



# Human Rights, Human Wrongs

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## Righting Wrongs

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*Argument:* Responsibility-based cultures are long delegitimized and unprepared for the public sphere; rights-based cultures are increasingly committed to corporatism in philanthropy. The former need supplementation for entry into democratic reflexes just as the latter need supplementation into the call of the other. Supplementation is needed by both sides. The humanities can play a role. Otherwise human rights feed (on) class apartheid.

'Human Rights, Human Wrongs', the title of this lecture series, is asymmetrical. The primary nominative sense of 'rights' cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'justifiable claim, on legal or moral grounds, to have or obtain something, or to act in a certain way'. There is no parallel usage of 'wrongs', connected to an agent in the possessive case—'my wrongs'—or given to it as an object of the verb 'to have'—'she has wrongs'.

'Rights' entail an individual or collective. 'Wrongs', however, cannot be used as a noun, except in so far as another, as agent of injustice, is involved. The verb 'to wrong' is more common than the noun, and indeed the noun probably gets its enclitic meaning by back-formation from the verb.

The word 'rights' in the title of our lecture series this year acquires verbal meaning by its contiguity with the word 'wrongs'. The verb 'to right' cannot be used intransitively on this level of abstraction. It can only be used with the unusual

noun 'wrong': 'to right a wrong' or 'to right wrongs'. Our title thus makes visible that 'Human Rights' is not only about having or claiming a right or a set of rights, it is also about righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights. The idea of human rights, in other words, may carry within itself the agenda of a kind of Social Darwinism: the fittest must shoulder the burden of righting the wrongs of the unfit—and the possibility of an alibi.' Only a 'kind of' Social Darwinism, of course. Just as 'the white man's burden', undertaking to civilize and develop, was only 'a kind of' oppression. It would be silly to footnote the scholarship that has gone to show that the latter may have been an alibi for economic, military and political intervention. It is on that model that I am using the concept-metaphor of the alibi in these introductory paragraphs.

Having arrived here, the usual thing is to complain about the eurocentrism of human rights. I have no such intention. I am of course troubled by the use of human rights as an alibi for interventions of various sorts. But its so-called European provenance is for me in the same category as the 'enabling violation' of the production of the colonial subject.<sup>2</sup> One cannot write off the righting of wrongs. The enablement must be used even as the violation is renegotiated.

Colonialism was committed to the education of a certain class. It was interested in the seemingly permanent operation of an altered normality. Paradoxically, human rights and 'development' work today cannot claim this self-empowerment that high colonialism could. Yet, it is some of the best products of high colonialism, descendants of the colonial middle class, who become human rights advocates in the countries of the South. I will explain through an analogy.

'Doctors without Frontiers'—I find this translation

[*Médécins sans Frontières*] more accurate than the received 'Doctors without Borders'—dispense healing all over the world, travelling to solve health problems as they arise. They cannot be involved in the repetitive work of primary health-care, which requires changes in the habit of what seems normal living: permanent operation of an altered normality. This group cannot learn all the local languages, dialects and idioms of the places where they provide help. They use local interpreters. It is as if, in the field of class-formation through education, colonialism and the attendant territorial imperialism had combined these two imperatives—clinic and primary healthcare—by training the interpreters themselves into imperfect yet creative imitations of the doctors. The class thus formed—both (pseudo)doctor and interpreter, as it were—was the colonial subject.

The end of the Second World War inaugurated the post-colonial dispensation.

It was the U.N. Special Committee on Decolonization . . . that in 1965 asked the Commission [on Human Rights, created in 1946] to process the petitions that the Committee was receiving about human rights violations in southern Africa . . . [Until the mid-1960s,] particularly for the new African and Asian members, the priority was [white] racism and [against it] self-determination from colonial rule [in other words, decolonization]. Later, their enthusiasm for the new procedures waned as the protection of civil and political [human] rights [in the new nation] emerged as the priority consideration and many of them became the targets [since they, as the new masters, were the guilty party] for the Commission's new mandate.<sup>3</sup>

For the eighteenth-century Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens by the National Assembly of France, the 'nation is essentially the source of sovereignty; nor can any

individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.'<sup>4</sup> One hundred and fifty years later, for better or for worse, the human rights aspect of postcoloniality has turned out to be the breaking of the new nations, in the name of their breaking-in into the international community of nations.<sup>5</sup> This is the narrative of international manoeuvring. Risse, Roppe and Sikkink's recent book, *The Power of Human Rights*, takes the narrative further. In addition to the dominant states, they argue, since 1993 it is the transnational agencies, plus non-governmental organizations that subdue the state.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, it is still disingenuous to call human rights eurocentric. This is not only because, in the global South, the domestic human rights workers are, by and large, the descendants of the colonial subject, often culturally positioned against eurocentrism. It is also because, internationally, the role of the new diasporic is strong, and the diasporic in the metropolis stands for 'diversity' 'against eurocentrism'. Thus the work of righting wrongs is shared above a class line that to some extent and unevenly cuts across race and the North-South divide.<sup>7</sup> I say 'to some extent and unevenly' because, to be located in the Euro-US still makes a difference. In the United Nations itself, 'the main human rights monitoring function [has been] allocated to the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe]'.<sup>8</sup> The presuppositions of Risse, Roppe and Sikkink's book also make this clear. The subtitle, 'International norms and domestic change', is telling. In keeping with this, the authors' idea of the motor of human rights is 'pressure' on the state 'from above' (international) and 'from below' (domestic). (It is useful for this locationist privilege that most NGOs of the global South survive on Northern aid.) Here is a typical example, as it happens about

the Philippines: "Human rights" have gained prescriptive status independent of political interests . . . [We] doubt that habitualization or institutionalization at the state level have proceeded sufficiently to render pressure from societal actors futile." This is pressure 'from below', of course. Behind these 'societal actors' and the state is 'international normative pressure'. I shall go on to suggest that, unless 'education' is thought differently from 'consciousness-raising' about 'the human rights norm' and 'rising literacy expand[ing] the individual's media exposure', 'sufficient habitualization or institutionalization' will never arrive, and this will continue to provide justification for international control.

Thinking about education and the diaspora, Edward W. Said has recently written that 'the American University generally [is] for its academic staff and many of its students the last remaining utopia.'<sup>10</sup> The philosopher Richard Rorty as well as Lee Kuan Yew—the former Prime Minister of Singapore who supported 'detention without trial . . . [as] Confucianist'—share Professor Said's view of the utopianism of the Euro-US university. I quote Rorty, but I invite you to read Premier Lee's *From Third World to First: the Singapore Story: 1965–2000* to savour their accord:

Producing generations of nice, tolerant, well-off, secure, other-respecting students of [the American] sort in all parts of the world is just what is needed—indeed all that is needed—to achieve an Enlightenment utopia. The more youngsters like that we can raise, the stronger and more global our human rights culture will become.<sup>11</sup>

If one wishes to make this restricted utopianism, which extends to great universities everywhere, available for global social justice, one must unmoor it from its elite safe harbours,

supported by the power of the dominant nation's civil polity, and be interested in a kind of education for the largest sector of the future electorate in the global South—the children of the rural poor—that would go beyond literacy and numeracy and find a home in an expanded definition of a 'humanities to come'.

Education in the humanities attempts to be an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires.<sup>12</sup> If you are not persuaded by this simple description, then nothing I say about the humanities will move you. This is the burden of the second section of this essay. It is this simple but difficult practice that is outlined there. It is only when we interest ourselves in this new kind of education for the children of the rural poor in the global South that the inevitability of unremitting pressure as the *primum mobile* of human rights will be questioned. If one engages in such empowerment at the lowest level, it is in the hope that the need for international/domestic-elite pressure on the state will not remain primary forever. We cannot necessarily expect the old colonial subject transformed into the new domestic middle-class urban radical, defined as 'below' by Risse, Roppe and Sikkink and by metropolitan human rights in general, to engage in the attempt I shall go on to describe. Although physically based in the South, and therefore presumably far from the utopian university, this class is generally also out of touch with the mindset—a combination of episteme and ethical discourse—of the rural poor below the NGO level. To be able to present a project that will draw aid from the North, for example, to understand and state a problem intelligibly and persuasively for the taste of the North, is itself proof of a sort of epistemic discontinuity with the ill-educated rural poor.<sup>13</sup> (And the sort of education we are thinking of is not to make the rural poor capable of

drafting NGO grant proposals!) It is this discontinuity, not skin colour or national identity crudely understood, that undergirds the question of who always rights and who is perennially wronged.<sup>14</sup>

I have been suggesting, then, that 'human rights culture' runs on unremitting Northern-ideological pressure, even when it is from the South; that there is a real epistemic discontinuity between the Southern human rights advocates and those whom they protect.<sup>15</sup> In order to shift this layered discontinuity, however slightly, we must focus on the quality and end of education, at both ends: the Southern elite is often educated in Western or Western-style institutions. We must work at both ends—both in Said/Rorty's utopia and in the schools of the rural poor in the global South. I shall argue this by way of a historical and theoretical digression.

As long as the claim to natural or inalienable human rights—rights that all human beings possess because they are human by nature—was reactive to the historical alienation in 'Europe' as such (the French *ancien régime* or the German Third Reich), the problem of relating 'natural' to 'civil' rights was on the agenda. Since its use by the Commission on Decolonization in the 1960s, its thorough politicization in the 1990s, when the nation-states of the South, and perhaps the nation-state form itself needed to be broken in the face of the restructuring demands of globalization; and its final inclusion of the postcolonial subject in the form of the metropolitan diasporic, that particular problem—of relating 'natural' to 'civil' rights—was quietly forgotten. In other words, that the question of nature must be begged (assumed when it needs to be demonstrated), in order to use it historically, has been forgotten.<sup>16</sup>

The urgency of the political calculus obliges Thomas Paine to reduce the shadow of this immense European debate—between justice and law, between natural and civil rights [*jura*], at least as old as classical antiquity—to a 'difference'. The structural asymmetry of the difference—between mental theatre and state structure—remains noticeable:

His natural rights are the foundation of all his civil rights. But in order to pursue this distinction with more precision, it will be necessary to mark the different qualities of natural and civil rights . . . Every civil right has for its foundation, some natural right pre-existing in the individual, but to the enjoyment of which his individual power is not, in all cases, sufficient.<sup>17</sup>

The context of the *second* Declaration brings us close to our present. To situate it historically within the thematic of the begged question at the origin, I refer the reader to Jacques Derrida's treatment of how Walter Benjamin attempts to contain this in his 1921 essay 'Critique of Violence', which deals precisely with the relationship between natural and positive law and legitimate and illegitimate violence.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin's consideration of the binary opposition between legitimate and illegitimate violence as it relates to the originary violence that establishes authority can be placed on the chain of displacements from Hobbes's consideration of the binary opposition between the state of nature and the law of nature, with the former split by what George Shelton sees as the difference between the fictive and its representation as the real.<sup>19</sup>

I will mention Ernst Bloch's *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (1961) here to give a sense of a text at the other end of the Third Reich.<sup>20</sup> The 1960s will witness the internationalization of human rights. The Benjamin/Bloch texts

represent the European lineaments that brought forth the second Declaration.

