



CONTEMPORARY CONTINENTAL ETHICS

CHOOSE
YOUR
BEARING

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT,
HUMAN RIGHTS AND
DECOLONIAL ETHICS

Benjamin P. Davis

Choose Your Bearing

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**Édouard Glissant, Human Rights
and Decolonial Ethics**

Benjamin P. Davis

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For my students

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Abbreviations

- CD *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989.
- DA *Le discours antillais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- PhR *Philosophie de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 2009.
- PO *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- PR *Poétique de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- TTM *Traité du Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

Preface

Looking back at the three or four years it took to write and revise this book, I can say that it has become something different from what I had originally envisioned. This project started as a relatively narrow intervention into how a line of Latin American philosophy that Enrique Dussel called ‘the philosophy of liberation’, what is increasingly called ‘decolonial philosophy’, took up the ethical vocabulary of Emmanuel Levinas. My argument remains that Édouard Glissant’s relative ethics of opacity is more capable of speaking to today’s ethical problems and possibilities than Levinas’s absolute ethics of alterity. As I revised this book over the past year and read the work of, as well as engaged in conversation with, a few others – Gerard Aching, Kris Sealey, Nancy Mithlo, Neil Roberts, Allison Weir, LaRose Parris, Frieda Ekotto and Chris Tinson especially – I started to think of the book differently. In its placement in this series, and in the questions it raises, *Choose Your Bearing* can be read as asking Continental ethics and human rights discourse to take seriously Caribbean philosophy and Indigenous philosophy, and by extension Black Studies and Indigenous Studies, as sites of critical theory, epistemological correctives, and conceptual creation. What results from this engagement is a political theory that can no longer assume that the nation state protects rights, an ethical theory that can no longer withdraw into carefree abstractions,

and a human rights discourse that can no longer maintain the goal of ‘developing’ humans, cultures and economies. Perhaps from such a renewed philosophy, one that looks back to Caribbean philosophy in the past century, we will gain ethical modes attuned to the rhythms of this century. At the very least, we will take one step toward a truer academic philosophy, one finally made to the measure of the world.

Benjamin P. Davis

September 2022

St Louis

To be 'for' human rights means, in effect, to be willing to venture interpretations of those rights in the same place and with the same language employed by the dominant power, to dispute its hierarchy and methods, to elucidate what it has hidden, to pronounce what it has silenced or rendered unpronounceable. These intellectual procedures require, above all, an acute sense not of how things are separated but of how they are connected, mixed, involved, embroiled, linked.

—Edward Said, 'Nationalism, Human Rights,
and Interpretation'

Introduction: Starting from Responsibility and Human Rights

In a 2020 op-ed in *The Guardian*, Nemonte Nenquimo, a leader of the Waorani people, an Indigenous nation whose home is the Amazon rainforest, stated: 'This is my message to the western world – your civilization is killing life on earth.'¹ Could this be true? Could a way of life in one place not only harm people and damage environments in other places, but also destroy life itself across the planet? If this is true, then do those in the West have a duty to change their way of life? How could this change occur across societies? Are the concepts and ideas we currently use to speak about social justice, such as human rights, sufficient to bring about this needed social change, change that would honour and preserve life on earth?

This book's argument rests on the following premises: as a result of European colonisation, the way of life in any Western country today relies on resource extraction and commodity production in other countries it thereby renders poor.² This international division of labour involves practices that deny the human rights – the political, economic and cultural rights – of the workers who mine the minerals, sew the clothes, and otherwise provide the basic substances for life in the West. Fair trade programmes and wage increases do not change the fact that some spend their days hunched over sewing machines while others continually update their wardrobes.

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Even a cursory reading of international news, or literature from a variety of places, makes clear that the West's way of life depends on resource extraction that violates human rights in different parts of the planet.³ Poor people the world over often make ethical appeals asking people in the West to change their basic habits of living in order to allow for others to live, to live with dignity, and to live amidst sustaining land and water. By leveraging rights claims in pronouncing what dominant powers have tried to silence, philosophers such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Édouard Glissant have also called for the West to change its political and economic foundations.

In this book, I argue that Western societies need to re-examine how we understand responsibility. I contend that human rights claims provide a sufficient tool for conducting this re-examination. Through listening to the rights claims of dispossessed people across the world, we can begin to understand our duties not only to one another, but also to life itself.

* * *

Several thoughtful critics have consistently raised concerns about using the concepts of responsibility and human rights in order to achieve the scale of social change needed for the survival of our species. Internationally, the discourse of responsibility often takes the form of capitalist development, leading the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak to observe that today '[d]evelopment is the dominant global denomination of responsibility'.⁴ Further, the 'protection' that Western powers claim to offer through 'the responsibility to protect', exemplified in US military operations in the Middle East, has in practice increased the gap between ethical ideals and political realities on earth. Indeed, the responsibility to protect has been little more than a 'cosmetic' effort that fails to address the true causes of war.⁵ Overall, through the rhetoric of global

responsibility, the US projects 'low-minded imperial ambitions in high-minded humanitarian tones', as the historian Samuel Moyn puts it.⁶ In part with the above concerns and histories in mind, in her study of how invoking responsibility functions in human rights advocacy, the political scientist Kathryn Sikkink points out that 'the norms appear to require that one *not* talk about the responsibility of a wider range of actors because such talk might take the pressure off the state'.⁷ Invoking responsibility might, she continues, even 'risk blaming the victim, underplay the structural causes of injustice, or crowd out other more collective forms of political action'.⁸ A prominent example that proves all of these critics right is BP's hiring of the public relations firm Ogilvy & Mather to promote the idea of the 'carbon footprint', a concept that shifts our focus away from oil companies and an energy landscape based on fossil fuels and toward how much we as individuals drive, travel, and otherwise use oil. In other words, the corporations that increasingly govern the values of our world promote an understanding of responsibility not in structural but in individual terms.⁹

