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THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

INTRODUCTION

Deadly exploitative labor conditions, food insecurity, racism, apartheid, and gender inequality in all of its manifest and invisible forms call us to join the long walk against injustice itself in our communities, together, regardless of whether we have yet “to steal a view of the glorious vista,” the metaphor Nelson Mandela uses to describe the transformations of his political community:

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.¹

Mandela went from leading an oppressed majority within the apartheid-divided political community of South Africa through the tumult of dismantling apartheid

¹ Mandela (1994: 625).

oppression, becoming the first black African president of a country with an apartheid past. As if answering Lorde's call, he tried to turn difference to strength.

The challenge for just responsibility is to use that strength to make a difference. Just responsibility is a normative theory of taking responsibility for injustice itself in a just way, a way that enhances the political capacity of each of us and all of us together to transform our power relations, norms, and social epistemologies. This theory (1) is a human rights theory of responsibility, relying on and developing a theory of human rights that emerges through the political struggles of those whose rights are denied, (2) relies on five principles-in-practice that we can see within the ten core strategic activities of women's human rights organizations, (3) offers concrete guidelines for how consumers, philanthropists, advocates, policymakers, and activists can take responsibility for injustice itself through their actions in the world, and (4) recommends how we should understand political community, accountability, and leadership in ways that support just responsibility, or so I will argue in this and the next chapter.

For some this may seem like a backwards way of approaching a political theory of responsibility. Why not start, as in part I we saw philosophers do, with responsibility that follows from the actions, the causal actors, and intent that led to a harm or patterns of harm? The problem with that approach is that it begins within a particular social epistemology of what harms are evidence of injustice and what kinds of actions provide evidence of injustice. As we saw in part I, often that social epistemology is the source of injustice itself. Of course, from the privileged place in which academics and students write and read about injustice itself, we know that we don't know a lot, but we are pretty confident that those who live with the human rights violations associated poverty, for example, should not have to do so. In this chapter, we look at another social epistemology of responsibility, one that focuses not only on injustice itself but also on building a political community to support it.

In the ten core strategies described in the preceding chapter, we see women's human rights activists taking responsibility for injustice itself and, in the process, transforming their political environment. We also see them taking on injustice itself without reference to their own privilege, though some are undoubtedly more privileged than others. They engage in a politics intended not merely to address the consequences of injustice that they have experienced or witnessed, but to transform the politics of our shared humanity.

Not individually, but together, the ways of working for women's human rights demonstrate a human rights theory of responsibility, as I will argue in this chapter. This is not the common social epistemology of the link between rights and responsibility that philosophers generally share. Many have argued that rights require

duties.² In this view, rights and duties are fixed by their complementarity in moral and legal structures.

What if instead of considering rights and duties to be complementary, we think of them as dynamically *part of each other* and, together, as the tools of politics and thus the political tools for transforming political community? This is the normative political theory of responsibility for injustice itself that I derive from the practice of women's human rights activists. In this chapter I will argue that the view of rights and political responsibility as complementary entails four ideas: (1) rights are conceptually realized through lived experience, not through legal or informal entitlements alone; (2) the human rights approach to responsibility is a theory about the process of structural change and *the way we work for it*; (3) taking responsibility for injustice itself does not depend on a full understanding of injustice itself; and (4) the goal of a human rights theory of political responsibility does not in fact have to do with the particular consequence of structural changes, but rather with *relational changes*: the changes in political inequalities and in relationships throughout the web of political change that happen as a result of the way we take political responsibility together.

To be clear, the purpose of the analysis in chapter 5 was to describe the normative commitments of the principles-in-practice, that is, to illuminate the normative values within the actions of those taking responsibility for injustice itself.³ The present chapter moves from those five principles-in-practice to a fuller account of a human rights theory of political responsibility. Finally, chapter 7 develops the implications of this human rights theory of political responsibility for what we *should* be doing to take responsibility for injustice itself across a range of contexts.

