capacities involved in this process of self-construction must not be undermined by reflection-distorting factors such as manipulation or coercion. Among these two ideas, *individual authenticity* plays an interesting role in dealing with the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. This is because individual authenticity often serves as a conceptual tool for assigning greater weight to diverse voices of postcolonial subjects.

For instance, John Christman (1991, 2001, 2009) proposes a historical model of autonomy in which authenticity is secured through sustained critical reflection: a person must not feel alienated from her current volitional commitments after critically reflecting, under a variety of conditions, on the historical processes that gave rise to them (2009, 155). Christman explicitly incorporates social identities into his model and argues that if a postcolonial woman's commitments to local norms that prescribe hierarchical social relations withstand sustained, historically informed critical reflection, they may be regarded as part of her authentic self (2004, 156–57; 2009, 162–63). He further contends that her autonomy cannot be secured if these local norms are rendered inoperative or publicly denigrated, as this would deprive her of the resources necessary to live a non-alienated life (2009, 193, 209). Diana T. Meyers (1987, 1989, 2000a) also describes autonomy as living in harmony with one's authentic self, which depends on a person's competency to exercise a repertory of coordinated skills necessary for self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction. In her view, postcolonial women can be sufficiently competent in this respect, though in different ways. Some women may achieve a sense of authenticity by abandoning their culture, whereas others may experience feelings of denigration and disorientation in the same situation, as they are prevented from enacting cultural values they have regarded as authentically their own (Meyers 2000a, 483).

Indeed, internalists acknowledge that the mere fact that a person endorses cultural and religious traditions with a sense of fulfillment does not guarantee her autonomy. Meyers emphasizes that culture, for its survival, has internal mechanisms that channel autonomy competency: discouraging the psychological skills that question the adequacy of culturally approved practices, while encouraging skills compatible with cultural allegiance (Meyers 2000a, 471, 484–85). Christman likewise emphasizes that individuals should be able to interpret the meaning of their social identities in their own way and be recognized accordingly (Appiah 2005; Christman 2009, 193–94). This concern aligns with the notion of procedural independence: authentic endorsement of local norms that prescribe hierarchical social relations are compatible with autonomy insofar as the overall psychological process is not subject to reflection-distorting factors that could undermine the proper functioning of psychological capacities. Nevertheless, internalists' commitment to individual authenticity has typically been used to underscore the importance of maintaining epistemic humility in our assessment of postcolonial women's autonomy, acknowledging that there is no guarantee that any of us possesses more developed epistemic skills than others for determining which norms and practices are more desirable or fulfilling for a particular individual (Meyers 2000a, 213; Christman 2009, 170).

for conceiving autonomy for postcolonial subjects. I take the labels "internalist" and "dialogical" to be intuitive in this context.

Nevertheless, I argue that internalists' reliance on individual authenticity is *not* effective in addressing the central themes of the axis of imperial imposition. Consider one possible response to *WW* from Christman's historical model of autonomy. Under his historical model, incorporating the axis of imperial imposition requires Minji to engage in a broader range of critical reflection on the historical processes that have given rise to her current commitments: just as she has done with regard to Confucian norms, she may also undertake sustained critical reflection on the imperialist drive that has shaped her commitment to liberal values. For instance, suppose Minji later realizes that, when she first encountered liberal values in her youth, she was influenced by an idealized image of Anglo-European society with racist and imperialist connotations. If this realization does not produce a sense of alienation, then she has integrated liberal values into her personal history, and they remain as her authentic commitment. In other words, under the historical model, Minji's problem is primarily a matter of partial or insufficient critical reflection on the origins of her current commitment. Therefore, the problem can be resolved by extending the model to the axis of imperial imposition.

I argue that this is an unsatisfactory response for two reasons. The first concerns the fact that the historical model requires introspective self-transparency: it requires a person to be aware of the origins of her volitional commitments and to identify the reflection-distorting factors that influence them. This has already been criticized as a mental state difficult to achieve (Mackenzie 2002; Westlund 2003, 504; Oshana 2006, 49–52; 2007). And this becomes even more difficult in contexts of radical historical rupture, such as the one Minji is experiencing, where conflicting reflection-distorting forces are deeply interwoven and interpenetrated, making any clear analysis of their individual impact on a person's agency nearly impossible.