Why, then, start from responsibility? I begin from responsibility because it cannot be avoided. As Spivak reminds us, to be human is to be 'already inserted into a structure of responsibility'.¹⁰ Even if responsibility is currently carried out largely in personal ways, and even if responsibility is often understood as tying us only to our nuclear family or country, it can also be understood as a route or a path. In this way, responsibility forms an occasion for relating differently. The question becomes how to re-describe and re-think responsibility such that the actions that responsible ethical actors pursue collectively are different from 'development' and 'protection' internationally and victim-blaming and individualisation interpersonally.¹¹

From taking responsibility as a starting point, a second question emerges: Precisely who is responsible for changing

their habits and institutions for the sake of life on our planet? Is it simply everyone who lives in what Nenquimo called the Western world? *Choose Your Bearing* specifically addresses the task of creatively becoming more responsible to elites, those whom the memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg calls ‘implicated subjects’, meaning people who ‘occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes’.¹² Implicated subjects initially tend to deny that they are part of an elite. ‘For the members of the elite who wish to help make changes in existing relationships’, Glissant observes, ‘the obligation is absolute to deny that there is such an elite class in order to deny the system’ (DA 698/CD 206). But responding to differences in social class, Glissant teaches, should look less like ‘aiding’ the oppressed and more like directly challenging the economic and political foundations of the elite class in the first place. ‘If they declare their commitment to liberation without also negating themselves (calling themselves into question) as a group’, he continues, ‘they cannot fight against the system that created their class and will only fall into step with the system’ (DA 698/CD 206, translation modified).

In their class positions and through their daily actions, implicated subjects benefit from and reinforce domination. On my reading of implicated subjects, they include men who through their gender identification gain authority in patriarchal contexts, citizens who through their civic status gain access to social services in nation states, students who through their education at prestigious universities have access to political power, and many others – I invite my reader to consider their own positioning. For responsibility to be effective under these conditions, it must be active. Passivity tends toward complicity. Surveying twentieth-century histories of

how fascism takes over countries, the historian Nitzan Lebovic notes that a fascist mob ‘needs the cooperation of the elite more than it needs to be in the majority’.¹³ Glissant adds about implicated subjects who assimilate themselves to practices of domination, ‘Everything must grind to a halt so that exploitation can take place’, and ‘the elite is given the responsibility of “maintaining” this condition of stasis’ (DA 693/CD 202).

In a recent study of responsibility, the political theorist Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo argues that a politically effective sense of responsibility needs to include not only reflection on ‘how one is responsible for the historical structures of power bearing one’s name and from which one differentially benefits’ but also an active break from those unjust structures.¹⁴ Reflection and breaking, he continues, require ‘calibrating one’s response, in the midst of emotional and often visceral reactions when one is asked to take responsibility for the actions performed in one’s name and for the structures of power that constitute the stage in which one enjoys certain rights, privileges, and status’.¹⁵ Responsibility today requires a recalibration – not an overwhelming guilt but an active break with elite class affiliations, a break that is understood as part of a larger transformation of governing institutions. Several practical questions emerge. How can implicated subjects take responsibility for the ‘historical structures of power’ from which they continue to benefit? How should elite actors recalibrate their responses to injustice? What exactly is the ‘stage’ on which responsibility is to be enacted? Because it raises these questions, this book speaks especially to students, those whose goals and orientations are soon to become more expansive through showing up for protests, making art in community and living in new places. It is a study especially relevant to classrooms, faith groups, café discussions and other settings of conversation about how justice-oriented actors understand themselves to be responsible amidst the overlapping political and environmental crises

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of the present. These conversations, which would do well to start from and remain in dialogue with the dispossessed, are steps on a larger path of action.

* * *

I now need to answer a second question: Why start from human rights? This question requires a more extended answer, because while structures of responsibility form a part of life for all humans, human rights discourse is a recent political fabrication. For that reason, while human life will always be conditioned by needing to respond to others, we could always choose another strategy if leveraging human rights claims failed to realise ethical ideals and achieve political gains.

In his sixth and eighth theses on Feuerbach, Karl Marx teaches that the truth of something does not lie only in its abstraction. Rather, the truth of something is its social truth.¹⁶ The social truth of human rights contains several problematic articulations. Indeed, the reason to take human rights movements seriously with a view toward decolonial pursuits is not because there is a natural or historical alignment between these movements. Following World War II, the human rights movement began as distinct from efforts toward decolonisation. Relatedly, there are conceptual reasons why decolonial theory remains suspicious of human rights discourse. In his 2009 article 'Who Speaks for the "Human" in Human Rights?', the decolonial thinker Walter D. Mignolo gives an answer to the question his article's title asks:

From the sixteenth century to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, He who speaks for the human is an actor embodying the Western ideal of being Christian, being man and being human. In other words, 'human' in human rights is an invention of Western imperial knowledge rather than the name of an existing entity to which everyone will have access.¹⁷

Mignolo's argument is that the European origin and scope of human rights belie their claim to universal application. For Mignolo, human rights exemplify 'the provincialism of the universal'.¹⁸ For his part, the philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres diagnoses 'the colonality of human rights'.¹⁹ He argues that the decolonisation of human rights requires firstly a decolonisation of the human. On this account, scepticism toward human rights is part of the decolonial turn's scepticism toward the coloniser's historical denial of full humanity to the colonised. Discussing Mignolo as well as Spivak, Maldonado-Torres notes that 'their common concern is that there is a pattern in which the definition of human rights leads to the creation of experts who are designated to speak to the colonized and other marginalized peoples about the rights that they possess'.²⁰ Other philosophers have examined how human rights claims operate in particular places, and they have found that Maldonado-Torres's analysis is correct. Thinking with Spivak and attending to Palestine, Jasbir Puar has observed that '[t]he white woman's burden from the nineteenth century is regenerated for contemporary deployment through liberal feminist frames within human rights discourses'.²¹ Writing about the violence nation states bring onto Indigenous peoples in Latin America, Julia Suárez-Krabbe concludes that while '[r]ights can contribute to protect the lives and wellbeing of some', '[b]ecause they are framed within a specific dominant ontology, and sustain a particular political horizon, human rights and development limit radical social change'.²²