Bloch faces the problem of the 'natural' by historicizing it. He gives an account of the ways in which the European tradition has finessed the begged question of nature. His heroes are the Stoics—especially Epicurus—and Marx. Marx contains the potential of setting free the question of nature as freedom: '[a] Marxism that was what it was supposed to be would be a radical penal theory, indeed the most radical and at the same time most amiable: It kills the social mother of injustice.' I cannot credit a 'Marxism in its proper outlines'. But I can at least suggest that in these times, when an internationalized human rights has forgotten to acknowledge the begged question of nature, a non-disciplinary 'philosopher' who has been taught the value of philosophy as an 'art of living' in the Stoic style through the Nietzschean line of Foucault and Derrida might want to point out that Zeno and Epicurus were, necessarily, what would today be called 'colonial subjects'. I would also suggest that we may attempt to supplement a merely penal system by re-inventing the social mother of injustice as worldwide class-apartheid, and kill her, again and again, in the mode of 'to come', through the education of those who fell through colonial subject-formation.<sup>21</sup>

I have not the expertise to summarize the long history of the European debate surrounding natural/civil rights. With some hesitation I would point at the separation/imbrication of nature and liberty in Machiavelli, at the necessary slippage in Hobbes between social contract as natural fiction and social contract as civil reality, at Hobbes's debate on liberty and necessity with Bishop Bramhill.<sup>22</sup> George Shelton distinguishes between a 'hypothetical' and a 'real' social contract

in Hobbes, at a certain point calling the former a 'useful fiction.'<sup>23</sup> New interest in Hobbesian theology has disclosed a similar pattern in Hobbes's discussion of God as ground.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly interesting because Hobbes is so widely seen as the initiator of individualism. Hobbes himself places his discussions within debates in Roman law and I think we should respect this chain of displacements—rather than a linear intellectual history—that leads to the rupture of the first European Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>25</sup> I am arguing that such speculative lines are not allowed to flourish within today's global human rights activities, where a crude notion of cultural difference is about as far as grounds-talk will go.

Academic research may contest this trend by tracking rational critique and/or individualism within non-European high cultures.<sup>26</sup> This is valuable work. But the usually silent victims of pervasive rather than singular and spectacular human rights violations are generally the rural poor. These academic efforts do not touch their stagnating general cultures unless it is through broad generalizations, positive and negative. Accessing those long-delegitimized epistemes requires a different engagement. The pedagogic effort that may bring about lasting epistemic change in the oppressed is never accurate, and must be forever renewed. Otherwise there does not seem much point in considering the humanities worth teaching. And, as I have already signalled, the red thread of a defence of the humanities as an attempt at uncoercive rearrangement of desires runs through this essay.

Attempts at such pedagogic change need not necessarily involve confronting the task of undoing the legacy of a specifically *colonial* education. Other political upheavals have also divided the postcolonial or global polity into an effective class apartheid. (I expand my argument beyond postcoloniality in

the narrow sense because of what I hope is the beginning of a long-term involvement with grassroots rural education in China.) All that seems possible to surmise is that the redressing work of human rights must be supplemented by an education that can continue to make unstable the presupposition that the reasonable righting of wrongs is inevitably the manifest destiny of groups—unevenly class-divided, embracing North and South—that remain poised to right them; and that, among the receiving groups, wrongs will inevitably proliferate with unsurprising regularity. Consequently, the groups that are the dispensers of human rights must realize that, just as the natural Rights of Man were contingent upon the historical French Revolution, and the Universal Declaration upon the historical events that led to the Second World War, so also is the current emergence, of the human rights model as the global dominant, contingent upon the turbulence in the wake of the dissolution of imperial formations and global economic restructuring. The task of making visible the begged question grounding the political manipulation of a civil society forged on globally defined natural rights is just as urgent; and not simply by way of *cultural* relativism.

In disciplinary philosophy, discussion of the begged question at the origin of natural rights is not altogether absent. Alan Gewirth chooses the Rational Golden Rule as his PGC (principle of generic consistency), starting his project in the following way: 'The Golden Rule is the common moral denominator of all the world's major religions.'<sup>27</sup> From a historical point of view, one is obliged to say that none of the great religions of the world can lead to an end to violence today.<sup>28</sup> Where Gewirth, whom nobody would associate with deconstruction, is important for our argument, is in his awareness of the grounding of the justification for Human

Rights in a begged question. He takes it as a 'contradiction' to solve and finds in the transposition of 'rational' for 'moral' his solution.<sup>29</sup> 'The traditional Golden Rule [Do unto others as you would have them do unto you] leaves open the question of why any person ought to act in accordance with it.'<sup>30</sup> This is the begging of the question, because the moral cannot not be normative. According to Gewirth, a commonsensical problem can be theoretically avoided because

[i]t is not the contingent desires of agents but rather aspects of agency which cannot rationally be avoided or evaded by any agent that determine the content of the Rational Golden Rule [because it] . . . focuses on what the agent necessarily wants or values insofar as he is rational.

It would seem to us that this begs the question of the reasonable nature of reason (accounting for the principle of reason by the principle of reason).<sup>31</sup> We would rather not construct the best possible theory, but acknowledge that practice always splits open the theoretical justification.

In fact, Gewirth knows this. Toward the end of the essay, this curious sentence is left hanging: '*Materially*, [the] *self-contradiction* [that to deny or violate the Rational Golden Rule is to contradict oneself] is *inescapable* because . . . the Rational Golden Rule [is] derived from the necessities of purposive agency' (emphasis added). If we acknowledge the part outside of reason in the human mind, then we may see the limits of reason as 'white mythology' and see the contradiction as the necessary relationship between two discontinuous begged questions as I have suggested above: proof that we are born free and proof that it is the other that calls us before will. Then the question 'Why must we follow the Golden Rule (the basis of human rights)?' finds an answer: because the other

calls us. But it is never a fitting answer, it is not continuous with the question. Let us then call this a relationship, a discontinuous supplementary relationship, not a solution. Instead, Gewirth is obliged to recode the white mythology of reason as unavoidable last instance, as an 'inherent capab[ility] of exercising [human rights]'.<sup>32</sup> If one enters into a sustained give-and-take with subordinate cultures attempting to address structural questions of power as well as textural questions of responsibility, one feels more and more that a Gewirth-style recoding may be something like a historical incapacity to grasp that to rationalize the question of ethics *fully* (please note that this does not mean banishing reason from ethics altogether, just giving it an honorable and instrumental place) is to transgress the intuition that ethics are a problem of relation before they are a task of knowledge. This does not gainsay the fact that, in the juridico-legal manipulation of the abstractions of contemporary politics by those who right wrongs, where a reasoned calculus is instrumentally necessary, nothing can be more welcome than Gewirth's rational justification. What we are describing is a simplified version of the aporia between ethics and politics. An aporia is disclosed only in its one-way crossing. This essay attempts to make the reader recognize that human rights is such an interested crossing, a containment of the aporia in binary oppositions.<sup>33</sup>

A few words, then, about supplementing metropolitan education before I elaborate on the pedagogy of the subaltern. By 'subaltern' I mean those removed from lines of social mobility.<sup>34</sup>

I shall continue to insist that the problem with US education is that it teaches (corporatist) benevolence while trivializing the teaching of the humanities.<sup>35</sup> The result is, at best,

cultural relativism as cultural absolutism ('American-style education will do the trick'). Its undoing is best produced by way of the training of reflexes that kick in at the time of urgency, of decision and policy. However unrealistic it may seem to you, I would not remain a teacher of the humanities if I did not believe that at the New York end—standing metonymically for the dispensing end as such—the teacher can try to rearrange desires noncoercively (as I mentioned a few pages back) through an attempt to develop in the student a habit of literary reading, even just 'reading', suspending oneself into the text of the other. For this, the first condition and effect is a suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end-product for which history happened, and that New York is necessarily the capital of the world. It is not a loss of will, especially since it is supplemented in its turn by the political calculus, where, as Said's, Rorty's and Premier Lee's argument emphasizes, the possibility of being a 'helper' abounds in today's triumphalist US society. A training in literary reading is a training to learn from the singular and the unverifiable. Although literature cannot speak, this species of patient reading, miming an effort to make the text respond, as it were, is a training not only in poiesis, accessing the other so well that probable action can be prefigured, but teleo-poiesis, striving for a response from the distant other, without guarantees.

I have no moral position against grading, or writing recommendation letters. But if you are attempting to train in specifically literary reading, the results are not directly ascertainable by the teaching subject, and perhaps not the taught subject either. In my experience, the 'proof' comes in unexpected ways, from the other side. But the absence of such



proof does not necessarily 'mean' nothing has been learnt. This is why I say 'no guarantees'.<sup>36</sup> And that is also why the work of an epistemic undoing of cultural relativism as cultural absolutism can only work as a supplement to the more institutional practice, filling a responsibility-shaped gap but also adding something discontinuous. As far as human rights goes, this is the only prior and patient training that can leaven the quick-fix training institutes that prepare international civil society workers, including human rights advocates, with uncomplicated standards for success.<sup>37</sup> This is not a suggestion that all human rights workers should have institutional humanities training. As it stands, humanities teaching in the United States is what I am describing only in the very rare instance. And the mode is 'to come'.