For example, while Minji's commitment to liberal values is undoubtedly influenced by cultural imperialism and cannot be separated from the historical context of foreign imposition, her judgment that "Western" liberalism can provide a conceptual tool for countering what she perceives as oppression likely reflects some genuine concerns. Therefore, it is difficult for Minji to determine the exact historical processes that gave rise to her current commitment. And even if she were able to do so, it remains unclear whether there is any satisfactory way to determine the extent to which forces of cultural imperialism have had reflection-distorting effects in this process. Is the sense of inferiority or the double consciousness she is experiencing not undermining the proper functioning of her reflective process?[9] The difficulty I am articulating here is not merely descriptive but also a *normative* one: introspective self-transparency prescribed by the historical model can be more demanding for those situated in multifaceted oppression created by liberal imperialism than for those who are not. Therefore, Minji is structurally positioned to face greater difficulty in being considered autonomous with respect to her commitment to liberal values than her Anglo-European counterpart.

Second, the historical model is inadequate as an alternative framework for moving *beyond* the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. Suppose that Minji finds herself under the influence of two major normative forces,

[9]The difficulty of answering this question may arise from the underdetermination of what count as reflection-distorting factors, a problem that most procedural accounts face. There has been criticism that, to make a complete assessment of what counts as a distorted reflective process, internalists must import a substantive moral theory (Stoljar 2014, 232). However, if they do so, they can no longer be considered procedural. If they do not, their theory relies disproportionately on a fundamentally subjective foundation, which renders their argument toothless (Oshana 2006, 49–52).

namely, local cultural traditions and "Western" liberalism, which attempt to shape her value judgments in seemingly opposing directions. In the face of major conflicting forces in her life, Minji relates to liberal values in ways that reinforce the epistemic privilege of Anglo-European contexts. To illustrate, I add further context to *WW*:

> *Western-oriented woman (imperial constraints) or* WW_{ic}: Minji chooses to reject Confucian practices and pursue liberal life projects, even though she knows this choice implies embracing cultural imperialism. She understands this decision as selecting the option that better aligns with her authentic desires and interests, despite its negative implications for her social identity. She is, so to speak, willing to "bite the bullet."

Here, Minji is willing to accept the constraints of liberal-imperialist institutions on herself. Her perception of her choices is constrained in two interrelated ways. First, she forecloses the possibility of drawing on local norms to situate liberal values within her socio-historical context and believes that adopting liberal values entails the complete abolition of local norms. For instance, in South Korea, existing cultural practices surrounding filial obligations to the extended family—such as providing care for and showing respect to one's parents-in-law—place an asymmetric burden on wives. Consider that, having observed her mother participate in these practices during her youth, Minji came to believe the ideal of filial piety is fundamentally antithetical to women's personal freedom, and therefore must be abolished. Her conviction is consolidated as she internalizes a white feminist worldview which holds that "while virtually all of the world's cultures have distinctly patriarchal pasts, … Western liberal cultures … have departed far further from them than others" (Okin 1999, 16). It is entirely unimaginable to Minji that the problem may not lie in the ideal of filial piety itself, but in the form in which it is practiced, the fact that it is practiced asymmetrically rather than reciprocally due to patriarchal social structures. What if the filial obligations of care and respect toward parents-in-law were shared reciprocally between spouses? What would be the implications of such a reconstruction for women's personal freedom? Such questions are unintelligible to Minji, and her understanding of Korean culture remains confined within rigid boundaries defined in opposition to the supposedly progressive "West."

Consequently, Minji accepts her peripheral position within the liberal discourse that shapes her volitional commitments: she assumes the role of a subscriber to foreign principles as given. What she does with liberal values is simply apply them to her situation as if they were objective moral standards, evaluating Korean culture accordingly. She criticizes Korean culture for deviating from what has been accomplished in "Western" society and for not being sufficiently "Westernized." In other words, in endorsing liberal values as her volitional commitments, she cannot imagine that her situated knowledge could meaningfully contribute to or reconstruct the discourse that shapes those commitments.

However, this is not the only way Minji could relate to liberal values. She could instead reflect on what liberal values mean within the cultural and historical context of her society and draw on her situated knowledge as a Korean woman to transform both liberal values and Confucian norms so that they better align with her practical situation. This would reflect a much more self-directed life than that of WW_{ic}, as she would demonstrate greater competence in creatively interacting with different normative forces. Yet the historical model lacks the conceptual vocabulary to distinguish WW_{ic} from such a case. Despite being constrained within the liberal-imperialist institutions,

Minji in WW_{ic} is fully autonomous under the historical model, since her commitments to liberal values survive sustained critical reflection without a sense of alienation.