Beyond decolonial theory, in the field of international relations, Neve Gordon and Nicola Perugini ask us to keep in mind the second Bush administration's justification of wars in the name of human rights as well as Amnesty International's use of the discourse to advocate for the Western occupation of Afghanistan. Gordon and Perugini have thus shown how the concept of human rights has become an epistemic and

moral framework subtending ‘a culture of *ethical violence* . . . in which human rights, humanitarianism, and domination are intricately tied’.²³ Their critique updates, in regard to contemporary humanitarians, what Du Bois wrote about missionaries in *Color and Democracy*, a text to which I will return in concluding this book. Du Bois put it this way: ‘Even if among these people of kindly intent there should be some who really succeed in doing an appreciable amount of good, the good they do often is not sufficient to compensate for the bad for which the system back of them is responsible.’²⁴ With such insights in mind, the critical theorist Randall Williams starts his book *Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence* from Du Bois’s writings in the 1940s, drawing on additional Marxists to highlight ‘the oppositional relation between two major postwar political forms, human rights and decolonization’.²⁵

We can see, then, that insightful critical theorists have demonstrated how human rights can presuppose an oppressive, hierarchical and ironically provincial anthropology, operating through paternalistic declarations, designations and calls for development. In other words, we can see that in practice, when citizens of the West invoke human rights, they are often speaking for others instead of standing with them, or they are citing human rights only to justify colonial occupations and violence. Here the decolonial critiques of responsibility and human rights overlap: the critical point is that both can substitute minimal moral reform for maximal political transformation.²⁶

But the social truth of human rights is also found in the Amnesty International tote bag on an otherwise conservative campus in Atlanta, in the community events board in a progressive church in Minneapolis, and in the Human Rights Campaign bumper sticker on a car outside a bar in Houston. That is to say, the discourse of human rights articulates the terrain of justice-oriented actors today. It is the language from which many of us begin, especially as students and in

faith groups, not quite knowing where to go from there. For this reason, human rights are broadly legible starting points for conversations about politics.²⁷ 'Human rights norms and organizations remain the chief source of idealistic passion in the world', Moyn writes – 'at least among its well-meaning cosmopolitan elites.'²⁸ A key strategic question in turn, Moyn continues, is 'what to do with the progressive moral energy to which human rights have been tethered in their short career. Is the order of the day to reinvest it or to redirect it?'²⁹

I contend that reinvesting in human rights claims is worthwhile in order to strengthen the oppositional (decolonial) elements within them. This is a method with broad historical precedent, including how the diplomats of recently independent states variously mobilised rights claims at the United Nations following World War II. While associating human rights and empire is now what the historian Roland Burke calls 'an academic commonplace', this was not the case even and especially among the self-understanding of newly post-colonial states in the 1950s.³⁰ At the South-South dialogue that was the Bandung conference of 1955, for instance, many delegates agreed on the universality of human rights. Neither the critique that human rights violated cultural particularity nor the sense that human rights were a colonial instrument was present at Bandung. It was quite the opposite. '[A]t this point in history', Burke explains, 'in the eyes of European, colonial powers, human rights were a threat to their colonial holdings and legacies more than a neocolonial tool.'³¹ As Burke further argues regarding the relationship between human rights and decolonisation, 'Human rights became a perennial aspect of anti-imperial and postcolonial phraseology not for its conceptual clarity, but for its versatility as a language with all-purpose emancipatory potential.'³² More specific precedents include, for instance, Jamaican Premier Norman Manley's early 1961 human rights policy, which his government understood

as in line with the larger regional project of the West Indies Federation, and the Xukuru nation's 2018 victory in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the state of Brazil, which the Xukuru understood as a wider victory for Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the Xukuru have continued to use the language of human rights not only to make claims on the state, but also as a way to name ongoing wrongs and to motivate additional struggles.³³ With this robust, but often overlooked, decolonial history of human rights in mind, the legal theorist José-Manuel Barreto has stressed, in regard to state violence and exploitative capitalism, that contemporary social movements 'have in human rights a powerful discourse to resist them' as well as 'to fathom a new world order pervaded by global justice'.³⁴

* * *

In addition to learning from the historical examples Burke, Barreto and others highlight, *Choose Your Bearing* looks to the cultural theorist Stuart Hall to gain its methodological foundation for beginning from human rights. Hall allows us to see how human rights can serve as a starting point to develop an ethics for a new Left – to motivate a politics – in the present. His sixth, seventh and eighth lectures on cultural studies in 1983 inform how I read human rights in the present. In Lecture 6, 'Ideology and Ideological Struggle', Hall treats the function of ideology through the philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of 'articulation'. 'The theory of articulation', Hall explains, 'asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it.'³⁵ That is, ideologies work in at least two ways: they not only limit our understanding of the world, but they also empower us to find a place in it. In Hall's words, ideologies enable us 'to begin to make some sense or intelligibility

of [our] historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to [our] socioeconomic or class location or social position'.³⁶ The example he gives here is religion, arguing that religion has 'no necessary political connotation'.³⁷ While religion conditions individuals ('subjects'), those articulations are historically contingent. They can always be transformed through re-articulation. 'To use a geographical metaphor', he goes on, 'to struggle around religion in that country' – a country where religious influences predominate – 'you need to know the ideological terrain, the lay of the land . . . If you want to move religion, to rearticulate it in another way, you are going to come across all the grooves that have articulated it already.'³⁸

Hall continues with a key point that I will extend to how human rights have been articulated in the US: '[R]eligion has become the *valorised* ideological terrain, the domain into which all the different cultural strands are obliged to enter.'³⁹ As a consequence, 'no political movement in that society can become popular without negotiating the religious terrain. Social movements have to transform it, butt into it, inflect it, develop it, clarify it – but they must engage with it.'⁴⁰ Reading human rights as Hall reads religion, I argue that human rights discourse – even as a limiting ideology for the reasons Spivak, Mignolo, Puar, Williams and others have documented – allows actors to make sense of our historical situation, providing a topographical map to guide our responses to an unjust present. Human rights claims thus can also serve as an empowering ideology, if they can be re-articulated to motivate further ethical, political and spiritual commitment.