It is in the interest of supplementing metropolitan humanities pedagogy, rather than from the perspective of some fantasmatic cultural difference, that we can say that the 'developed post-capitalist structure' of today's world must 'be filled with the more robust imperative to responsibility which capitalist social productivity was obliged to destroy. We must learn to re-define that lost imperative as defective for the emergence of capitalism, rather than necessarily pre-capitalist on an interested sequential evolutionary model.'<sup>38</sup> On the simplest terms, being defined by the call of the other—which may be a defining feature of such societies—is not conducive to the extraction and appropriation of surplus. Making room for *otium* and living in the rhythm of the eco-biome does not lead to exploration and conquest of nature. And so on. The method of a specifically literary training, a slow mind-changing process, can be used to open the imagination to such mindsets.<sup>39</sup>

One of the reasons international communism failed was

because Marx, an organic intellectual of the industrial revolution, could only think the claiming of rights to freedom from exploitation by way of the public use of reason recommended by the European Enlightenment. The ethical part—to want to exercise the freedom to redistribute after the revolution—comes by way of the sort of education I am speaking of. This intuition was not historically unavailable to Marx: 'circumstances are changed by men and . . . the educator himself must be educated'.<sup>40</sup> In the event, the pedagogic impulse was confined to the lesson of capital, to change the victim into an agent. The intuition that the lesson was historically determined was of course not unavailable to Marx either.<sup>41</sup> My position is thus not against class-struggle, but yet another attempt to broaden it, to include the 'ground condition' [*Grundbedingung*] of the continued reproduction of class apartheid in ancient and/or disenfranchised societies in modernity. If the industrial proletariat of Victorian England were expanded to include the global subaltern, there is no hope that such an agent could ever 'dictate' anything through the structures of parliamentary democracy—I admit I cannot give this up—if this persistent pedagogic effort is not sustained.

(I am more than ever convinced of the need to resuscitate the lost cultural imperative to responsibility after the initial trip, mentioned above, to the lowest-level rural schools in a mountain province in China, in the company of a wonderfully enthusiastic young English teacher at the University of Science and Technology in the provincial urban center. He had never visited such schools, never thought of the possibility of restoring a failed communism with a persistent effort to teach oneself how to access older cultural habits in practice in order to suture in, in rural education, the ethical impulse that can make social justice flourish, forever in the mode of 'to

come', because forever dependent upon the qualitative education of the young.<sup>42</sup> Yet he has already been used by the US industry in 'China's ethnic minority education' scholarship, as a 'grassroots native informant' sent into 'the field' with a questionnaire for ten days' research! A perfect candidate for the domestic 'below', for whom the 'evils' of communism seem to be open for correction only through the absolutist arrogance of US utopianism, coded as an interest in cultural difference.)

A desire to redistribute is not the unproblematic consequence of a well-fed society. In order to get that desire moving by the cultural imperative of education, you have to fix the possibility of putting not just 'wrong' over against 'right', with all the genealogical lines compressed within it; but also to suggest that another antonym of 'right' is 'responsibility', and further, that the possibility of such responsibility is underived from rights.

I will now describe a small and humble experiment that I have tried over the last ten years, nearly every day at the Columbia University gym and, unhappily, the rate of experimental verification is 100 per cent. There is an approximately 6 ft by 4 ft windowless anteroom as you enter the locker area. This useless space, presumably to protect female modesty, is brightly lit. There is a light switch by the door from the main gym into the anteroom, and another by the door leading into the lockers. In other words, it is possible to turn the light off as you exit this small enclosed space. You can choose not to let it burn so brightly for 24 hours for no one. Remember, these are university folks, generally politically correct, interested in health, a special control group, who talk a good deal about environmental responsibility. (I am drawing the example from within the cultural idiom of the group, as always.) I turn off

the light in this windowless cube whenever I enter the locker and my sciatica keeps me going to the gym pretty regularly. In the last ten years, I have never re-entered this little space and found the light off. Please draw your own conclusions.

The responsibility I speak of, then, is not necessarily the one that comes from the consciousness of superiority lodged in the self (today's quote of the month at the gym is, characteristically: 'The price of greatness is responsibility'—Winston Churchill), but one that is, to begin with, sensed before sense as a call of the other.<sup>43</sup>

Varieties of the Churchillian sense of 'responsibility', nearly synonymous with duty, have always also been used from within the Rights camp, of course. Machiavelli and Hobbes both write on duty. The 1793 version of the Declaration of the Rights of Man contains a section on the duties of man and of the citizen. The UN issued a Declaration of Responsibilities—little more than a reinscription of the rights as duties for their establishment—in 1997. There is a scientists' 'Declaration of Duties'. And so on. This is the trajectory of the idea of 'responsibility' as assumed, by choice, by the group that can right wrongs. I think Amnesty International is correct in saying that the UN Declaration of Responsibilities is 'no complement to human rights', and that 'to *restate . . . rights* from the UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights] as *responsibilities* the draft declaration introduces vague and ill-defined notions which can only create confusion and uncertainty'.<sup>44</sup> Thus even a liberal vision is obliged to admit that there is no continuous line from rights to responsibilities.

This notion of responsibility as the 'duty of the fitter self' toward less fortunate others (rather than the predication of being-human as being called by the other, before will) is not my meaning, of course. I remain concerned, however, by one

of its corollaries in global social movements. The leaders from the domestic 'below',—for the subaltern an 'above'—not realizing the historically established discontinuity between themselves and the subaltern, counsel self-help with great supervisory benevolence. This is important to remember because the subalterns' obvious inability to do so without sustained supervision is seen as proof of the need for continued intervention. It is necessary to be involved in the everyday working (the 'textuality') of global social movements to recognize that the seeming production of 'declarations' from these supervised groups is written to dictation and is thus no strike against class-apartheid. 'To claim rights is your duty' is the banal lesson that the above—whether Northern or Southern—then imparts to the below. The organization of international conferences with exceptionalist tokenization to represent collective subaltern will is a last-ditch solution, for both sides, if at all. And, sometimes, as in the case of my friend in Yunan, the unwitting native informant is rather far from the subaltern.

Within the rights camp, the history of something like responsibility-based cultural systems is generally given as part of the progress towards the development of a rights-based system in the type case of the European self.<sup>45</sup>

The Judaic articulation of responsibility, after the very war that produced the Universal Declaration, is set forth by Emmanuel Levinas.<sup>46</sup> Derrida has attempted to unmoor this from unquestioning support for the state of Israel by proposing a messianicity without messianism, although he acknowledges that he is caught in the traces of his own peculiar cultural production in stating responsibility just this way.<sup>47</sup> This history and its institutional discussions remain confined to the elite academy. If there is no direct line from rights to

responsibility, there is certainly no direct possibility of supplementing the below from this discussion.<sup>48</sup>

It can seem at first glance that if the Euro-US mindset modifies itself by way of what used to be called, just yesterday, Third Way politics, providing a cover for social democracy's rightward swing, perhaps the dispensers of human rights would at least modify their arrogance. As George W. Bush claims Tony Blair as his chum on Bush's visit to Britain in July 2001, I believe it is still worth examining this impulse, however briefly, so that it is not offered as a panacea. Let us look at a few crucial suggestions from *Beyond Left and Right* by Anthony Giddens, the academic spokesperson of the Third Way.<sup>49</sup>

Giddens mentions the virtues of Third World poverty and therefore may seem at first glance to be recommending learning from the subaltern. Criticizing the welfare state, he quotes Charles Murray with approval: 'Murray, whose work has been influenced by experiences in rural Thailand, asks the question, what's wrong with being poor (once people are above the level of subsistence poverty)? Why should there be such a general concern to combat poverty?' I hope it is clear that I have no interest in keeping the subaltern poor. To repeat, it is in view of Marx's hope to transform the subaltern—whom he understood only as the worker in his conjuncture—into an agent of the undoing of class apartheid rather than its victim that this effort at educating the educator is undertaken.

Here are some of Giddens's 'practical' suggestions: 'A post-scarcity system is . . . a system in which productivism no longer rules', a 'new ethics of individual and collective responsibility need to be formed', 'traditions should be understood in a non-traditional manner', a 'pact between the sexes [is] . . . to be achieved, within the industrialized societies and on a more global level'—that hesitation between the two

levels is kin to the asymmetry in our title and the invasive gender-work of the international civil society—and, best of all, ‘a new pact between the affluent and the poor’ is now needed. How is Professor Giddens going to persuade global finance and world trade to jettison the culture of economic growth? The question applies to all the passages I have quoted and more. He is, of course, speaking of state policy in Europe, but his book tries to go beyond into other spaces:

The question remains whether a lifestyle pact as suggested here for the wealthy countries could also work when applied to the divisions between North and South. Empirically, one certainly could not answer this question positively with any degree of assurance. Analytically speaking, however, one could ask, what other possibility is there?<sup>50</sup>

However utopian it might seem, it now appears to me that the only way to make these sweeping changes—there is nothing inherently wrong with them, and of course I give Professor Giddens the benefit of the doubt—is for those who teach in the humanities to take seriously the necessary but impossible task to construct a collectivity among the dispensers of bounty as well as the victims of oppression.<sup>51</sup> Learning from the subaltern is, paradoxically, through teaching. In practical terms, working across the class-culture difference (which tends to refract efforts), trying to learn from children, and from the behaviour of class-‘inferiors’, the teacher learns to recognize, not just a benevolently coerced assent, but also an unexpected response. For such an education, speed, quantity of information, and number of students reached are not exclusive virtues. Those ‘virtues’ are inefficient for education in the responsibilities in the humanities, not so much a sense of being responsible *for*, but of being responsible *to*, before will. Institutionally,

the humanities, like all disciplines, must be subject to a calculus. It is how we earn our living. But where ‘living’ has a larger meaning, the humanities are without guarantees.

Speaking with reference to the Rights of Man and the Universal Declaration, I am insisting that in the European context, it used to be recognized that the question of nature as the ground of rights must be begged in order to use it historically. The assumption that it is natural to be angled toward the other, before will, the question of responsibility in subordinate cultures, is also a begged question. Neither can survive without the other, if it is a just world that we seem to be obliged to want. Indeed, any interest in human rights for others, in human rights and human wrongs, would do better if grounded in this second begged question, to redress historical balance, as it were, than in the apparent forgetting of the other one. In the beginning are two begged questions.

Surely the thought of two begged questions at the origin is no more abstract than John Rawls’s interminable suppositions which, when confronted with the necessity of doing something, come up with such platitudes as

There will also be principles for forming and regulating federations (associations) of peoples, and standards of fairness for trade and other cooperative arrangements. There should be certain provisions for mutual assistance between peoples in times of famine and drought, and were it feasible, as it should be, provisions for ensuring that in all reasonably developed liberal societies people’s basic needs are met.<sup>52</sup>

In the ‘real world’ there is, in general, a tremendously uneven contradiction between those who beg the question of nature as rights for the self and those who beg the question of responsibility as being called by the other, before will.