Meyers's competency model, on the other hand, partly addresses these concerns. First, it emphasizes that individual authenticity does not require a transparent self-conception waiting to be discovered through introspective reflection. Rather, authenticity is understood as an evolving sense of self that emerges through the exercise of a repertory of coordinated skills, which orchestrate disparate social influences into an intelligible personality (Meyers 1989; 2000b, 172–73). The strength of this model lies in its forward-looking dimension: autonomy is less about being aware of the origins and effects of social influences and more about how a person continuously forges herself through engagement with them. Accordingly, the model provides conceptual vocabulary for distinguishing between a person who actively weaves surrounding social influences and one who merely chooses to endorse or reject them. Minji is likely to display greater competence in exercising a range of coordinated skills when she refuses to be a subscriber to "Western" liberalism and instead actively draws on her situated knowledge to imagine possibilities beyond the epistemic hierarchy.

Meyers (2000b) highlights this creative element of autonomy in her discussion of intersectional identities. She acknowledges that individuals with intersectional identities engage in a dynamic and ongoing process of self-definition, "seeking out heterodox resources within one's culture, perhaps borrowing from other cultures, and synthesizing these materials in novel ways." (2000b, 166). This implies cultural transformation: it is not merely an individual act of self-definition but also involves the collective redefinition and displacement of conventional social stereotypes toward more emancipatory group images. The individual-level self-definition and collective-level cultural redefinition are mutually constitutive, each continually influencing and reshaping the other (2000b, 167–68).[10] This shows that Meyers does realize that autonomy for postcolonial women should be more than maneuvering within the predicament produced by local oppression and imperial imposition; it must involve becoming a creative agent capable of transforming the very discourses that bind her life.

Nevertheless, I depart from her competency model in maintaining that the capacity to weave different social elements creatively into an intelligible sense of self does *not* require individual authenticity. Meyers, while emphasizing that authenticity should not be construed as a precondition or a prescribed infrastructure, nonetheless operates with the notion of an authentic self; and, by definition, authenticity entails either a conception of a true self or a sense of satisfaction. It requires asking whether a person's current volitional commitment, X, reflects what she truly wants or whether she is alienated from it. Although I agree that developing an authentic self can generally help a person live a fulfilling life, I regard this as a more demanding ideal than what is necessary for autonomy.

This point has already been discussed by Oshana, who contends that the kind of authenticity required for autonomy is not the absence of alienation or reflective satisfaction, but simply the avoidance of self-betrayal or self-deception (Oshana 2005, 91; 2007, 424–28). Oshana argues that denying how cultural scripts of one's race shape one's

[10]Jennifer Nedelsky also makes a similar point through her notion of *nested relations*: in her view, every individual is situated within nested relations, ranging from personal relationships to broader relational patterns, with each level interacting with the others. Consequently, a person's agency is always both constituted by, and contributory to, the changing and reinforcing of the intersecting relationships of which they are a part (Nedelsky 2011, 20–22).

position in public life diminishes autonomy, since such denial means falsifying oneself. By contrast, being disaffected from or disengaged with these scripted components of one's racial identity need not signal diminished autonomy. For instance, an African American woman who feels disaffected or ambivalent about what is culturally scripted as Black womanhood may experience alienation from an inescapable part of her racial identity. Nevertheless, Oshana argues that this very sense of alienation, though impossible to resolve, can itself be a source of autonomy (Oshana 2005; 2006, 69–70; 2007).

Oshana's attempt to separate authenticity from autonomy has an important implication for addressing the axis of imperial imposition, as it recognizes that the meaning of individual authenticity can be far from straightforward for those whose lives are marked by constant ruptures, tensions, and inconsistencies. Consider that Minji has a deep ambivalence toward her Korean identity. On some days, she feels strong contempt for it and seeks to detach herself from it. At other times, however, she recognizes that certain essential components of her self-conception, such as her sense of responsibility for her parents' well-being and her respect for the elderly, cannot be understood without reference to the Confucian culture embedded in Korean identity. On most days, she feels little emotional attachment to her country and develops a sense of disillusionment. Yet at times, she experiences a strong sense of connection to it, such as during national elections. While the competency model recognizes that such ambivalence can be compatible with autonomy (Meyers 2000b), it nevertheless requires satisfying the condition of individual authenticity: Minji would have to either embrace the ambivalence as an essential part of her emerging self or feel satisfied with it. Yet she may never be able to do so: she may continue to experience a lingering sense of alienation toward this ambivalence. In fact, due to radical historical rupture, Minji is structurally positioned in a way that makes it difficult for her to meet the kind of individual authenticity typically proposed by internalists. However, it seems unreasonable to conclude that she lacks competence for autonomy on this basis.[11]

The foregoing discussion shows that internalist accounts that rely on individual authenticity are insufficient for addressing the axis of imperial imposition. For instance, Christman's historical model, which ties authenticity to sustained critical reflection on the origins of volitional commitments, can be especially demanding for those situated within multifaceted forms of oppression produced by liberal imperialism. It also lacks the conceptual vocabulary needed to distinguish those who seek to move beyond the epistemic hierarchy through their situated knowledge from those who merely operate within its constraints. Meyers's competency model, while partially equipped to address these problems, nonetheless remains grounded in individual authenticity and therefore cannot explain how a person's unresolved sense of alienation toward her ambivalent social identity may still be compatible with autonomy.