As we saw in chapter 5 and as we will theorize in this chapter, activists demonstrate that "human rights" are not merely a goal, but also a way of working toward that goal. A human rights theory of political responsibility outlines a way of taking action; it does not merely theorize about the *desired consequences of an action*. In the hands of activists, the normative theories of rights and responsibility are not just complementary; they do not simply mutually reinforce a particular worldview.⁴ Rather they are the *same thing*. Human rights understood as a political process and not the consequences of any political process or structure are a theory of political responsibility. In this same sense political responsibility is a theory of human rights. As awkward as this nomenclature may be, this theory is a human rights theory of political responsibility, or just responsibility.

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² See this chapter, notes 72–74 and associated text.

³ The purpose was also to demonstrate one way of doing grounded normative theorizing.

⁴ This concern is the focus of many feminist and decolonial critics of human rights (Peterson 1990; Baxi 2002).

THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS' APPROACH TO POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Taking responsibility for injustice itself entails taking responsibility for how we take responsibility for injustice. Do we take responsibility in a way that challenges hierarchies and privileges, and supports rights enjoyment, or do we further entrench or, worse, legitimize the hierarchies of injustice itself through the way we take responsibility?⁵ The bar is high because we need to be able to guide and assess our efforts even when we lack full information and complete understanding of the complexities and power relations of injustice itself.

The connection between the normative analysis and its empirical antecedent is important for a rigorous application of a grounded normative methodology. The connection is also important for the political implications of the analysis. These are practice-tested principles for guiding how those concerned with injustice itself can take responsibility for injustice itself. The political implications of the theory have merit not because they are likely to lead to successful achievement of social movement objectives (that would require a different dataset and a positive social science argument) and not because they are ideal (that would require a different mode of doing political theory). Rather, we should consider the merits of the human rights theory of political responsibility as a normative basis for our *working toward a political life together that is ever more able to take on injustice itself.*⁶

This is an empirical and normative account of the five principles-in-practice. The account is empirical in the sense that BCWS and the other rights-promoting organizations described in chapter 5 take responsibility in this way. The argument is theoretical, in the sense that these principles-in-practice are normative principles that guide a human rights theory of taking responsibility for injustice itself under conditions of social epistemology and cognitive limitations that render injustice itself invisible to many, including to the most privileged.⁷

The five principles-in-practice are (1) utilizing intersectional analysis; (2) thinking about narrow issues with awareness of their cross-issue dimensions; (3) promoting

⁵ Examples of this include humanitarian aid that exacerbates inequalities (Kennedy 2004), the human rights dilemmas of military solutions to human rights violations (Booth 2001), and the use of Responsibility to Protect to guide decisions about when the United Nations should sanction military intervention (Doyle 2011). Humanitarian aid and military interventions exploit power inequalities and often create others. These problems are what make many suspicious about the prospects of *any* approach to human rights. The human rights theory of responsibility I am proposing includes an account of how it mitigates and transforms power inequalities.

⁶ Cf. Sen (2009).

⁷ When citizens in a democracy vote against their own political or economic interests, this can be evidence that the most privileged are not the only ones rendered unaware by social epistemologies and cognitive limitations. See, for example, Newman's (2004) discussion of the attempt to pass a tax supporting public education in Alabama (2004).

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the capacity for self-advocacy and other political skills of ourselves and of those throughout our web of partners and allies; (4) working against the complex forces that create obstacles to rights enjoyment by building community through connected activism; and (5) working in ways that enhance our learning. These five principles-in-practice are interdependent; the connection is one of complementarity, not chronology or hierarchy. They are best understood as complementary, enacted norms that are part of a normative theory of taking responsibility for injustice itself (and for those tragedies and misfortunes whose connections to injustice itself are difficult for us to perceive because they seem the result of contingencies, interaction effects, or our epistemological or cognitive limitations). There is more to a political theory of responsibility than these principles-in-practice; they are the grounded basis of this theory.