Hall's discussion of the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony in Lecture 7, 'Domination and Hegemony', develops Hall's previous claims regarding religion. '[B]ecause hegemony is the establishment of the leading position on a variety of sites of social and political struggle', he

says, 'it includes domains that are usually ignored by Marxists, like the discourses of morality.'⁴¹ 'Anybody who wants to command the space of common sense, or popular consciousness, and practical reasoning', he goes on, 'has to pay attention to the domain of the moral, since it is the language within which vast numbers of people actually set about their political calculations.'⁴² 'The Left has rarely talked about that space in which the difference between the "good" and the "bad" is defined', meaning 'it has rarely attempted to establish the language of a socialist morality'.⁴³ In stronger terms, Hall argues that the Left 'has abstained from engaging on a front where it ought to be present'.⁴⁴ Here are his summary lines, said in central Illinois a few years into Ronald Reagan's first term:

A hegemonic politics operates in the cultural apparatuses, the discourse of moral languages, in the economic struggle, in the political space (including electoral struggles as well as other forms). It tries to occupy each and every front and understands that victory is not the great battle which ends with the final collapse of the enemy. Victory is the seizing of the balance of power on each of those fronts of struggle. It is commanding the balance of power on each of those ideological forces at each point in the social formation. That is a lesson which few on the Left have understood, but one which the bourgeoisie (especially in its contemporary forms) absolutely understands. They do not leave the cultural, intellectual, and moral spaces alone. They do not ignore the academies because there are relatively few people involved. They do not refuse to do battle on the terrain of sexual, social, and religious problems because that is not the domain of politics and power. They know that if they are going to make a difference in history, they are going to have to make a difference on all those fronts.⁴⁵

Hall's response to neoliberal hegemony, to social values created by market logics, does not simply look to apply previous models of social change. '[W]e have lived through a succession of

periods in the Western world when nonproblematic forms of the class struggle and the class belongingness of ideologies have simply refused to appear', he states in his final lecture, returning to name the problem that a methodological attention to cultural forms tries to solve.⁴⁶ 'There are only two responses to this situation: Either continue to use theory to guarantee that somewhere down the road such correspondences will appear, or undertake the exceedingly difficult task of bringing theory into line with the complexities of the empirical problems you have to explain.'⁴⁷ His lectures continually emphasise the latter approach: theory has to look to strange places and use various imaginative approaches to be able to understand empirical problems in the present. But that does not mean that theory should avoid the compromises that come with intervening into the predominant terrain.⁴⁸ Critical theory can try either to posit an alternative to existing vocabularies or to modify those vocabularies on their own terms. Hall consistently advocates for the latter, calling for a politics that 'strengthen[s] and deepen[s] the oppositional elements of already existing cultural forms'.⁴⁹ This is different from 'inviting people to abandon the forms in which they are involved and to suddenly move over to a different place, into a different formation'.⁵⁰ Hall would warn against any utopian suggestion of an absolute break, event or interruption. He teaches that such suggestions tend to fail not only because they are not persuasive to actors who do not want to depart from their habitual lives, but also because ethical theorists are not as good as we think we are at diagnosing which cultural forms are problematic. For him, all cultural forms are contradictory.⁵¹

* * *

One of the examples Hall gives of a cultural form that is worth strengthening and deepening is the discourse of rights. '[T]he

language of rights', he says, 'cannot belong *only* to the bourgeoisie.'⁵² Civil rights are an example. While the liberal and institutional ground on which civil rights are contested might lead to containment, he acknowledges, they are nevertheless 'real and effective moments of protest, resistance, and struggle'.⁵³ He also names human rights, noting that bourgeois rights meant more than merely gaining rights for some classes, because they also 'open[ed] the possibility for classes which had been excluded by the ways in which that ideology functioned, to claim the universality of such rights'.⁵⁴ 'Those excluded others', he says, 'could struggle to place themselves within a language which claimed to speak of *human* rights.'⁵⁵ Human rights thus provide an example of his claim that sometimes people who are being excluded from gaining rights do 'not need another term; they needed *that* term, the term which the bourgeoisie already understood, in order to conduct the struggle'.⁵⁶

Both Hall's call for a method that deepens the oppositional elements of existing cultural forms instead of appealing to a transcendental ethics of interruption and his example of rights language to illustrate this point raise problems for many theorists. Some worry that using rights language individualises struggle and cannot sufficiently challenge the state, a concern I address further in Chapter 2.⁵⁷ Hall has a similar concern, going on to acknowledge that 'the franchise is eventually won in a form which, while allowing [those previously excluded] access to political power, also individualises and fragments their political representation (one person, one vote)'.⁵⁸ Rights can also limit (or delimit) mobilisations, thereby containing radical definitions of democracy 'by articulating them, stitching them into place within, ideologies of liberalism'.⁵⁹

Acknowledging these concerns, Hall nevertheless points us to struggle on the ever-contested social terrain. '[T]he meaning of all these terms', he says about rights as well as democracy in

that final lecture, and the struggles about the definitions and implications of those terms, ‘changed from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The same terms refer to different realities. They can even represent different interests, different demands, different sites of struggle, as the historical conditions in which they are mobilized, the social forces to which they are attached, change.’⁶⁰

I suggest that human rights can speak to the domain of the moral, the terrain of ethics through which most people live out their (often unacknowledged) political commitments. Because human rights have been articulated in a widely accessible document – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – actors can debate this text. Because human rights also belong to a longer, generally under-studied radical tradition – David Walker, José Carlos Mariátegui, Claudia Jones, Malcolm X, Patricia Monture and Paul Gilroy come to mind – actors can apprentice themselves to this tradition and thus join these conversations.⁶¹ These debates and conversations can lead to community-guided political actions. This book itself is a reflection inspired by, and an elaboration on, the radical rights claims made by those noted a few lines above; below, I will briefly elaborate on how reflecting on the Universal Declaration can inspire debates about the habits and structures through which we live.