[11]Meyers emphasizes that, in some circumstances, ambivalence and unresolved tensions regarding one's social identity can be part of an authentic identity and therefore do not defeat autonomy. One example is María Lugones, who embraced her situation as a "border dweller" situated at the intersection of multiple, possibly conflicting, communities, thereby occupying an epistemically favorable vantage point through such experiences (Meyers 2000b, 155, 174). While I think that a person who embraces ambivalence and tension as part of her authentic self may live a more satisfying life, I still believe this does not entail that a person who does not do so cannot be autonomous.

3. Dialogical account: autonomy beyond epistemic hierarchy

In this section, I defend a dialogical account of relational autonomy and explain why it is better suited to addressing the questions that arise along the axis of imperial imposition. My argument is twofold. First, I argue that existing dialogical accounts, in general, provide richer conceptual resources for addressing the axis of imperial imposition than internalist accounts, because they shift the focus from authentic self-construction to dialogical reflexivity and answerability. Second, I argue that, for a dialogical account to adequately serve the purpose of this paper, that is, reconceiving relational autonomy in a way that resists liberal-imperialist institutions, it must foreground what I call self-regard in *creative appropriation*. I illustrate this argument by further discussing *WW*.

3.1 Advantages of dialogical accounts

Dialogical accounts reconstruct autonomy as a disposition and capacity to speak for oneself in the face of potential criticisms (Benson 2005; Westlund 2003, 2009, 2012, 2014). By responding to potential criticisms, an autonomous person demonstrates that she is capable of representing her volitional commitments and thereby taking responsibility for them. Despite their differences, which are discussed later in this paper, dialogical accounts share two key features. First, autonomy is an inherently dialogical capacity that presupposes the existence of potential critical interlocutors with whom a person interacts. Second, autonomy is primarily concerned with a person's willingness and competence to authorize herself as the representative of her volitional commitments. In other words, it concerns having normative authority over her reasons for actions and commitments (Mackenzie 2014, 18–19).

Like internalist accounts, dialogical accounts conceptualize autonomy primarily as a particular kind of human capacity, including a set of psychological capacities. However, unlike internalist accounts, they leave some conceptual space between autonomy and the problem of authentic self-construction (Westlund 2014, 187). A person can exhibit competence in dialogical reflexivity and possess the normative authority to represent her actions and commitments, regardless of whether she develops a sense of authentic self. Accordingly, dialogical accounts can address some of the drawbacks of internalist accounts outlined in the previous section, which arise from their focus on authentic self-construction: they have greater potential to accommodate the diverse lived experiences that arise under conditions of radical historical rupture. For instance, under conditions of complex interpenetration between local and foreign cultures that often conflict with one another, an autonomous person need not engage in accurate self-analysis of the origins of her current commitments or resolve the sense of alienation from her ambivalent social identity. Instead, she retains autonomy by recognizing her authority to represent herself, that is, by taking her perspective on her actions and commitments as the primary representation of who she is.

More importantly, I argue that dialogical accounts provide a richer conceptual vocabulary for moving beyond the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts. This is because a dialogical account, by definition, must incorporate a person's situated knowledge, inseparable from her socio-historical context, as a constitutive dimension of autonomy. How we conceive of critical interlocutors is central to this argument. As noted, dialogical accounts assume the existence of potential critical interlocutors with whom a person interacts. If critical interlocutors are defined in abstraction, as disembodied individuals, then dialogical reflexivity collapses into the

capacity for critical reflection already proposed by internalists. Conversely, it is implausible to confine critical interlocutors to those with whom we engage in actual dialogue, since our dialogical capacity clearly transcends face-to-face interaction (Westlund 2009, 39). Instead, I understand critical interlocutors as a conceptual device that highlights how the concrete socio-historical contexts in which a person is situated are *constitutive* of the assessment of her autonomy.