Utilizing intersectional analysis

In 2001, former garment workers with experience in organizing employees in garment factories (who were fired for doing so) formed BCWS. Having seen the importance of organizing workers across all sectors of the economy, they initially decided to take what they learned about factory organizing to help workers in the informal sector. They focused on domestic workers, encouraging them to recognize and advocate for their rights under Bangladeshi law. From the beginning, BCWS saw the connections between exploitable power inequalities in the global labor market and those in the domestic worker labor market. While they have focused on fair and safe labor conditions for garment workers, they have also drawn attention to fair and safe labor conditions in shrimp factories, in construction, and in domestic work—sites for which there are no global brands through which to bring corporate and consumer pressure on local employers. Recognition of the differences in power dynamics across sites of work is an illustration of BCWS's intersectional analysis.

Intersectional analysis is the strategic analysis of the connections among exploitable power inequalities or between exploitable power inequalities and the social values and political pressures that prevent public, critical discussion of these inequalities. Intersectional analysis is the essential core of human rights activism because it provides insight into the relationships among forces of exclusion and oppression and recognizes that no individual can truly enjoy human rights unless everyone enjoys human rights. With intersectional analysis we can identify strategies for working against injustice for some that also support the work that others are doing against injustice.⁸

⁸ In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ([2012] 2015) argues that in talking about human rights, we might lose sight of the importance of gender. I have been arguing that a human rights approach to

Intersectional analysis is the principle-in-practice of the broader normative commitment that advocacy for human rights must take into account for the interdependence of human beings, their power inequalities, and their privileges. Because injustice itself entails complex causality, exploitable power inequalities, and normalization, intersectional analysis is important for the human rights approach to responsibility for injustice. It entails analyzing the relationships among forces of exclusion and oppression in order to identify strategies that are consistent with promoting rights for all and not just for those individuals most closely connected with their particular activism. In the case of BCWS, initially this meant seeing the connection between workers in the formal and informal sectors. However, as its work evolved, so did its intersectional analysis. Despite the organization's initial founding commitment to non-factory workers, it has come to play an important role in garment worker organizing and advocacy. In addition, BCWS leaders have played a similar role in those sectors of the formal economy that employ low-wage workers but that cannot make use of international pressure in the way that workers producing for the global ready-made garment sector can. BCWS has addressed the concerns of workers in sectors including construction, industrial recycling, and shrimp processing.⁹ In addition, even though BCWS is located in Bangladesh, in its criticism of global garment brands, it has stood with low-wage workers employed in other countries by those same brands. For example, at Walmart's annual shareholder meeting, Kalpona Akter, who had been given the time to seek compensation for Rana Plaza victims, also spoke in alliance with OUR Walmart, the movement of Walmart employees in the United States.¹⁰

More generally, intersectional analysis looks at forces of oppression like capitalism and social norms, and it notes that they affect many subgroups (and subgroups within subgroups) in a society. For example, intersectional analysis enables us to see that the forces affecting domestic workers in one place affect domestic workers everywhere. This is why domestic workers and their advocates around the world worked for ILO Convention 189, which sets standards for decent work for domestic workers (immigrant or domestic).¹¹ Even without fully identified and differentiated forces of connection, intersectional approaches support the rights of all. Finally,

injustice itself *must* take into account gender and other power dynamics. Not to do so would be not to take a human rights approach.

⁹ Both industrial recycling (locally referred to as "shipbreaking") and the cleaning and packing of shrimp are export industries, the first a service provided to the world's decommissioned ships and the second produced for the global shrimp market.

¹⁰ See Making Change at Walmart (<http://forrespect.org/>), an organization of Walmart employees and allies.

¹¹ ILO Convention 189 (International Labour Organization 2011).

intersectional analysis is not predicated on being able to anticipate contingencies or interaction effects, but it may help anticipate the precarious conditions these create.