If we mean to place the latter—perennial victims—on the way to the social productivity of capital (as an old-fashioned Marxist I distinguish between capital and capitalism and do not say these words ironically), then we must acknowledge the need for supplementation there as well, rather than transform them willy-nilly, consolidating already existing hierarchies, exporting gender-struggle, by way of the greed for economic growth. I have argued above that these cultures started regressing because their cultural axiomatics were defective for capitalism. I have also argued that the socialist project can receive its ethical push not from within itself but by supplementation from such axiomatics. I have argued that in their current decrepitude the subaltern cultures need to be known in such a way that we can suture their re-activated cultural axiomatics into the principles of the Enlightenment. I have argued that socialism belongs to those axiomatics. That socialism turns capital-formation into redistribution is a truism.<sup>53</sup> It is by this logic that supplementation into the Enlightenment is as much the possibility of being the agent of the social productivity of capital as it is of the subjectship of human rights.

The general culture of Euro-US capitalism in globalization and economic restructuring has conspicuously destroyed the possibility of capital being redistributive and socially productive in a broad-based way. As I have mentioned above, 'the burden of the fittest'—a re-territorializing of 'the white man's burden'—does also touch the economic sphere. I hope I will be forgiven a brief digression into that sphere as well. I have prepared for this by describing the 1990s as a time 'of the restructuring demands of globalization'. The reader is urged to concentrate on the lack of intellectual connection between the people at work in the different spheres. I cannot be more

than telegraphic here, but it would be a mistake to leave untouched the great economic circuits that often remotely determine the shots in the human rights sphere. I remain among the unabashed walking wounded generalist aspirants from the 1960s. Elsewhere, I have called this 'transnational literacy'.

As an introduction to this brief foray into the economic sphere, let us consider philosophers connecting Hobbes with global governance, an issue that bears on the administration of human rights in an economically restructured post-state world.<sup>54</sup> The question they have asked—whether the 'stronger nations might reasonably believe their prospects to be better if they remain in the international state of nature, rather than accepting some international (but nonabsolute) equivalent of Hobbes's civil sovereign . . . despite the fact that in supporting it they run the risk, along with the weaker nations, of creating a monster that may well attempt to devour them'—has no bearing on the institutive difference at the origin of the state of nature.<sup>55</sup>

The quotation above is from the early 1980s, when the floodgates of the current phase of globalization—the financialization of the globe with the decentred centralization of world trade attendant upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union which, in turn, allowed a fuller flow for information technology—had not yet been opened. Yet the process had already begun, through the newly electronified stock exchanges combining with what was then called postfordism, enabled by computer technology and the fax machine. And Euro-US thinkers, connecting Hobbes with human rights, were certainly ignoring the question of the relationship between 'natural' and 'civil'.

The relatively autonomous *economic* sphere of operations, worked by agents with competence restricted to this area, is explained for the *cultural* sector by other kinds of academic agents, restricted to the political sphere, in terms of a global governance story that started at the beginning of the post-colonial era at Bretton Woods. The culturalists then weigh in by endlessly pointing out that world markets are old hat. This then feeds back into the cultural difference story or the hip global public culture story.<sup>56</sup> Other disciplinary areas involved in this are social psychology and management. The former (as I indicate in note 14) gives us the multiculturalist cultural difference stereotypes that undergird human rights policy when it wishes to protect a 'community without individualism' against a rogue state. Cultural distance studies in management relate directly to the economic sphere and global finance, plotting the 'joint ventures' opened up by neo-liberal economic restructuring.<sup>57</sup> There is a compendious literature on how such ventures undermine the state and move toward the post-state world which becomes the object of global governance. In this brief compass, I refer the reader to note 25. The rogue state is disciplined by fear and pressure—the stick—with the promise of economic partnership—the carrot. My principal argument continues to be that a combination of fear and pressure, today supported by these powerful para-disciplinary formations proliferating crude theories of cultural difference, cannot bring about either lasting or real epistemic change although, accompanied by public interest litigation, they may be effective short-term weapons.

Meanwhile, the seriousness of training into the general culture is reflected by the fact that Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, Merrill Lynch, and other big investment companies are accessing pre-schoolers; children are training parents to

manage portfolios. There is a growing library of books making it 'fun' for kids to invest and giving them detailed instructions on how to do so. The unquestioned assumption that to be rich is to be happy and good is developed by way of many 'educational' excuses.

Children are never too young to start grasping the fundamentals of money management . . . Even toddlers understand the concept of 'mine!' In fact, it's the idea of owning something they like that sparks their interest in investing. Rest assured, you won't turn your child into a little money-grubber by feeding that interest. Through investing you're going to teach him more about responsibility, discipline, delayed gratification, and even ethics than you ever thought possible!<sup>58</sup>

Such a training of children builds itself on the loss of the cultural habit of assuming the agency of responsibility in radical alterity. It is followed through by the relentless education into business culture in academic and on-the-job training, in management, consumer behaviour, marketing, prepared for by the thousands and thousands of business schools all over the global South as well as the North, training undergraduates into business culture, making the supplementation of the responsibility-based subaltern layer by the ethics of class-culture difference altogether impossible, consolidating class apartheid.<sup>59</sup> The Declaration of the Right to Development is part of such acculturation into the movements of finance capital. Third Way talk floats on this base. Culturalist support is provided on the internet—in book digests on 'market Taoism' and 'Aristotle for capitalism'.<sup>60</sup> It is provided in the sales presentations of countless telecommunication marketing conferences. It connects to the laughing and frequent exhortations to 'follow the money' at women's rights

meetings at the UN. We should keep all this in mind when we give Professor Giddens the benefit of the doubt.

Ethics within the corporatist calculus is also inscribed within this cultural formation. I team-taught a course with Political Science in Fall 2000. Our greatest problem was negotiating the difference between ethics as imagined from within the self-driven political calculus as 'doing the right thing' and ethics as openness toward the imagined agency of the other, responsibility for and to—a tiny radical enclave here and, as I shall argue, a compromised and stagnating conformity there.

Such a training of children is also a legitimation by reversal of our own insistence on elementary pedagogy of the rural poor. Supplementation by the sort of education I am trying to describe becomes necessary here, so that the relationship between child investors and child labourers is not simply one of righting wrongs from above. How does such supplementation work? If in New York, to stem the tide of corporatist ethics, business culture, appropriative New Age radicalism, and politically correct multiculturalism, the subterranean task is to supplement the radical responsibility-shaped hole in the education of the dispenser of rights through literary reading, and making use of the humanities, what about the education of those whose wrongs are righted?

Some assumptions must first be laid aside. The permeability of global culture must be seen as restricted. There is a lack of communication between and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world. Cultural borders are easily crossed from the superficial cultural relativism of metropolitan countries, whereas, going the other way, the so-called peripheral countries encounter bureaucratic and policed frontiers. The frontiers of subaltern cultures, which

developed no generative public role, have no channels of interpenetration. Here, too, the problem is not solved in a lasting way by the inclusion of exceptional subalterns in South-based global movements with leadership drawn from the descendants of colonial subjects, even as these networks network. These figures are no longer representative of the subaltern stratum in general.

In 2000 I visited a so-called biodiversity festival, where a rural and country town audience in a 'least-developed country [LDC]' roared its derision at biodiversity songs from two neighbouring nation-states, applauding enthusiastically instead at embarrassing imitations of Bollywood (the trade-name of the hugely international Bombay film industry) 'adaptations' of moments from US MTV, unrecognizable by the audience as such, of course. The embarrassment of the activist leaders, from a colonial subject's class background, was compounded by their public exhortations, which were obeyed by the rural audience as a set of bewildering orders. The historical discontinuity leading to such events is one of the reasons why, although I generalize, my example remains singular. On the practical calculus, the problem of the singular and the universal is confronted by learning from the singularity of the singular, a way to the imagination of the public sphere, the rational representation of the universal.

We must question the assumption that, if the sense of doing for the other is not produced on call from a sense of the self as sovereign, packaged with the sense of being fittest, the alternative assumption, romantic or expedient, of an essence of subalternity as the source of such a sense, denies the deprivations of history. Paulo Freire, in his celebrated *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written during the era of guerrilla warfare in Latin America, warns us against subalternist essentialism, by

reminding us that 'during the initial stages of the struggle, the oppressed . . . tend themselves to become oppressors'.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, in the face of UN human rights policy-making, we must be on guard against subalternist essentialism, both positive and negative. If the self-permission for continuing to right wrongs is premised implicitly on the former—they will never be able to help themselves—the latter nourishes false hopes that will as surely be dashed and lead to the same result: an unwilling conclusion that they must always be propped up. Indeed, in the present state of the world, or perhaps always and everywhere, simply harnessing responsibility for accountability in the South, checking up on other-directedness, as it were, without the persistent training of 'no guarantees', we reproduce and consolidate what can only be called 'feudalism', where a benevolent despot like Lee Kuan Yew can claim collectivity rather than individualism when expedient. In the present state of the world, it also reproduces and consolidates gender oppression, thus lending plausibility to the instant rightspeak of the gender lobby of the international civil society and Bretton Woods.

Declarations like the Bangkok NGO Declaration, entitled 'Our Voice', and cataloguing what 'their right to self-determination' would be for 'indigenous people in general',<sup>62</sup> may like many UN Declarations be an excellent tool for political manoeuvring but it will not touch the entire spectrum of Asian aboriginals, each group as culturally absolutist as the rural audience at the biodiversity festival. In order to make the political manoeuvrings open to the ethical, we must think the supplementation towards which we are now moving.

When the UN offers violence or the ballot as a choice, it is unrealistic because based on another kind of related mistake—

unexamined universalism—the assumption that this is a real choice in all situations. It will soon lead to military intervention in the name of righting wrong, in geopolitically specific places. For 'democratization' is not just a code name, as it so often is in practice, for the political restructuring entailed by the transformation of (efficient through inefficient to wild) state capitalisms and their colonies to tributary economies of rationalized global financialization. If it is to involve the largest sector of the electorate in the global South—the rural population below poverty level—it requires the undoing of centuries of oppression, with a suturing education in rural subaltern normality, supplementing the violent guilt and shame trips of disaster politics.

I offer here a small but representative example. I was handing out sweets, two a head, to villagers in Shahabad, Birbhum. Some of the schools I describe later are located in this area. These villages have no caste-Hindu inhabitants. Sweets of this cooked traditional variety, that have to be bought from the Hindu villages, are beyond the villagers' means. There are no 'candy stores' in either type of village. Distribution of sweets is a festive gesture, but it makes my Calcutta-bred intellectual-leftist soul slightly uneasy. I have learnt such behaviour in my decades-long apprenticeship in these areas.