Unpacking this argument requires further explanation of Andrea Westlund's description of critical interlocutors in her answerability model. She makes clear that the openness to justificatory dialogue required for autonomy does not entail responding to all comers, but only to those she describes as *legitimate challengers*: would-be critics who meet the condition of relational situatedness, that is, who can demonstrate that they stand in a context-providing relationship that matters to both parties (2009, 39–40). Context-providing relationships may range from personal ties, such as those with family members or friends, to broader relations, such as those with fellow citizens. An autonomous person understands and accepts the normative weight of these relationships, treating would-be critics as legitimate interlocutors owed explanations about her actions and commitments. But what is equally important is that these would-be critics also bear responsibility for showing why their questions matter to the person being asked. As Westlund argues, "part of the burden of facilitating justificatory dialogue" rests on "the would-be critic who must position herself appropriately with respect to the agent in question" (2009, 40). This suggests that the criticisms raised by critical interlocutors must be articulated in ways that the person in question can recognize as meaningful and relevant to her situation. In other words, Westlund's answerability model highlights that the reflective process an autonomous person undergoes is always deeply context-sensitive: it implies that an adequate assessment of whether a person is sufficiently competent in the dialogical reflexivity can be made only by attending to the socio-historical contexts in which she is situated.

Westlund has already discussed the implications of her answerability model along the axis of local oppression. Through the case of self-abnegating deference, she demonstrates the extent to which her model can accommodate postcolonial women who endorse local norms that prescribe hierarchical social relations. Self-abnegating deference is a specific form of deference in which a person can offer no response other than repeating the perspective to which she defers when faced with legitimate challenges to her actions and commitments (Westlund 2003, 2009). This form of deference is incompatible with autonomy because it prevents the person from speaking for her actions and commitments in her own voice. Instead, she is merely in the grip of her actions and commitments. However, Westlund makes clear that, unlike a person with self-abnegating deference, a person who shows the willingness and competence to engage in justificatory dialogue with legitimate challengers about her deference can be regarded as autonomous.

How, then, would her answerability model address the axis of imperial imposition? To answer this question, I turn to what has not been addressed in my original discussion of *WW*. Under the answerability model, Minji can be considered autonomous in relation to her commitment to liberal values if she demonstrates the willingness and competence to speak for that commitment in the face of legitimate challenges. Who would count as legitimate challengers in this case? I argue that the answer must include other members of her political community who share the conditions of radical historical rupture but may hold different views from her on how to respond to those conditions. For instance, Minji would likely encounter other

Koreans who challenge her commitment to liberal values, either in defense of cultural tradition or in critique of cultural imperialism. I argue that Minji's autonomy is sustained only insofar as she is willing and competent to engage in meaningful dialogue with such local challengers.

Yet I acknowledge that many political arguments against women's endorsement of liberal values, framed in the rhetoric of cultural integrity, often have the explicitly sexist intention of silencing them. Therefore, the condition of relational situatedness becomes crucial here as well: potential interlocutors who have a sexist intention to silence Minji would not count as legitimate challengers who position themselves appropriately with respect to her. They fail to establish a relationship that carries normative weight and, therefore, are not owed an explanation. Nevertheless, it would be equally problematic to claim that all arguments grounded in respect for local norms are merely vehicles of oppression antithetical to women's autonomy. Some of these arguments may be considered legitimate challenges, and Minji must remain open to justificatory dialogue with them if she is to be autonomous.

Consider Minji's aunt, Sookhee, a woman of an older generation who adhered to the traditional marital practices prevalent in her time: she entered into an arranged marriage and took on the responsibility of caring for her parents-in-law. Although these important life decisions cannot be described as freely chosen, her marriage was primarily bound by mutual respect. In fact, she never regarded these practices as major constraints on her life: she believes that a good marriage is about maintaining harmonious family relationships rather than about an individual's choice of romantic partner. Minji, by contrast, sees these marital practices as a typical example of outdated practices grounded in Confucian culture, perpetuating women's subordination. For instance, she believes there is an inherently antithetical relationship between performing care work for one's in-laws and women's personal freedom.

In my view, what determines Minji and Sookhee's autonomy is not the content of their volitional commitments *per se*, but their willingness and competence to speak for those commitments in response to each other's claims. Both Minji and Sookhee can be understood as legitimate challengers to one another: they can demonstrate their autonomy by making the effort to respond seriously to one another's criticisms with a point of view they regard as representing their own experiences. Such reciprocal justificatory dialogue is a constitutive element of autonomy. Although Minji and Sookhee may ultimately continue to disagree, this process reflects a markedly different degree of autonomy from cases in which both merely display dogmatism, whether rooted in traditional norms or in "Western" liberalism. Therefore, they mutually contribute to each other's development and maintenance of autonomy.

Moreover, Westlund argues that, when each person in a deliberative duo functions for the other as a would-be critic who raises challenges in good faith, and when both parties remain open to the possibility of joint deliberation, these efforts can give rise to a "symmetrically shared practical perspective" within the given context (2012, 72–73). Although such efforts may not always succeed, it is important that each person remains open to the possibility of forming a shared practical perspective: they respect one another as mature agents and do not aim to dominate the other. In the case of *WW*, this would mean that Minji must not treat Sookhee as uncritically submitting to backward cultural practices, and Sookhee must not dismiss Minji's views as those of an immature younger generation. Both must engage in genuine reflection on the meaning and implications of existing marital practices and women's personal freedom within their shared socio-historical context.