* * *

When we take the Universal Declaration as a starting point, we can note how extractions of goods that allow for ‘normal’ daily life to proceed in some places involves the exploitation of resources (and ultimately lives) according to colonial patterns.⁶² Many resources, from the beans for our morning lattes to the lithium for our hybrid cars, are still being extracted by the most precarious people for shipment to the

West. Although political power shifted during formal decolonisation, to a considerable extent economic power remains in the hands of elites in colonising countries. For instance, after independence, leaders of Ghana and Nigeria have had to face the problem that the control of cocoa and oil markets remains in London, New York and Houston. It is in considering such a problematic that Ghana's first prime minister, Kwame Nkrumah, said, 'Neo-colonialism is . . . the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer it, it means exploitation without redress.'⁶³ Studying the production of commodities such as cocoa and oil, as well as cobalt from the Congo that goes into our electronic devices, allows us to see endurances of the practices of forced labour that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits in Article 4 and aims to provide a bulwark against in Article 22.⁶⁴

Moreover, when we read Article 13, Part 1 – 'Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state' – we can ask: What are the necessary conditions for having this right? For the coffee or avocado farmer who picks beans or fruits during his or her day, what does this right mean? If we consider this meaning, and our responsibilities for carrying out this right, we quickly see that what is needed is much more than a 'fair trade' programme, which still looks like people in the West drinking the best coffee (saved for export) and travelling to the coffee-producing countries (say as tourists or studying abroad) while the people in the rest of the world stay in one place for much of their lives given their economic exigencies.

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.' This line could be taken up to intervene in the US context because 'liberty' is couched between life and security of person. While Republicans in the US have elevated liberty

over and above life and security of person, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought into relief, once again, the need for life and security if one is to have liberty in a meaningful way. Article 3 is a secular statement, agreed upon widely enough to make it into the Universal Declaration. It could be cited and used to push local mobilisations for socialised medicine in the US, deployed in places like churches where 'life' is already articulated strongly (if often in conservative senses) and where human rights are often already taken seriously. It is noteworthy that Pope Francis, following a Catholic tradition that suddenly embraced human rights in the middle of the twentieth century, employs the language of human rights.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the Human Rights Campaign is the largest LGBTQ advocacy group in the US. It is rare that the Pope and the queer advocates agree on the language of struggle. Of course, they have different understandings of what human rights imply. But if we take seriously Hall's argument for deepening oppositional elements in already existing cultural forms, then some critiques, here that the Catholic Church is too conservative or that the HRC is too corporate, appear as unhelpful. The point, Hall teaches us, is to shift the meaning of (often problematic) inherited language in order to make political gains. We do not get to choose this language, and we desperately need to have cultural conversations, on the widest possible level, in order to make these political gains. Hall reminds us that '[p]eople have to have a language to speak about where they are and what other possible futures are available to them'.⁶⁶ While 'emergent cultural forms do not contain their own guarantees', they nevertheless 'contain real possibilities'.⁶⁷

Many of us, after having conversations with others to examine our daily lives and to consider how they relate to the rights listed in the Universal Declaration, will find that we participate in patterns that violate human rights. In response, many of us remain invested in the ever-difficult task of

‘unlearning imperialism’.⁶⁸ We are left with some questions: Can we participate differently? Is there a way to live in our daily lives – as externally determined as they feel from trying to provide for our families and to pay our bills and debts – such that we do not violate but in fact protect the rights of others and of the earth itself?⁶⁹

Thesis and Chapter Outline

The thesis of this book is that rights claims made by the dispossessed entail duties for citizens of wealthy countries to live differently. The particular claim I take as my focus is Glissant’s call for a ‘right to opacity’, which I explain in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I use the philosopher James Griffin’s distinction between primary and secondary duties in order to argue that the primary duties corresponding to the right to opacity include participation in coalitional protest against the state and corporate forces that violate rights. I then treat the prayer camps at Standing Rock in 2016 as places where actors articulated rights claims resonant with the right to opacity. These examples show how the right to opacity functions in practice. In Chapters 3 and 4, I further argue that the secondary duties corresponding to the right to opacity include, beyond coalitional participation, a broader sense of solidarity extending to basic areas of life: what food we eat, what jobs we take, what clothes we wear, when and how we travel or decide not to travel, and how we form kinship relationships. Having treated the ethical strengths of rights claims in the first four chapters, in Chapter 5 I consider one important limitation of human rights claims, namely, that they can foreclose other political visions. To make this point, rather than prescribing a universal relation between human rights and politics, or conversely rejecting the usefulness of rights in all cases, I examine a particular context: W. E. B. Du Bois’s brief use of human rights and

then abandonment of the discourse for its complicity with capitalism and colonialism in the 1940s. Examining Du Bois's relationship to human rights can inform how we recalibrate our relationship to rights and responsibilities in the situations in which we find ourselves today.

While this book overall keeps considerable faith in human rights as a starting point for a Left/decolonial ethics and politics, it concludes with the acknowledgement that if human rights are tools for making political gains in addition to rethinking ethical duties and responsibilities, then a strategic leveraging of human rights claims also needs to know when not to deploy the discourse and instead seek other paths. As a whole, *Choose Your Bearing* can be read as an extended inquiry into what Tiffany King calls the 'new and old forms of speech' that decolonial social movements engage, create, abandon and require.⁷⁰ In other words, this book can be read as dwelling with what ethical theory could become when it is inflected by protest and prayer.⁷¹ *Choose Your Bearing* is ultimately a call for the West – which Glissant understands as a project more than a place (DA 14/CD 2) – to transform its understanding of value itself.