A young man in his early thirties, generally considered a mover and a shaker among this particular ethnic group—the Dhekaros, straddling the Aboriginal-Untouchable divide—was opening the flimsy paper boxes that swam in syrup in flimsier polythene bags, as I kept dipping my hand.<sup>63</sup> Suddenly he murmured, 'Outsiders are coming in, one a piece now.' I thought the problem was numbers and changed to one, a bit sad because there were now more children. Suddenly, the guy says in my ear, 'Give her two, she's one of ours.' Shocked, I



quickly turn to him, and say, in rapid monotone Bengali, 'Don't say such things in front of children; what if I should say you're not one of ours?', since I'm a caste-Hindu and technically one of his oppressors.<sup>64</sup>

This is the seedbed of ethnic violence in its lowest common unit.<sup>65</sup> You can fill in the historical narrative, raise or lower the degree of the heat of violence. Punishing Milosevic is good, human rights pressure and guilt and shame trips on rogue states should continue, I suppose, but it is on ground such as this that violence festers. This man is quite aware of party politics, the CPM (Community Party Marxist) is strong here. He certainly casts his vote regularly, perhaps even rallies voters for the party. There are two sentiments at work here. First, ethnic group competition within a corrupt quota system in the restructured state as resources dwindle. Second, the intuition of a multi-party parliamentary democracy as a species of generally homo-social competitive sport with the highest stakes available to players in the impoverished rural sector being violence and the ballot. These sentiments can co-exist in a volatile relationship, one ready to be mobilized over the other, or even in the other's interest. This is why the UN's choice—ballot box or 'peacekeeping mission'—is unrealistic. I shall consider an answer by way of a digression into suturing rights thinking into the torn cultural fabric of responsibility; or, to vary the concept-metaphor, activating a dormant ethical imperative.

Subordinate cultures of responsibility, then, base the agency of responsibility in that outside of the self that is also in the self, half-archived and therefore not directly accessible. I use the word 'subordinate' here because, as I have been arguing throughout this essay, they are the recipients of human rights bounty, which I see as 'the burden of the fittest', and which, as I insist from the first page on down, has the *ambivalent*

structure of enabling violation that anyone of goodwill associates with the white man's burden. I will rely on this argument for this second part of my essay, which concerns itself with the different way in to the damaged episteme.

From the anthropological point of view, groups such as the Sabars and the Dhekaros may be seen to have a 'closely-knit social texture'. But I have been urging a different point of view through my concept-metaphor of 'suturing'. These groups are also in the historical present of state and civil society (human rights punishes the latter in the name of the Enlightenment). I am asking readers to shift their perception from the anthropological to the historico-political and see the same knit text-ile as a torn cultural fabric in terms of its removal from the dominant loom in a historical moment. That is what it means to be a subaltern. My point so far has been that, for a long time now, these cultural scripts have not been allowed to work except as a delegitimized form forcibly out of touch with the dominant through a history that has taken capital and empire as telos. My generalization is therefore precarious, though demonstrable if the effort I go on to describe is shared. These concept-metaphors, of suturing a torn fabric, of recoding a delegitimized cultural formation, are crucial to the entire second half of my argument.

Subordinate cultures of responsibility, as I have argued, base the agency of responsibility in that outside of the self that is also in the self, half-archived and therefore not directly accessible. Such a sentence may seem opaque to (christianized) secularists who imagine ethics as internalized imperatives; they may seem silly to the ordinary language tradition which must resolutely ignore the parts of the mind not accessible to reason in order to theorize.<sup>66</sup> It may be useful to think of the archived exteriority, in terms of your unmediated knowledge, of the

inside of your body. The general premise of the Oxford Amnesty series *The Genetic Revolution and Human Rights*, for example, was that genes are digitalized words that are driving our bodies, our selves.<sup>67</sup> Yet they are inaccessible to us as objects and instruments of knowledge, in so far as we are sentient beings. (A smart reader mistook this as alterity being thoroughly interiorized. My exhortation is to try to think otherwise: that there is an other space—or script, all analogies are ‘false’ here—in the self, which drives us.) Think also of our creative invention in the languages that we know well. The languages have histories before us and futures after us. They are outside us, in grammar books and dictionaries.<sup>68</sup> Yet the languages that we know and make in are also us, and in us. These are analogies for agency that is out of us but in us—and, like all analogies, imperfect, but I hope they will suffice for now. In responsibility-based subordinate cultures, the volatile space of responsibility can be grasped through these analogies, perhaps. Please note, I’m not suggesting that they are better, just that they are different, and this radically different pair—rights and responsibility—need to relate in the hobbled relationship of supplementation.

These are only analogies, to be found in an Oxford Amnesty series collection and in Saussure. They work in the following way: if we can grasp that all human beings are genetically written before will, and if we can grasp that all human children access a language that is ‘outside’, as mother-tongue, then on these structural models, we might grasp the assumption that the human being is human in answer to an ‘outside call’. We can grasp the structure of the role of alterity at work in subordinate cultures according to these analogies. The word ‘before’ in ‘before the will’ is here used to mean logical and chronological priority as well as ‘in front of’. The

difference is historical, not essential. It is because I believe that right/responsibility can be shared by everyone in the persistent mode of ‘to come’ that I keep insisting on supplemental pedagogy, on both sides.

In its structure, the definitive predication of being-human by alterity is not with reference to an empirical outside world. Just as I cannot play with my own genes or access the entire linguisticity of my mother-tongue, so ‘is’ the presumed alterity radical in the general sense. Of course it bleeds into the narrow sense of ‘accountability to the outside world’, but its anchor is in that imagined alterity that is inaccessible, often transcendentalized and formalized (as indeed is natural freedom in the rights camp).

I need not be more specific here. The subordinate subaltern is as diversified as the recipients of human rights activity. I need not make too many distinctions, for they are tied by a Universal Declaration.

Anticipating objections to this stopping short of distinction and specificities, I should perhaps say once again that, if these people became my object of investigation for disciplinary information retrieval as such, I would not be able to remain focused on the children as my teachers. There is nothing vague about this activity. Since this is the central insight of my essay, the reader will, I fear, have to take it or leave it. This is the different way of epistemic access, this the teacher’s apprenticeship as suturer or invisible mender, this the secret of ongoing pedagogic supplementation. Writing this piece has almost convinced me that I was correct in thinking that this different way was too *in situ* to travel, that I should not make it part of my academic discourse. And yet there is no other news that I can bring to Amnesty International under the auspices of human rights.

Rewriting Levinas, Irigaray called for an ethics of sexual difference in the early 1980s.<sup>69</sup> That fashion in dominant feminist theory is now past. But the usefulness of the model does not disappear with a fad. Call this supplementation an ethics of class-culture difference, then: relating remotely, in view of a future 'to come', the dispensers of rights with the victims of wrongs.

With this proviso, let us consider an example of why we need to suture rights thinking into the torn cultural fabric of responsibility or, to vary the concept-metaphor, activate a dormant ethical imperative. I shall give only the bare bones.

Activists from the institutionally educated classes of the general national culture win a state-level legal victory against police brutality over the tribals. They try to transform this into a national-level legal awareness campaign.<sup>70</sup>

The ruling party supports the activists on the state level. (India is a federation of states. The national level is not involved here.) The ruling party on the local level is generally less answerable to the state precisely because of the discontinuity from the grassroots that I have been insisting upon all along. Indeed, this absence of redress without remote mediation is what makes the subaltern subaltern. On the local level, the police of the ruling party consistently take revenge against what is perceived as a victory over 'their' party by taking advantage of three factors, one positive, two negative:

1. The relatively homogeneous dominant Hindu culture at the village level keeps the tribal culturally isolated through prejudice.
2. As a result of this *cultural* isolation, women's independence among the tribals has remained intact. It has not been

infected by the tradition of women's oppression within the general Hindu rural culture.

3. *Politically*, the general, supposedly homogeneous rural culture and the tribal culture share a lack of democratic training.<sup>71</sup> This is a result of poverty and class prejudice existing nationally. Therefore, votes can be bought and sold here; and electoral conflict is treated by rural society in general like a competitive sport where violence is legitimate.

Locally, since the legal victory of the metropolitan activists against the police, the ruling party has taken advantage of these three things by rewriting women's conflict as party politics.<sup>72</sup> To divide the tribal community against itself, the police have used an incidental quarrel among tribal women, about the theft of a bicycle, if I remember right. One side has been encouraged to press charges against the other. The defending faction has been wooed and won by the opposition party. Thus a situation of violent conflict has been fabricated, where the police have an immediate edge over everyone, and since the legal victory in remote Calcutta is there after all, police revenge takes the form of further terror. In the absence of training in electoral democracy, the aboriginal community has accepted police terror as part of the party spirit: this is how electoral parties fight, where 'electoral' has no intellectual justification. This is a direct consequence of the educated activists'—among whom I count myself—good-hearted 'from above' effort at constitutional redress, since at the grassroots it can only be understood as a 'defeat' by police and party.

I am not asking that the women be left alone to flourish in some pristine tribality. I am also not speaking about how to stop women's oppression! The police are rural Hindus, the

aboriginals are a small disenfranchised group, the situation is class-race-state, power written into the caste system. Teaching is my solution, the method is pedagogic attention, to learn the weave of the torn fabric in unexpected ways, in order to suture the two, not altering gender politics from above. As for gender, I hope the parenthesis below will show why everything cannot be squeezed into this relatively short piece. I am suggesting that human rights activism should be supplemented by an education that should suture the habits of democracy on to the earlier cultural formation. I am the only person within this activist group—organized now as a tax-sheltered, non-profit organization—who thinks that the real effort should be to access and activate the tribals' indigenous 'democratic' structures to *parliamentary* democracy by patient and sustained efforts to learn to learn from below. 'Activate' is the keyword here. There is no tight cultural fabric (as opposed to group solidarity) among these disenfranchised groups after centuries of oppression and neglect. Anthropological excavation for description is not the goal here. (I remain suspicious of academic golden-ageism from the colonial subject.) I am not able to give scholarly information. Working hands-on with teachers and students over long periods of time on their own terms without thinking of producing information for my academic peers is like learning a language 'to be able to produce in it freely . . . [and therefore] to move in it without remembering back to the language rooted and planted in [me, indeed] forgetting it.'<sup>73</sup>

As I mentioned above, I do not usually write about this activity at all. Yet it seems necessary to make the point when asked to speak on human rights, because this is a typical wake of a human rights victory. The reader is invited to join in the effort itself. In the meantime I remain a consensus breaker

among metropolitan activists, who feel they can know everything in a non-vague way if only they have enough information, and that not to think so is 'mystical'. The consensually united vanguard is never patient.