Westlund acknowledges that the scope of this dialogical process must extend beyond the joint deliberation of a deliberating duo to avoid the risk of a shared echo chamber (2012, 73–74). The dialogical reflexivity required for autonomy, and the joint deliberation it entails, must therefore extend beyond dyadic personal relationships and be understood as a broader social phenomenon operating across multiple levels of social relations. It will many times take the form of engagement with existing social discourses shaped by actual or imagined others, rather than direct dialogue with a particular individual. Still, the distinctive feature of her answerability model is its emphasis that our autonomy is, in crucial ways, constituted by our direct or indirect interactions with potential interlocutors with whom we share concrete socio-historical contexts. While Minji may continue to affirm her commitment to personal freedom, responding to local challenges will enable her to consider how to situate liberal values within her lived experiences, rather than adopting Anglo-European liberalism as a set of dogmatic scripts.

Consequently, a dialogical reconstruction of autonomy has greater potential to disrupt the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts by facilitating local justificatory dialogue *in the name of* autonomy. It provides new conceptual vocabulary conducive to addressing the axis of imperial imposition: liberal-imperialist institutions undermine the autonomy of postcolonial subjects insofar as they affect their willingness and competence to engage in justificatory dialogue with legitimate local challengers, to whom they owe an explanation, by rendering the standpoints of these local challengers "backward" or inherently antithetical to progress. This, in turn, hampers the possibility of meaningful and creative dialogue about how to blend foreign and local values to generate new terms of social cooperation and political legitimacy that would cultivate the autonomy of all members of a given political community. Liberal-imperialist institutions confine social change within the rhetoric of "Westernization," pressure societies to adopt "Western" standards as universal, and thereby reinforce the epistemic structure that perpetuates the peripheral position of postcolonial subjects as mere subscribers to Anglo-European liberalism.

3.2 Self-regard in creative appropriation

So far, I have explained why the notion of critical interlocutors presupposed in dialogical accounts can be useful in addressing problems that arise along the axis of imperial imposition. First, by creating a conceptual space between authenticity and autonomy, dialogical accounts can accommodate the diverse lived experiences of postcolonial women who are unable or unwilling to meet the condition of authentic self-construction with respect to their social identities. And more importantly, drawing on Westlund's answerability model, I argue that a postcolonial woman cannot achieve autonomy merely by adopting Anglo-European liberalism; rather, autonomy requires situating liberal values within her socio-historical context through justificatory dialogue with legitimate local challengers. In this section, I argue that a dialogical account must foreground what I call self-regard in *creative appropriation* in order to achieve the central aim of this paper: to reconceive relational autonomy in a way that disrupts, rather than reproduces, the epistemic hierarchy between Anglo-European and postcolonial contexts, thereby enabling the concept to resist liberal-imperialist institutions.

To begin, Westlund diverges from other theorists who believe that having normative authority over one's reasons for actions and commitments requires a notion of *self-regard*. For instance, Paul Benson (2005, 2014) argues that an autonomous person must

regard herself as both capable of and worthy of speaking for her actions and commitments. An autonomous person must actively claim her discursive authority; being passively situated in social-relational conditions that merely permit such authority is not sufficient. On this basis, Benson (1991, 1994, 2005, 2014) argues that a sense of self-worth is crucial for autonomy: a person must regard herself as having moral worth in order to claim authority over her will. Catriona Mackenzie (2000, 139–42; 2008, 2015) similarly argues that autonomy requires affective self-trust and self-respect sustained through social structures of mutual recognition. Westlund, by contrast, rejects that autonomy requires a sense of self-worth, arguing that this would render autonomy overly demanding: it risks excluding agents who lack positive self-regard yet remain capable of reflective answerability. According to Westlund, the justificatory dialogue required for autonomy is a formal procedure that does not burden autonomy with positive self-judgments (Westlund 2009, 37; Meyers 2014, 125–26). What is required instead is self-responsibility: treating herself, not anyone else, as ultimately responsible for justifying her volitional commitments. To take responsibility for herself, an autonomous person must have a disposition to accord critical interlocutors appropriate normative standing and remain open to justificatory dialogue. In her view, this disposition is distinct from positive feelings about one's own worthiness.