* * *

To begin this book, I have suggested that human rights contain no guarantee, but that they speak to where many people are and suggest futures available to them. They are a starting point to strengthen and deepen already present oppositional commitments. Because the language of human rights is already operative across many campuses, churches and other political spaces, it can be leveraged to contest oppressive sexual, social, religious and educational norms. Naming human rights violations is a way to speak to the 'bad'. Defending human rights goals is a way to affirm the 'good'. Most

importantly, more than just starting conversations, at their best human rights claims can inspire political commitment. Making connections from everyday life to the Universal Declaration invites actors to show up to protest a pipeline or to decline the offer of an internship in oil and gas. If we think about what we can do collectively to challenge human rights violations, we will begin to consider local, direct actions.⁷² We can boycott companies that violate human rights and we can challenge these forces more directly. We can divest our money from pipeline-funding banks and investments, and we can occupy those financial institutions in order to bring attention to how they support a fossil fuel economy that violates Indigenous rights to drinking water and religious practices per Universal Declaration Articles 3, 18 and 25.⁷³ We can remind each other of the agency we still have.

Justice-oriented actors have in human rights claims a call to participate in activism around land here and now. Ongoing rights work connected to decolonial movements in the Americas demands honouring treaty rights and repatriating land. It also involves shifting currently predominant conceptualisations of obligation, particularly around debt and migration. A decolonial sense of responsibility would contribute to a larger reckoning with historical and ongoing (colonial) hierarchies of humanity. A clear example of the need to reframe obligation lies in the fact that Western financial bodies are willing to forgive some of Ukraine's debt but not that of Barbados.⁷⁴ A further example lies in the fact that the United States and many European countries continue to deny the rights of entry, healthcare, education and citizenship to migrants who have been forced to move for reasons of war, famine or conflict that Western agricultural or military practices caused.⁷⁵ Thought in terms of connecting movements and reframing obligations, the practice of human rights becomes about not just designating and delegating power, but about building power in the face of ongoing state violence.

‘Resistance presupposes power’, the political philosopher Joy James clarifies.⁷⁶ She goes on:

Those who differentiate between power and domination in order to link power to communal goals for social and cultural freedoms, economic sufficiency, and radical democracy posit a vision of political community as the context for human development. Recognizing the diverse experiences and powers of oppressed peoples is essential in order to challenge subordination and exploitation. Viable political communities reflect the diversity and plurality of humanity. With foundations in justice and equity, a law of human rights posits one humanity: the right to participate in self-governance, to experience freedom, to live without violence and economic degradation.⁷⁷

This is the promise of human rights work today, James teaches: to build power in ‘risk-taking commitments’ that affirm decolonial options.⁷⁸

* * *

In the following chapter, I read Glissant’s ‘right to opacity’ as a summary concept inviting practices that militate against the status quo of violent, rights-violating resource extraction and commodity production. Spivak writes about the globalised present, ‘Today Marx’s ghost needs stronger offerings than Human Rights with economics worked in . . . or even responsibility (choice or being-called) in the Western tradition.’⁷⁹ Following Glissant, *Choose Your Bearing* presents a ‘stronger offering’ in Spivak’s sense: not human rights to justify development economics, but human rights as a gateway to political commitment, where responsibility is understood as a relational practice – between autonomous choice and heteronomous being-called – of participation, solidarity and feasibility.⁸⁰ Connecting human rights discourse to decolonial philosophy by explaining duties corresponding to the right to opacity, this book highlights the ethical paths that remain

open to us if we not only choose to listen to the claims of others, but also allow them to bear on us.

Notes

1. See Nemonte Nenquimo, 'This is my message to the western world – your civilization is killing life on earth', *The Guardian*, 12 October 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/12/western-worldyour-civilisation-killing-life-on-earth-indigenous-amazon-planet>>.
2. See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (New York: Verso, 2018). See also Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
3. My method here follows Enrique Dussel in his *Ethics of Liberation*. There Dussel writes that 'the Other . . . the oppressed or excluded face, the nonintentional victim . . . reveals himself or herself as the cry for which one must have ears to be able to hear . . . The Other is the possible victim and caused by my functional action in the system. I am re-sponsible' (Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 384). It is noteworthy that I will follow Dussel's point here in spirit if not in Levinas's vocabulary of 'the Other'.
4. Gayatri Spivak, 'Responsibility', *boundary 2* 21, no. 3 (1994): p. 21.
5. Mojtaba Mahdavi, 'A Postcolonial Critique of Responsibility to Protect in the Middle East', *Perceptions* XX, no. 1 (2015): p. 7; Siddharth Mallavarapu, 'Colonialism and the Responsibility to Protect', in *Theorising the Responsibility to Protect*, ed. Ramesh Thakur and William Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 306.
6. Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* (New York: Verso, 2017), p. 2.
7. Kathryn Sikkink, *The Hidden Face of Rights: Toward a Politics of Responsibilities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 5.
8. Ibid.

9. See Rebecca Solnit, 'Big oil coined "carbon footprints" to blame us for their greed. Keep them on the hook', *The Guardian*, 23 August 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/23/big-oil-coined-carbon-footprints-to-blame-us-for-their-greed-keep-them-on-the-hook>>.
10. Gayatri Spivak, 'Supplementing Marxism' in *Whither Marxism: Global Crises in International Perspective*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 117.
11. As the social scientist Yascha Mounk notes in his recent study about narratives of the welfare state and the conservative emphasis on personal responsibility in the US, 'Over the last decades, the concept of responsibility has shrunk to a punitive core' (Yascha Mounk, *The Age of Responsibility: Luck, Choice, and the Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 21). In my view, the Left still needs to envision a concept of responsibility that functions as a legible and popular alternative to this punitive concept.
12. Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 1. I thank Patricia Hill Collins for asking me, at a conference in 2016, to consider further to whom my work is addressed.
13. Nitzan Lebovic, 'Introduction: Complicity and Dissent, or Why We Need Solidarity between Struggles', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 3 (2019): p. 2.
14. Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility: Responding to Predicaments of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. xvi.
15. *Ibid.* p. xvii.
16. In regard to Marx's method, Stuart Hall says that there is 'the necessary moment of abstraction', but 'you cannot stop there – which a great deal of theory does'; in turn '[y]ou need to return to the problem you really wanted to solve, but now understanding that it is the product of "many determinations," not of one . . . you return to a world of many determinations, where the attempts to explain and understand are open and never eliding – because the historical reality to be explained has no known or determined