This narrative demonstrates that when the human rights commissions, local, national or international, right state terrorism, police brutality, or gender violence in such regions, the punishing victory is won in relatively remote courts of law.

Catharine A. MacKinnon describes this well:

The loftiest legal abstracts . . . are born . . . amid the intercourse of particular groups, in the presumptive ease of the deciding classes, through the trauma of specific atrocities, at the expense of the silent and excluded, as a victory (usually compromised, often pyrrhic) for the powerless.<sup>74</sup>

In the aftermath of victory, unless there is constant vigilance (a 'pressure' that is itself a species of terror), the very forces of terror, brutality, or violence that suffer a public defeat often come back to divide and oppress the community even further. If the community fights back, it does so by the old rules of violence. The dispensation of justice, the righting of wrongs, the restoration of human rights, is reduced to a pattern of abyssal revenge and/or, at best, a spirit of litigious blackmail, *if* the group that has been helped has a strong connection to the regional human rights agencies or commissions (the dominant pressure groups described as 'below'), which is by no means always the case. Legal awareness seminars, altogether salutary in themselves, can exacerbate the problem without the painstaking foundational pedagogy which prepares the subject of rights from childhood and from within a disenfranchised culture of responsibility. And, if we get away from such remote areas, human rights dependency can be

particularly vicious in its neo-colonial consequences if it is the state that is the agency of terror and the Euro-US that is the saviour.

(Incidentally, this narrative also demonstrates that Carole Pateman's invaluable insight, 'that the social contract presupposed the sexual contract', has historical variations that may not always justify the eurocentrism that is the obvious characteristic of even *her* brilliant book.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, today the history of domination and exploitation has reduced the general picture, especially in the clients of human rights intervention, to a uniformity that may justify Pateman's remark: '[o]nly the postulate of natural equality prevents the original [European] social contract from being an explicit slave contract.' Even so brief a hint of this historicized and uneven dialectic between past and present surely makes it clear that feminists must think of a different kind of diversified itinerary for teasing out the relationship between human rights and women's rights rather than cultural conservatism, politically correct golden-ageism, or ruthless-to-benevolent eurocentrism. The suturing argument that I will elaborate below develops in the historical difference between the first two sentences of this parenthesis.)

Even if the immense labour of follow-up investigation on a case-by-case basis is streamlined in our era of telecommunication, it will not change the epistemic structure of the dysfunctional responsibility-based community, upon whom rights have been thrust from above. It will neither alleviate the reign of terror, nor undo the pattern of dependency. The recipient of human rights bounty whom I have described above, an agent of counter-terrorism and litigious blackmail at the grassroots, will continue not to resemble the ego ideal implied by the Enlightenment and the UDHR. As long

as real equalization through recovering and training the long-ignored ethical imagination of the rural poor and indeed, all species of sub-proletarians on their own terms—is not part of the agenda to come, s/he has no chance of becoming the subject of human rights as part of a collectivity, but must remain, forever, its object of benevolence. We will forever hear in the news, local to global, how these people cannot manage when they are left to manage on their own, and the new imperialism, with an at best embarrassed Social Darwinist base, will get its permanent sanction.

The seventh article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens, following eighteenth-century European radical thought, says that '[t]he law is an expression of the will of the community'.<sup>76</sup> Among the rural poor of the global South, one may attempt, through that species of education without guarantees, to bring about a situation where the law can be imagined as the expression of a community, always to come. Otherwise the spirit of human rights law is completely out of their unmediated reach. The training in 'literary reading' in the metropolis is here practised, if you like, in order to produce a situation, in the mode of 'to come', where it can be acknowledged that '[r]eciprocally recognized rating [to acknowledge a corresponding integrity in the other] is a condition without which no civil undertaking is possible'.<sup>77</sup>

The supplementary method that I shall go on to outline does not suggest that human rights interventions should stop. It does not even offer the impractical suggestion that the human rights activists themselves should take time to learn this method. Given the number of wrongs all the world over, those who right them must be impatient. I am making the practical suggestion for certain kinds of humanities teachers, here and there, diasporics wishing to undo the de-linking

with the global South represented by impatient benevolence, second-generation colonial subjects dissatisfied by the divided postcolonial polity. (This is not to limit the readership of this essay, of course. Anyone can do what I am proposing.) Only, whoever it is must have the patience and perseverance to learn well one of the languages of the rural poor of the South.

One of the languages. For the purposes of the essential and possible work of righting wrongs—the political calculus—the great European languages are sufficient. But for access to the subaltern episteme to devise a suturing pedagogy, you must take into account the multiplicity of subaltern languages. This is because the task of the educator is to learn to learn from below, the lines of conflict resolution undoubtedly available, however dormant, within the disenfranchised cultural system; giving up convictions of triumphalist superiority. It is because of the linguistic restriction that one is obliged to speak of just the groups one works for; but, in the hope that these words will be read by some who are interested in comparable work elsewhere, I am always pushing for generalization. The trainer of teachers will find the system dysfunctional and corrupted, mired in ritual, like a clear pond choked with scum. For their cultural axiomatics as well as their already subordinated position did not translate into the emergence of nascent capitalism. We are now teaching our children in the North, and no doubt in the North of the South, that to learn the movement of finance capital is to learn social responsibility. It is in the remote origins of this conviction—that capitalism is responsibility—that we might locate the beginning of the failure of the aboriginal groups of the kind I am describing: their entry into (a distancing from) modernity as a gradual slipping into atrophy.<sup>78</sup>

This history breeds the need for activating an ethical

imperative atrophied by gradual distancing from the narrative of progress—colonialism/capitalism. This is the argument about cultural suturing, learning from below to supplement with the possibility of the subjectship of rights.<sup>79</sup>

Now I go back to my broader argument—a new pedagogy. The national education systems are pretty hopeless at this level because they are the detritus of the postcolonial state, the colonial system turned to rote, unproductive of felicitous colonial subjects like ourselves, at home or abroad. This is part of what started the rotting of the cultural fabric of which I speak. Therefore, I am not just asking that they should have ‘the kind of education we have had’. The need for supplementing metropolitan education—‘the kind of education we have had’—is something I am involved in every day in my salaried work. And when I say ‘rote’, I am not speaking of the fact that a student might swot as a quick way to do well in an exam. I am speaking of the scandal that, in the global South, in the schools for middle-class children and above, the felicitous primary use of a page of language is to understand it; but in the schools for the poor, it is to spell and memorize.

Consider the following, the vicissitudes of a local effort undertaken in the middle of the nineteenth century. Iswarchandra Banerjee, better known as Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, a nineteenth-century public intellectual from rural Bengal, was 20 when Macaulay wrote his ‘Minute on Indian Education’. He fashioned pedagogic instruments for Sanskrit and Bengali that could, if used right (the question of teaching, again), suture the ‘native’ old with Macaulay’s new rather than reject the old and commence its stagnation with that famous and horrible sentence: ‘A single shelf of a good European library [is] worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.’<sup>80</sup>

Vidyasagar's Bengali primer is still used in state-run primary schools in rural West Bengal.<sup>81</sup> It is a modernizing instrument for teaching. It activates the structural neatness of the Sanskritic Bengali alphabet for the teacher and the child, and undermines rote learning by encouraging the teacher to jumble the structure in course of teaching at the same time. The wherewithal is all there, but no one knows (how) to use it any more.<sup>82</sup>

The first part of the book is for the active use of the teacher. The child does not read the book yet—just listens to the teacher, and learns to read and write by reading the teacher's writing and writing as the teacher guides. Reading and writing are not soldered to the fetishized schoolbook. In very poor rural areas, with no books or newspapers anywhere, this is still a fine way to teach. (If you have been stumped a hundred times in a lot of places by both teacher and student producing some memorized bit from the textbook when asked to 'write whatever comes to mind', you are convinced of this.) Halfway through the book, the child begins to read a book, and the title of that page is *prothom path*: 'first reading' not 'first lesson.' What a thrill it must have been for the child, undoubtedly a boy, to get to that moment. Today this is impossible, because the teachers, and the teachers' teachers, indefinitely, are clueless about this book as a do-it-yourself instrument. Well-meaning education experts in the capital city, whose children are used to a different world, inspired by self-ethnographing bourgeois nationalists of a period after Vidyasagar, have transformed the teacher's pages into children's pages by way of these ill-conceived illustrations.<sup>83</sup>

In the rural areas this meaningless gesture has consolidated the book as an instrument for dull rote learning. The page where Vidyasagar encourages the teacher to jumble the



structure is now a meaningless page routinely ignored. I could multiply examples such as this, and not in India alone. Most of the subordinate languages of the world do not have simple single-language dictionaries that rural children could use. Efforts to put together such a dictionary in Bengali failed in

false promises and red tape. The habit of independence in a child's mind starts with the ability to locate meaning without a teacher. If the dictionary is put together by the kind of well-meaning experts who put together the pictures in the primer, it would be geared for the wrong audience.

The generalizable significance of this case is that, at the onset of colonialism/capitalism, when the indigenous system of teaching began to be emptied out of social relevance, there had been an attempt to undo this. The discontinuity between the colonial subject and the rural poor is such that the instruments of such undoing were thoughtlessly de-activated. (This relates to the concept-metaphor of activation that I am using in this part of the essay.) As note 78 indicates, the metropolitan specialist has no sense of the pedagogic significance of the instruments. My discovery of the specific pattern of the primer was a revelation that came after eight years of involvement with using the primer. Since I do not consolidate instruction for the teacher except in response to a felt need, it was only then that I was letting the teacher at one school take down hints as to how to teach the students at the lowest level. As I continued, I realized the primer had pre-empted me at every step! I hope the impatient reader will not take this to be just another anecdote about poor instruction. And I hope I have made it clear by now, in spite of all the confusion attendant upon straying from the beaten track, that the practice of elementary pedagogy for the children of the rural poor is one of my main weapons, however humble.

The interference of the state can also be a cruel negligence. That is the point of the following story. I have included two personal details to show how caste politics, gender politics and class politics are intertwined in the detail. These details are typical.

Each of the rural schools of which I speak has a tube well. This provides clean water for the entire group. Near two of these schools the tube well is broken. The aboriginals cannot mend it for the same reason that the metropolitan middle class cannot do these repair jobs. They are not used to it and Home Depot hasn't hit yet.

One of my fellow students in college occupies a leading position in a pertinent ministry on the state level. I renewed contact with this man after 31 years, in his office in Calcutta, to ask for tube wells. Not only did I not get tube wells after two trips separated by a year, but I heard through the grapevine that, as a result of his boasting about my visit, his wife had disclosed in public, at a party, that she had complained to his mother about our ancient friendship!