The principle-in-practice of intersectional analysis is part of a theory of human rights. If some people are not enjoying their rights, then no rights entitlement is secure as a *universal* human right. Instead, “rights” are merely secured as individual or group privilege, which many people may enjoy. People can enjoy this privilege because they are members of a particular state¹² or because they are men.¹³ Intersectional analysis suggests that for rights to be universal entitlements they have to be universally enjoyed. Intersectional analysis is a key principle-in-practice for taking responsibility for injustice itself because it helps us recognize differences in the experience of rights enjoyment that can provide leverage for transforming social norms to make rights universally enjoyed. Moreover, taking responsibility for injustice itself utilizing this principle-in-practice is not dependent on prior understanding of those intersections that will be relevant for destabilizing normalized oppressive power inequalities. Therefore, intersectional analysis is not only a strategic practice of activists, but a principle-in-practice of a normative theory of responsibility for injustice.

Making cross-issue connections

Like most labor organizations,¹⁴ BCWS makes connections between workers’ right to organize and their ability to secure other rights. Even when laws are on the books and other practices are incorporated into corporate codes of conduct, BCWS understands that where workers cannot safely exercise the right to organize, raise safety and health concerns, or ask for better hours, better compensation, or other benefits, none of their rights are secure. However, securing compensation and health takes more than worker organizing. BCWS uses or allows its office space to be used for other rights-enhancing activities, though these additional activities require resources it doesn’t have and depend on partnerships with others. Some of these partnerships have included a nurse coming weekly to see patients in a small room in the front, day care for children of garment and domestic workers, which operates out of the back, and volunteer lawyers who work with individual clients. BCWS’s work addresses many aspects of its constituents’ lives. Making its space available for multiple purposes demonstrates BCWS’s cross-issue connection.

While cross-issue connection can be easily described and documented in a grant proposal or report, it is made vivid when a group of girls come into the office to get

¹² Cohen (2004).

¹³ Charlesworth (1995).

¹⁴ Kang (2012).

support for obtaining their wages for past work, though they cannot go back to work because their factory was audited and all underage workers were fired. Cross-issue connections are not the result of academic reflection, but rather take the form of the everyday politics of lived struggles.

Cross-issue connection is the strategic analysis of the connections across issues, sectors, and movements. Though a group cannot work on all issues of injustice and inequality toward women, for example, realization of how injustice in one issue field is related to injustice in other fields affects the group's strategies. An understanding of cross-issue connection is key to connected activism. It differs from intersectional analysis in its focus on issues, rather than social, political, economic, and other forces, but awareness of the intersectionality of forms of oppression can come from making cross-issue connections.

Cross-issue connection is the principle-in-practice of the indivisibility of human rights. Even though all rights, for example political participation, education, and health, can be enumerated distinctly, the enjoyment of one right is in fact interrelated with the enjoyment of other rights. By making cross-issue connections, we take responsibility for injustice itself in a way that strengthens the ability of each person and all people to have what they claim to be their rights recognized as rights. Theoretically, the cross-issue principle-in-practice is at odds with those theories of human rights that create a special class of rights related to basic needs, to "core" rights, or to justifications for military intervention.¹⁵ It is also at odds with the view that some rights, like sexuality rights, are "new" rights.¹⁶ Cross-issue connection is the principle-in-practice that human rights as an emancipatory project whose needs and potential may not be fully known even to those engaged in struggle.

The connections we make across issues may vary by context. Some of these connections, such as the links between the right to organize and the right to work under safe conditions, between education and health, or between health and sexual exploitation, are obvious across sites and time. Other connections are less obvious because they challenge norms or seek to transform less visible power inequalities, such as the connections between reproductive health, sexuality, and poverty. These connections are often labeled even by their advocates as "new" rights.¹⁷ The ability to make connections across issue areas is essential for being able to respond to the precariousness that arises from contingencies or interaction effects. In the field of women's rights, for example, a focus on the health of women and girls as a human right has led to

¹⁵ For example, Cohen (2012) creates classes of rights—extermination, ethnic cleansing, enslavement, and mass extinction. When an argument relies on classes of rights and when, as in this case, a class justifies violations of sovereignty, we need to apply skeptical scrutiny to the politics of creating the class and interpreting it.

¹⁶ Aalmeida (1983); Nelson and Dorsey (2008); Bob (2009); Perry (2009).