- end' (Stuart Hall, 'Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life', in *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 311).
17. Walter D. Mignolo, 'Who Speaks for the "Human" in Human Rights?', *Hispanic Issues On Line* (2009): p. 10.
 18. *Ibid.* p. 11.
 19. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Human Rights', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 114 (2017): pp. 117–36.
 20. *Ibid.* p. 130.
 21. Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 99.
 22. Julia Suárez-Krabbe, *Race, Rights and Rebels: Alternatives to Human Rights and Development from the Global South* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), p. 10.
 23. Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 77.
 24. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy* (New York: Oxford, 2007), p. 326.
 25. Randall Williams, *The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. xxi. While some might say that Williams's and my arguments work against each other, in fact we share many premises and differ only slightly in our conclusions. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, I follow Williams's call 'to shift our analytical perspective from one that assumes imperialism is a problem for international law, to one that grasps their mutually constitutive relationship', such that 'anti-imperialist theorizations direct us to look *outside the law* for sources of revolutionary, international transformations' (*ibid.* pp. xx, xxx). 'In this decolonizing register', Williams goes on, 'the displacement of the juridical makes possible a critical reckoning oriented toward the building of local, national, regional, and international movements in a counter-counterrevolutionary mode' (*ibid.* p. xxx). Looking beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Williams highlights 'alternative forms of universality', conceptions that, in addition to 'practices of freedom', were 'much more directly

rooted in the actualities of struggle' (ibid. p. xviii). By examining how rights claims carry with them a moral weight that bears on the desires and practices of those in the West, I am also looking outside the law. Further, the Indigenous rights claims that inspired this book certainly emerged from the actualities of struggle. It is for these reasons that I see my argument and that of Williams to have much more productive resonance than one might initially assume. Indeed, the following chapters' inquiry into solidarities beyond one-time participation in events offers a way to consider the political implications of rights claims beyond what Williams accurately calls a 'short-term urgent rescue model' that 'consistently reproduces an international division of humanity and works against the formation of a truly international practice of solidarity' (ibid. p. 38).

26. Cf. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), p. 171.
27. To continue the example of the Amnesty International bags on campus, when one student sees another with a bag claiming 'I Am a Human Rights Defender' or 'Build Bridges Not Walls', it can lead to further questions: What does that mean to you? How do you defend human rights around here?
28. Moyn, *Human Rights*, p. 101.
29. Ibid.
30. Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 113.
31. Ibid. p. 114.
32. Roland Burke, Marco Duranti and A. Dirk Moses, 'Introduction: Human Rights, Empire, and After', in *Decolonization, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Global Human Rights Politics*, ed. A. Dirk Moses, Marco Duranti and Roland Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 6.
33. For a discussion of Manley's relationship to human rights and decolonisation, see Steven L. B. Jensen, 'Manley, Human Rights, and the End of Colonial Rule in Jamaica', in Moses et al.,

- Decolonization*, p. 250. My knowledge of the Xukuru case comes from personal communication with Marcos and Diego Xukuru. I would like to thank o povo Xukuru for their guidance.
34. José-Manuel Barreto, 'Decolonial Thinking and the Quest for Decolonising Human Rights', *Asian Journal of Social Science* 46, nos. 4–5 (2018): p. 499.
 35. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 142.
 36. *Ibid.* p. 143.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. *Ibid.* p. 144.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. *Ibid.* p. 173.
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. *Ibid.*
 44. *Ibid.* p. 174.
 45. *Ibid.* pp. 177–8. These lines recall his 1979 essay 'The great moving right show', his diagnosis of the radical right: 'What makes these representations popular', he writes about the radical right's rhetorical moves around law and order, enemies of the state, the threat of anarchy and the idea of the 'enemy within', 'is that they have a purchase on practice, they shape it, they are written into its materiality. What constitutes them as a danger is that they change the nature of the terrain itself on which struggles of different kinds are taking place; and they have pertinent effects on these struggles. Currently, they are gaining ground in defining the "conjunctural". That is exactly the terrain on which the forces of opposition must organize, if we are to transform it' (Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. Sally Davison et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 176, 186). I read Hall's final 1983 cultural studies lecture, 'Culture, Resistance, and Struggle' as an elaboration on the kind of oppositional struggle he called for at the end of the 1979 'The Great Moving Right Show'.
 46. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 185.

47. Ibid.
48. Here I also follow Edward Said's claim that human rights are a way to see, and to argue for, connections across the planet: 'To be "for" human rights means, in effect, to be willing to venture interpretations of those rights in the same place and with the same language employed by the dominant power, to dispute its hierarchy and methods, to elucidate what it has hidden, to pronounce what it has silenced or rendered unpronounceable. These intellectual procedures require, above all, an acute sense not of how things are separated but of how they are connected, mixed, involved, embroiled, linked' (Edward Said, 'Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 430).
49. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 189.
50. Ibid. Examples of twentieth-century Continental ethics that call for a radical abandonment of present forms of life include Alain Badiou's call for fidelity to the 'event' that interrupts everyday life and Emmanuel Levinas's prescription of passive, prayerful reverence toward the Other.
51. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 188.
52. Ibid. p. 181.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid. p. 182.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid. pp. 183–4.
57. Recent work I have found instructive on these points includes Jessica Whyte, *The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (New York: Verso, 2019) and Jayan Nayar, 'The Non-Perplexity of Human Rights', *Theory & Event* 22, no. 1 (2019): pp. 267–305. See also Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 91.
58. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 183.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.