A near relative in the next generation, whom I had only met briefly when he was an adolescent, held a leading administrative position on the district level. I got an appointment with him, again to beg for the tube wells. I did not get them. But he did tell me that he was in line for a fellowship at the Kennedy School. Where the infrastructure for the primary education of the poor seems negligible even in the line of official duty, boasting about one's own spectacular opportunities for higher education seems perfectly plausible: internalized axiomatics of class apartheid. I use the detail to point at a pervasive problem.

The Hindu villagers insulted a boy who went to fetch water from the tube well in the main village. At night, the oldest woman was about to go and get water under cover. We sat together in her kitchen and boiled a pot of water.

The next morning, the teacher in the school could not prove that the students had learnt anything. She is a young Hindu widow from the village, who has failed her secondary



school leaving exam. As a rural Hindu, she cannot drink water touched by the Aborigines, her students. As I kept berating her, one of these very students spoke up! (She loves the students; her not drinking water from their hands is internalized by them as normal, much less absurd than my drinking hot boiled water. On her part, going back to the village every afternoon, keeping the water-rule, which she knows I abhor, compares to my standing in the snow for six hours to replace my stolen green card, I later thought.)

The student spoke up to say that all but three in the school had accompanied their parents 'east' and so had not come to school for months. Going east: migrant labour.

Just as not repairing tube wells is taken as proof of their fecklessness, taking their children on these journeys is seen as proof that they don't know the value of education. These are oral tradition folks for whom real education takes place in the bosom of the family. By what absurd logic would they graduate instantly into a middle-class understanding of something so counter-intuitive as 'the value of education'? Such lectures produce the kind of quick-fix 'legal awareness'-style lectures whose effects are at best superficial, but satisfying for the activists, until the jerrybuilt edifice falls down. When the community was addressed with sympathy, with the explicit understanding that behind this removal of the students from school lay love and responsibility, some children were allowed to stay behind next year. When I spoke of this way of dealing with absenteeism to the one hundred so-called rural teachers (stupid statistics) subsidized by the central government, one of the prejudice-ridden rural Hindu unemployed, who had suddenly become a 'teacher', advised me—not knowing that this elite city person knew what she was talking about—that the extended aboriginal community would object to the

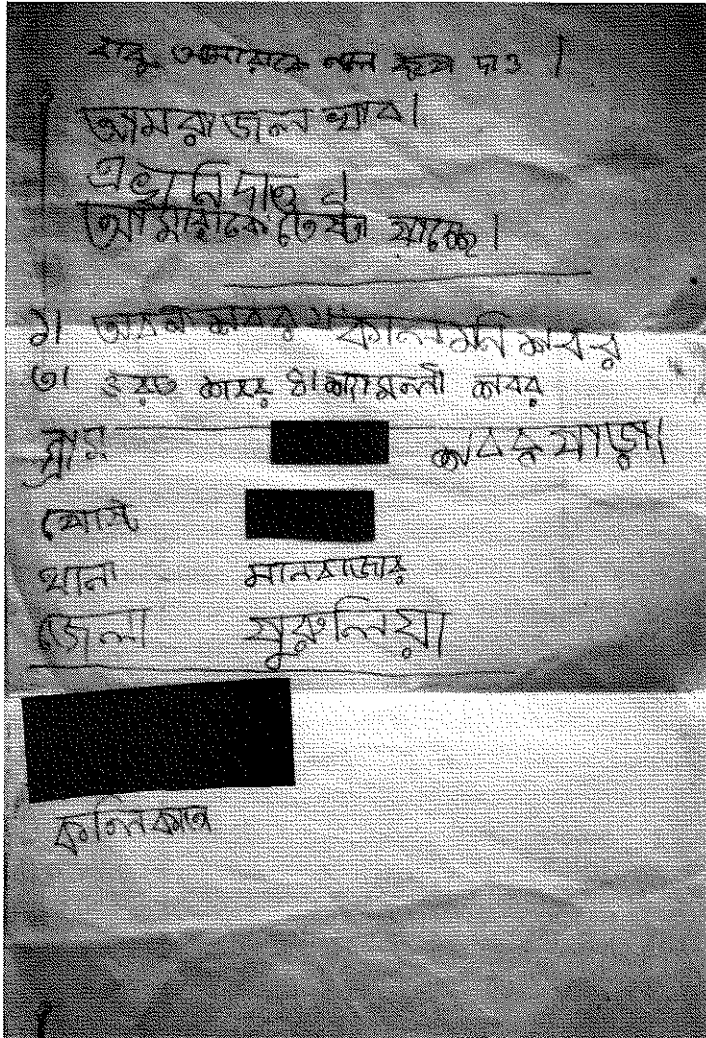
expenditure of feeding these children. Nonsense, of course, and prejudice, not unknown in the native informant.

When I saw that the three students who had not 'gone east' were doing fine, and that a year had gone by without tube wells, I said to them, write a letter. Another student, sitting back, looked so eager to write that I let her come forward as well. Each one give a sentence, I said, I will not prompt you. What they wrote is shown on p. 216.<sup>84</sup>

I told them the secret of alphabetization. They successfully alphabetized their first names. My second visit to this man's office, the source of the prurient party gossip in Calcutta, was to deliver the letter, in vain.

I have covered the place names because we do not want a tube well from a remote international or national philanthropic source. The water is getting boiled for me. They are drinking well water. We want the children to learn about the heartlessness of administrations, without short-term resistance talk. The bounty of some US benefactor would be the sharp end of the wedge that produces a general will for exploitation in the subaltern.<sup>85</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, I go with W. E. B. DuBois rather than Booker T. Washington: it is more important to develop a critical intelligence than to assure immediate material comfort.<sup>86</sup> This may or may not bear immediate fruit. Let me repeat once again, although I fear I will not convince the benevolent ethnocentrist, that I am not interested in teaching 'self-help'. I am interested in being a good enough humanities teacher in order to be a conduit (Wordsworth's word) between subaltern children and their subaltern teachers. That is my connection with DuBois, who writes a good deal about teacher training.

The teachers on this ground level at which we work tend to be the least successful products of a bad system. Our



educator must learn to train teachers by attending to the children. For, just as our children are not born electronic, their children are not born delegitimized. They are not yet 'least successful'. It is through learning how to take children's response to teaching as our teaching text that we can hope to put ourselves in the way of 'activating' democratic structures.

And it is to distinguish between 'activating' and producing good descriptive information for peers (the appropriate brief for an essay such as this), that I should like to point at the difference between Melanie Klein and Jean Piaget. Attending to children, Klein's way of speaking had turned into a kind of sublime literalness, where the metaphor is as literal as reality itself. In order to flesh out Freud's intuitions about children, Klein learnt her system from the children themselves. Her writings are practical guides to people who wished to 'learn' that language. That too is to learn to learn from below.

By contrast, all the confident conclusions of Piaget and his collaborators in *The Moral Judgment of Children* would be messed up if the investigators had been obliged to insert themselves into and engage with the value-system the children inhabited. Piaget is too sharp not to know this.

[I]t is one thing to prove that cooperation in the play and spontaneous social life of children brings about certain moral effects and another to establish the fact that this cooperation can be universally applied as a method of education. This last point is one which only experimental education can settle . . . But the type of experiment which such research would require can only be conducted by teachers or by the combined efforts of practical workers and educational psychologists. And it is not in our power to deduce the results to which this would lead.<sup>87</sup>

The effort at education that I am describing—perhaps comparable to Piaget's description of 'practical workers' (the teachers) and 'educational psychologists' (the trainers) with the roles productively confused every step of the way—hopes against hope that a permanent sanction of the Social Darwinism—'the burden of the fittest'—implicit in the human rights agenda will, perhaps, be halted if the threads of the torn cultural fabric are teased out by the uncanny patience of which the humanities are capable at their best, for the 'activation' of dormant structures.

Indeed, this is the 'humanities component', attending upon the object of investigation as other, in all labour. Here is the definitive moment of a humanities 'to come', in the service of a human rights, that persistently undoes the asymmetry in our title by the uncoercive rearrangement of desires in terms of the teaching text described above.

The Greek poet Archilochus is supposed to have written: 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.' This distinction between two types of thinkers was developed by Isaiah Berlin into the idea that fox-thinkers are fascinated by the variety of things, and hedgehog-thinkers relate everything to an all-embracing system.<sup>88</sup>

My experience of learning from the children for the last decade tells me that nurturing the capacity to imagine the public sphere and the fostering of independence within chosen rule-governance is the hedgehog's definition of democracy which will best match the weave of the torn yet foxy fabric—great variety of detail—of the culture long neglected by the dominant. The trick is to train the teachers by means of such intuitions, uncoercively rearranging *their* (most often unexamined) desires for specific kinds of futures for the children. No mean trick, for these teachers have been so maimed

by the very system of education we are trying to combat, and are so much within the class-apartheid produced by it, that they would blindly agree and obey, while the trainer was emoting over consciousness-raising. Great tact is called for if the effort is to draw forth consent rather than obedience. In addition, the children have to be critically prepared for disingenuously offered cyber literacy if these groups get on the loop of 'development'.<sup>89</sup> The hope is that this effort with the *teachers* will translate into the teaching of these reflexes in the educational method of the children who launch *the trainer* on the path of the hedgehog. The children are the future electorate. They need to be taught the habits and reflexes of such democratic behaviour. Do you see why I call this necessary and impossible? As I remarked about humanities teaching, you cannot gauge this one.

To suture thus the torn and weak responsibility-based system into a conception of human dignity as the enjoyment of rights, one enters ritual practice transgressively, alas, as a hacker enters software. The description of ritual-hacking below may seem silly, perhaps. But put yourself on the long road where you *can* try it, and you will respect us—you will not dismiss as 'nothing but' this or that approach on paper. In so far as this hacking is like a weaving, this too is an exercise in *texere*, textil-ity, text-ing, textuality. I must continue to repeat that my emphasis is on the difficulties of this texting, the practical pedagogy of it, not in devising the most foolproof theory of it for you, my peers. Without the iterative text of doing and devising in silence, the description seems either murky or banal.