I agree that autonomy does not require strong positive self-attitudes such as self-worth. However, since Westlund's model presupposes that an autonomous person must treat herself, not anyone else, as responsible for who she is, this form of self-representation appears to be more than a formal procedure. In my view, a minimal form of self-regard, such as a person's recognition of her competence to form a meaningful perspective about her own situation, is already signaled in her answerability model. If this were not the case, why should a person think that her perspective, rather than any other, matters in representing herself in the first place? Why would a person think that she should be the one to take responsibility for her actions and commitments, rather than someone else, such as those to whom she defers?

For this reason, I argue that a dialogical account of relational autonomy cannot be understood as a strictly formal procedure but must introduce a minimal threshold of self-regard. My intuition is that maintaining dialogical reflexivity and answerability in the face of potential criticism requires a person to regard herself as competent to construct her perspective in light of her lived experience, particularly on matters salient to her situation. To develop this intuition for the purpose of this paper, I propose a person's recognition of her competence in creative appropriation as the minimal threshold of self-regard required for autonomy. I develop and defend this proposal in the remainder of the paper.

I define *creative appropriation* as the reconfiguration of given life-constructing materials from a perspective that emerges from one's concrete circumstances and experiences. Four points require clarification. First, adopting certain life-constructing materials as one's volitional commitments always involves utilizing, referencing, and borrowing from what has been developed by others situated within socio-historical matrices that *differ*, partially or radically, from one's own. Second, an autonomous person must have the competence to reconfigure these materials, which emerge from different temporal, spatial, and social contexts, *in light of* her particular circumstances and experiences. This means that she is not merely referencing such materials but actively engaging with them. Third, in doing so, whether intentionally or unintentionally, an autonomous person creates *space* for these materials to acquire implications and nuances that diverge from their prior meanings and purposes. She may even regard

herself as competent to displace them radically from their original contexts, insofar as such displacement resonates with her lived experience, although such radical displacement is not required for autonomy. Fourth, while a person's self-regard in creative appropriation is a matter of degree, the minimal threshold of creative appropriation is met only when she treats her perspective as a meaningful standpoint for interpreting and reworking life-constructing materials. She does not defer to others' perspectives on those materials as authoritative scripts.

My point here can be further clarified by illustrating a person who does not regard herself as competent in creative appropriation. A person who lacks self-regard in creative appropriation fails to see herself as someone whose perspective can meaningfully interact with the life-constructing materials she adopts. Instead, she follows others' interpretations of those materials as dogmatic scripts, treating them as authoritative even when such interpretations arise in contexts radically different from her own or have outlived their relevance. In the extreme, she may come to view her perspective as entirely unreliable or conclude that there is no value in developing a perspective at all. To illustrate this point, I add further context to *WW*.

> *Western-oriented woman (epistemic deference) or* WW_{ed}: Minji's commitments to liberal values are profoundly shaped by her reading of early white feminist literature. She treats this literature as a set of dogmatic scripts and, accordingly, dismisses any claims grounded in her local culture as inherently hostile to gender equality. When asked to explain her reasoning, she merely reiterates what she has read. At times, she becomes aware of discrepancies between her lived experiences and the claims advanced in the literature. Yet she cannot even imagine that her lived experiences might offer better insights into her particular situation than those of prominent "Western" scholars. Consequently, she assumes that such discrepancies stem from her inability to fully cast off her "backwardness."

Here, the problem goes beyond that of WW_{ic}: it is not simply a matter of a trade-off between her personal freedom and cultural tradition within the existing constraints. Rather, she does not regard herself as competent to form her perspective on the meanings and implications of liberal values within her socio-historical context and simply reiterates white feminist views, which she takes to be authoritative. I am therefore reluctant to conclude that Minji, in this variation, fully exhibits the self-responsibility required by the answerability model, regardless of how eloquently she may respond to potential criticisms: she does not treat herself, rather than anyone else, as ultimately responsible for justifying her commitment to liberal values.

Creative appropriation applies to any life-constructing material a person adopts, regardless of its content. For a person to engage in meaningful justificatory dialogue about her commitment to local norms that prescribe hierarchical social relations, she must regard herself as competent in creatively appropriating them. A well-known example is the controversy over veiling, which many postcolonial feminists have illuminated: Muslim women are often acutely aware of the meanings and implications of different styles of veiling and can reconfigure these practices to fit their particular circumstances (Abu-Lughod 2013, 38–40). In my view, these women exhibit autonomous agency in speaking for their volitional commitments, insofar as they regard themselves as competent in creatively appropriating veiling practices. What I emphasize in this paper is that a parallel question should be posed to postcolonial women who develop commitments to liberal values under liberal-imperialist institutions. It is entirely

possible for a person to lack a sense of competence in creatively appropriating liberal values imposed on her society, and instead merely reproduce the perspectives of "white," "Western," or "imperialist," etc.