61. For rights claims in the work of these figures, see for example David Walker, 'Appeal' (1829); José Carlos Mariátegui, 'The Problem of Land' (1928); Claudia Jones, 'We Seek Full Equality for Women' (1949); Malcolm X, 'The Ballot or the Bullet' (1964); Patricia Monture, 'The Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women' (1992); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race* (2000) and *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005).
62. I have previously written about the connection between human rights and decolonisation in Benjamin P. Davis, 'What Could Human Rights Do? A Decolonial Inquiry', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 5 (2020): pp. 1–22.
63. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. xi. Nkrumah's is another way of stating the problem of coloniality. 'Coloniality', Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains, drawing on Aníbal Quijano, 'refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being', *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): p. 243).
64. Summarising Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's important attention to Western cultural impositions in addition to economic control, Robert J. C. Young writes, 'Ngũgĩ has drawn on Fanon to add to Nkrumah's analysis the additional component of the neocolonial elite, the often western-educated ruling class who identify more closely with the west than with the people of the country that they rule; in return for an affluent life-style, they facilitate the exploitative operations of western national and multinational companies' (Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley, 2016), p. 48).
65. The *Vatican News* got right to the point in their perfect title: see Francesca Merlo, 'Pope: Human rights first, even if it means going against the tide', *Vatican News*, 10 December 2018, <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-12/pope-francis-message-human-rights-day-international-conference.html>>.
66. Hall, *Cultural Studies* 1983, p. 206.

67. Ibid.
68. I borrow this phrase from Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso, 2019). In *Potential History*, Azoulay makes several insightful critiques of both human rights discourse and the United Nations. For example, she distinguishes between official invocations of human rights and a different set of performative rights: 'Rights are reconsidered in this book as protocols for a shared world, an alternative configuration to the dominant discourse of human rights that is conceived and considered from the perspective of differential sovereign powers and emblemized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights . . . This sovereign universal human rights discourse based on abstract equality renders obsolete and irrelevant the real, concrete inequalities perpetrated by imperialism and inherent in the position of citizens in a differential body politic' (ibid. p. 54). I hope that by the end of this book it is clear how much I have learned from this criticism as well as this vision of rights as 'protocols for a shared world'.
69. For my extended discussion of reading human rights with a view toward ethical changes in daily life, see Benjamin P. Davis, 'Human Rights and Caribbean Philosophy: Implications for Teaching', *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 12, no. 4 (2021): pp. 136–44.
70. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 44.
71. Standing Rock will be my principal example of protest and prayer. I also have in mind prayers in the work of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Both of arguably their most well-known prayers reflect a remarkable receptivity to the world and to a world in the making, a world that could be, a world not yet: Césaire in his 'robust prayer' [*ma prière virile*] says 'make of me a man of closure / make of me a man of beginning / make of me a man of reaping / but also make of me a man of sowing'; and Fanon, in his 'final prayer', says, 'O my body, make of me always a man who questions!' See Aimé Césaire, *Journal of a Homecoming/Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Durham, NC: Duke

- University Press, 2017), pp. 128/129; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 181. In reading protest and prayer together into ethics, I follow a long line of Caribbean philosophy that combines politics and aesthetics, what Paget Henry describes in terms of historicism and poeticism (Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 93, 112). Glissant himself acknowledges this lineage, reading Césaire as combining 'political activity' and 'poetic creation' (PhR 132).
72. My method is also informed by the work of Lewis Gordon. See for example Lewis Gordon, 'Shifting the Geography of Reason in an Age of Disciplinary Decadence', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011). See also his emphasis on collective responsibility: Lewis Gordon, *Fear of Black Consciousness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022), p. 158. Cf. the kind of pedagogy LaRose Parris calls for in *Being Apart: Theoretical and Existential Resistance in Africana Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 165.
73. See Emma Howard, 'A beginner's guide to fossil fuel divestment', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/23/a-beginners-guide-to-fossil-fuel-divestment>>; see also Green Portfolio, 'Is your hard-earned cash funding fossil fuel development?', 12 April 2022, <https://greenportfolio.com/blog/banking_and_climate_change/>.
74. '[B]y failing to fully account for how the exceptional costs of climate change affect national wealth, the I.M.F. and the World Bank have wound up driving countries in need toward profit-reaping hedge funds and banks, to borrow billions of dollars, often at credit-card-like interest rates. Throughout, the debts have been collected. They were collected as the shadow of the 2008 financial crisis lingered and as a pandemic decimated tenuous health care systems and tourist-reliant economies. They continue to be collected despite a climate crisis that is caused almost entirely by the copious fossil fuels that those same

creditor nations burned to industrialize and achieve their own wealth, the very wealth that undergirds the I.M.F. Caribbean nations are being asked, in a sense, to pay not only their own debts but the rest of the world's debts, too, for all the progress it made while leaving the Caribbean behind . . . Debt is written off in Ukraine, as it was for Germany after World War II. Other countries, though, the ones subjugated throughout history, have seen their humanitarian crises ignored . . . Perhaps the suggestion that lenders forgive debt isn't about kindness but about obligation – about seeing it as a kind of back tax that they owe to society and to frontline societies, in particular' (Abraham Lustgarten, 'Oceans of Debt', *The New York Times Magazine* (31 July 2022): pp. 31, 49, 47).

75. See for example Lea Coffineau, 'Migration as a Claim for Reparations: Connections between political agency and migration', *Public Seminar*, 7 December 2020, <<https://publicseminar.org/essays/migration-as-a-claim-for-reparations/>>.
76. Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, & Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 243.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*
79. Gayatri Spivak, 'What's Left of Theory?', in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 197.
80. For a critique of the legal 'liability model' of responsibility, see Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 95–122. For an elaboration of the (heteronomous) Levinasian being-called model of responsibility, including a helpful comparison of that model to the (autonomous) Sartrean model of responsibility, see François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 121–219.