Subordinate cultural systems are creative in the invention of ritual in order to keep a certain hierarchical order functioning. With the help of the children and the community, the trainer

must imagine the task of recoding the ritual-to-order habits of the earlier system with the ritual-to-order habits of parliamentary democracy, with a teaching corps whose idea of education is unfortunately produced by a terrible system. One learns active ritual as one learns manners. The best example for the readership of this anthology might be the 'wild anthropology' of the adult metropolitan migrant, learning a dominant culture on the run, giving as little away as possible. The difference here is that we learn from the vulnerable archaic (Raymond Williams's word captures the predicament better than the anthropological 'primitive'), but also without giving much away. The point is to realize that democracy also has its rituals, exaggerated or made visible, for example, when in our metropolitan life we seek to make politically correct manners 'natural', a matter of reflex.

It is because this habit of recoding ritual (always, of course, in the interest of uncoercive rearrangement of desires) for training other practitioners—rather than for production of knowledge about knowledge—has to be learned by the teacher as a reflex that I invoked the difference between Klein and Piaget. I will not be able to produce anthropologically satisfying general descriptions here because no trainer can provide satisfactory descriptions of the grammar of a language that s/he is learning painfully. This is the distinction I want to convey. I have such fear of derision of the detail of my work that I feel obliged to cite a self-defence that I offered at Columbia, when I presented there a talk whose London version drew forth my invitation to participate in the Amnesty Oxford Lectures.<sup>90</sup> What follows must remain hortatory—an appeal to your imagination until we meet in the field of specific practice, here or there. Of course, we all know, with appropriate cynicism, that this probably will not be. But a

ceremonial lecture allows you to tilt at windmills, to insist that such practice is the only way that one can hope to supplement the work of human rights litigation in order to produce cultural entry into modernity.

Fine, you will say, maybe human rights interventions do not have the time to engage in this kind of patient education, but there are state-sponsored systems, NGOs and activists engaging in educational initiatives, surely? The NGO drives count school buildings and teacher bodies. The national attempts also do so, but only at best. Activists, who care about education in the abstract and are critical of the system, talk rights, talk resistance, even talk nationalism. But instilling habits in very young minds is like writing on soft cement. Repeating slogans, even good slogans, is not the way to go, alas. It breeds fascists just as easily. UNESCO's teaching guides for human rights are not helpful as guides.

Some activists attempt to instil pride in these long disenfranchised groups in a pseudo-historical narrative. This type of 'civilizationism' is good for gesture politics and breeding leaders, but does little for the development of democratic reflexes.<sup>91</sup> These pseudo-histories are assimilated into the aetiological mythologies of the Aborigines without epistemic change. Given subaltern ethnic divisions, our teaching also proceeds in the conviction that, if identitarianism is generally bad news here, it is also generally bad news there.

Let me now say a very few words about the actual teaching, which is necessarily subject to restricted generalizability, because it is predicated upon confronting the specific problems of the closest general educational facility to which the teachers have had, and the students might have, access. Such generalizations can be made within the framework of the

undoing of those specific problems. One generalization seems apposite and relates to my parenthesis on Pateman. Whatever the status of women in the old delegitimized cultural system, in today's context emphasis must always be placed on girl-children's access to that entry, without lecturing, without commanding, earning credibility, of course. Another minimally generalizable rule of thumb in this teaching I will focus on is the one that Vidyasagar, the nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual, picked up 150 years ago: undermine rote learning.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, I am not speaking of the fact that a student might swot as a quick way to do well in an exam. I'm speaking of the scandal that, in the global South, in the schools for middle-class children and above, the felicitous primary use of a page of language is to understand it; in the schools for the poor, it is to spell and memorize. This is an absolute and accepted divide, the consolidation of continuing class apartheid I referred to above. It is as a result of this that 'education' is seen upon subaltern terrain as another absurdity bequeathed by powerful people and, incidentally, of no use at all to girl-children.

My own teachers, when I was a student in a good middle-class Bengali medium primary school in Calcutta, explained the texts. But as I have mentioned, there is no one to explain in these rural primary schools. I walked a couple of hours to a village high school in the national system and waited an hour and a half after opening time for the rural teachers to arrive. I begged them to take good care of the two aboriginal young women I was sending to the school. In late afternoon, the girls returned. Did she explain, I asked. No, just spelling and reading. An absurd history lesson about 'National Liberation Struggles in Many Countries', written in incomprehensible

prose. I am going into so much detail because no urban or international radical bothers to look at the detail of the general system as they write of special projects—'non-formal education', 'functional literacy', science projects here and there. Just before I left India in January 2001, a filmmaker made an English documentary entitled something like 'A Tribe Enters the Mainstream'. My last act before departure was to make sure that the shots of my school be excised. The so-called direct interviews are risible. How can these people give anything but the expected answers in such situations? And yet it is from such 'documentaries' that we often gather evidence. I have just received news that this video will be shown at a nationwide human rights gathering in the capital city with international attendance in September 2001. What is the generalizable significance of these embittered remarks? To emphasize the discontinuity between the domestic 'below' and the grassroots before I offer the final report on the education of Gayatri Spivak.

My project seems to have defined itself as the most ground-level task for the breaking of the production and continuation of class apartheid. I now understand why, in Marx's world, Marx had come down to something as simple as the shortening of the working day as 'the grounding condition [*die Grundbedingung*]' when he was speaking of such grand topics as the Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity.<sup>92</sup>

The discovery of the practical use of the primer was an important moment for me. Other moments would be difficult to integrate into this; they might seem inconsequential or banal. Something that can indeed be reported is that, since I presented my paper in February 2001, I have learnt how to communicate to the teachers and students—for whom the absurd education system *is* education—that it is the class

apartheid of the state that is taken on in the move from rote to comprehension. I can now show that there is no connection in this absurd education (to memorize incomprehensible chunks of prose and some verse in response to absurd questions in order to pass examinations; to begin to forget the memorized material instantly) with the existing cultural residue of responsibility. (In metropolitan theoretical code, this lack of connection may be written as no sense at all that the written is a message from a structurally absent subject, a placeholder of alterity, although the now-delegitimized local culture is programmed for responsibility as a call of the other—alterity—before will. Thus education in this area cannot activate or rely on ‘culture’ without outside/inside effort.) For the suturing with enforced class-subalternization I had to chance upon an immediately comprehensible concept-metaphor: when there is no exercise for the imagination, no training in intellectual labour (*matha khatano*) for those who are slated for manual labour (*gatar khatano*) at best, the rich/poor divide (*barolok/chhotolok* big people/small people) is here to stay.<sup>93</sup> At least one teacher said, at leave-taking, that he now understood what I wanted, in the language of obedience, alas. There is more work for the trainer down the road, uncoercive undermining of the class-habit of obedience.

Perhaps you can now imagine how hard it is to change this episteme, how untrustworthy the activists’ gloat. For the solidarity tourist, it is a grand archaic sight to see rural children declaiming their lessons in unison, especially if, as in that mud-floored classroom in Yunan, 6 to 9 year olds vigorously dance their bodies into ancient calligraphy. But if you step forward to work together, and engage in more than useless patter, the situation is not so romantic. Learning remains by rote.

It is a cruel irony that when the meaning of *sram* in Vidyasagar’s Lesson 2—*sram na korile lekhapora hoy na*—is explained as ‘labour’ and the aboriginal child is asked if she or he has understood, he or she will show their assent by giving an example of manual labour. In English, the sentence would read ‘Without labour you cannot learn to write and read’—meaning intellectual labour, of course.

Produced by this class-corrupt system of education, the teachers themselves do not know how to write freely. They do not know the meaning of what they ‘teach’, since all they have to teach, when they are doing their job correctly, is spelling and memorizing. They do not know what dictionaries are. They have themselves forgotten everything they memorized to pass out of primary school. When we train such teachers, we must, above all, let them go, leave them alone, to see if the efforts of us outsiders have been responsive enough, credible enough without any material promises. When I see rousing examples of ‘people’s movements’, I ask myself, how long would the people continue without the presence of the activist leaders? It is in the context of earning that credibility that I am reporting my access to the new concept-metaphor binary: *matha khatano/gatar khatano*: class-apartheid: *barolok/chhotolok*.

I am often reprimanded for writing incomprehensibly. There is no one to complain about the jargon-ridden incomprehensibility of children’s textbooks in this subaltern world. If I want you to understand the complete opacity of that absurd history lesson about ‘National Liberation Struggles in Many Countries’, devised by some state functionary at the Ministry of Education, for example, I would have to take most of you through an intensive Bengali lesson so that you are able to assess different levels of the language.

Without venturing up to that perilous necessity, I will simply recapitulate: First, the culture of responsibility is corrupted. The effort is to learn it with patience from below and to keep trying to suture it to the imagined felicitous subject of universal human rights. Second, the education system is a corrupt ruin of the colonial model. The effort is persistently to undo it, to teach the habit of democratic civility. Third, to teach these habits, with responsibility to the corrupted culture, is different from children's indoctrination into nationalism, resistance-talk, identitarianism.

I leave this essay with the sense that the material about the rural teaching is not in the acceptable mode of information retrieval. The difficulty is in the discontinuous divide between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged. I have no interest in becoming an educational researcher or a diasporic golden-agist. I will ask my New York students what concept-metaphor served them best. (Dorah Ahmad told me this afternoon that what she liked best about my graduate teaching was the use of stories that made immediate sense!)

Here are some nice abstract, seemingly fighting words:

[G]enerative politics is by no means limited to the formal political sphere but spans a range of domains where political questions arise and must be responded to. Active trust is closely bound up with such a conception . . . No longer depending on pre-given alignments, it is more contingent, and contextual, than most earlier forms of trust relations. It does not necessarily imply equality, but it is not compatible with deference arising from traditional forms of status.<sup>94</sup>

If you want to attempt to bring this about, hands-on—for the sake of a global justice to come—you begin along the lines I have described in this paper.

I am so irreligious that atheism seems a religion to me. But

I now understand why fundamentalists of all kinds have succeeded best in the teaching of the poor—for the greater glory of God. One needs some sort of 'licensed lunacy' (Orlando Patterson's phrase) from some transcendental Other to develop the sort of ruthless commitment that can undermine the sense that one is better than those who are being helped, that the ability to manage a complicated life support system is the same as being civilized. But I am influenced by deconstruction and for me, radical alterity cannot be named 'God' in any language. Indeed, the name of 'man' in 'human' rights (or the name of 'woman' in 'women's rights are human rights') will continue to trouble me.

'Licensed lunacy in the name of the unnamable other' then. It took me this long to explain this incomprehensible phrase. Yet the efforts I have described may be the only recourse for a future to come when the reasonable righting of wrongs will not inevitably be the manifest destiny of groups that remain poised to right them; when wrongs will not proliferate with unsurprising regularity.