What implications, then, does this modified dialogical account, which foregrounds self-regard in creative appropriation, have for reconceiving relational autonomy in a way that resists liberal-imperialist institutions? I argue that there are at least two implications. First, it provides a conceptual vocabulary to demonstrate why fostering a vibrant local dialogue about how to blend local and foreign values in the aftermath of radical historical rupture is important for the autonomy of postcolonial subjects. In this historical setting, postcolonial subjects may have to reconfigure foreign values that originate in radically different socio-historical contexts and are imposed on their society with imperialist intent, as well as cultural traditions that have outlived their relevance and merely perpetuate structures of domination amid rapid social change. A person who regards herself as competent in this process contributes more to the autonomy of all members of her society than those who remain locked in a counterproductive opposition between "Westernization" and the protection of cultural integrity. This is because, in my view, self-regard in creative appropriation is a characteristic not only of a competent and responsible answerer but also of a meaningful critical interlocutor who can generate and foster productive justificatory dialogue. A dialogical account conceptually entails that the quality of the justificatory dialogue in which a person engages is inherently constituted by the quality of the challenges raised by her potential interlocutors. If most interlocutors a person encounters are unable to pose meaningful challenges because they lack a perspective beyond the dogmatic scripts they find authoritative, the person's ability to speak for herself will be constrained and stagnate.[12] In contrast, if each person in her society regards herself as competent in creative appropriation, she will be able to collectively create and maneuver within ruptures in liberal-imperialist institutions, thereby generating new terms of social cooperation and political legitimacy through the exercise of autonomy.

Second, postcolonial subjects who develop and maintain self-regard in creative appropriation through such vibrant local dialogue can come to understand their commitment to liberal values as something more than the application of a universal standard to their particular situation. Instead, they may come to see themselves as forging new exemplars of those values or, at times, even transforming them through their lived experiences. The modified dialogical account can highlight that Minji develops and sustains autonomy not by departing from Korean identity and becoming "Westernized," but by speaking back to both local and foreign challengers about her interpretation of existing values grounded in her situated knowledge. Consequently, Minji occupies a position different from that of either a potential victim of cultural oppression or a subscriber to Anglo-European liberalism, positions previously assigned to postcolonial women in the autonomy literature. As an autonomous person, she becomes a meaningful contributor to the discourse that shapes her volitional commitments.

[12]My point here provides an additional reason to distinguish autonomy from individual authenticity. I argue that an unresolved sense of alienation and deep ambivalence toward one's racial or ethnic identity, which may hamper authentic self-construction at the individual level, can in fact benefit the autonomy of postcolonial subjects. Such conditions can position them as valuable critical interlocutors who raise important questions about the realities of radical historical rupture, at least more so than those who authentically endorse dogmatism.

4. Relational autonomy toward a shared global ideal

In this paper, I examine the relationship between postcolonial women and liberal-imperialist institutions under conditions of radical historical rupture and propose a modified dialogical account of autonomy as a plausible ideal for postcolonial women. The paper makes three contributions to the literature on relational autonomy. First, it introduces the axis of imperial imposition to show that the mere adoption of liberal values is insufficient for postcolonial women's autonomy, since these values are imposed through historically structured relations of power. Second, through the case of the Western-oriented woman, it shows that internalist accounts centered on authentic self-construction cannot adequately address the analytical themes that arise from this axis. Third, it defends a modified dialogical account that emphasizes self-regard in creative appropriation as well-suited to addressing this axis. This is because the modified dialogical account highlights the importance of local justificatory dialogue for the autonomy of postcolonial subjects, as well as their capacity to reinterpret and transform both local and foreign values by drawing on their situated knowledge.

Overall, the paper can be understood as advancing a conception of autonomy modeled after the lived experiences of postcolonial subjects. Feminist theorists have criticized classical conceptions of autonomy for being modeled after white, upper-middle-class male experiences and have sought to reconceive autonomy in ways that better accommodate women's experiences. This paper undertakes a similar task with respect to relational autonomy, aiming to disrupt the epistemic hierarchy that has largely shaped the autonomy literature and therefore better accommodate the diverse experiences of postcolonial women. Unlike many postcolonial feminist theorists who express doubts about autonomy, criticizing it as an inherently imperialist notion, I still see value in autonomy. However, I also maintain that the autonomy literature, including the literature on relational autonomy, has not recognized postcolonial women as equal and serious producers of moral and political knowledge. By defending a dialogical account that emphasizes creative appropriation, this paper envisions one possible way of incorporating the lived experiences of postcolonial women as a crucial resource for transforming autonomy from a parochial ideal into a shared global one.

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