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transformations in the global understanding of women's human rights¹⁸ and in local practices.¹⁹

Cross-issue connection is one way to confront imperfect and always incomplete information about injustice itself, knowingly making connections to issues outside of one's expertise without needing *a priori* to know the implications of making those connections. Making connections across issues, sectors, and movements is part of the politics of enhancing the enjoyment of all rights for all. Though a group cannot work on all issues of injustice, awareness that injustice in one issue field is related to injustice in other fields is part of a political understanding of rights as universal; understanding that these issues are related is *not* predicated on empirical knowledge of how exactly this is so.

As a principle-in-practice, cross-issue connection differs from intersectional analysis in that it focuses on issues rather than on social, political, economic, and other *forces*.

Building capacity for self-advocacy and group advocacy

Babul Akhter and Kalpona Akter, who are now leaders in the Bangladeshi worker movement, were employed in the garment industry when they met at the Solidarity Center, where Babul was Kalpona's English teacher (which will strike you as ironic when you meet them). With financial support from worker rights organizations outside of Bangladesh, the Solidarity Center supported Bangladeshi workers with training in organizing. Teaching English is part of the capacity-building approach of the Solidarity Center because when workers speak English, inspectors can talk to them directly (if confidentiality prevents retaliation). BCWS has continued this strategy of capacity building.²⁰ One key way it does so is by cultivating workers' ability to speak for themselves. For example, in February and March 2015, Akter toured the United States on behalf of Rana Plaza survivors and their families with a survivor, Mahinur Begum. Although Akter had heard Mahinur's story many times and could have told it herself or answered questions on her behalf, she encouraged Mahinur to tell her story herself, again and again, and each time Akter played the role of translator. One of the core ways that BCWS fosters capacity building is by offering training to workers on their rights under Bangladeshi law and the corporate codes of conduct of the brands for which they produce.

Capacity-building strategies enable others to develop and internalize capacities for acting politically on their own individual or collective behalf by advocating for

¹⁸ Petchesky (2003).

¹⁹ Ackerly (2016a).

²⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948: preamble).

themselves or their families, by advocating with others on behalf of a group, or by networking with others for shared or reciprocal capacity building. Activist strategies associated with capacity building are distinct from those that provide rights-related services.

The principle-in-practice of capacity building has three dimensions. First, in order to enjoy their rights in perpetuity, individuals need to be self-advocates. Taking responsibility in a human rights way means cultivating the *individual self-advocacy capacities* of others, as Akter did in encouraging Mahinur to tell her story herself.²¹ The principle-in-practice of individual capacity building develops others' ability to speak with their own voice and on their own behalf. Second, as illustrated by Solidarity Center's English language training and BCWS's legal and code of conduct trainings, the principle-in-practice of capacity building means cultivating leadership capacity so that people can advocate for themselves, *as a group*. This may mean that an organization provides services, such as education or training; however, it does so with mechanisms that develop participants' abilities to advocate for themselves and those similarly situated. For example, BCWS provides training for workers in corporate codes of conduct, the laws of Bangladesh, and the rights protected by the ILO Conventions. These trainings involve analysis of specific problems in actual factories, strategic assessment of allies within and outside the factory, a plan for the argument and a plan for where and how to make the argument. This strategic coaching might be called "role playing" and entails a political interpretation of that descriptor. As evidence of their success at coaching workers to become advocates for others, some who participate in BCWS training become organizers in their own factories. The strategy of capacity building transforms the power inequalities of injustice itself and undermines their potential for exploitation. At the same time, capacity building promotes individuals' capacity to make arguments on their own behalf to audiences at community, national, regional, and global levels.

Finally, when organizations bring people and organizations into relationship with one another, they strengthen the political networks that are important for taking political responsibility for injustice itself.

In these three ways, capacity building is a principle-in-practice of just responsibility that enables people to take on injustice itself and to be less vulnerable to interaction and contingencies effects, because they have the ability to speak for themselves and articulate their needs, objections, or expectations rather than allow these to be dictated by those who are not themselves confronting injustice itself.

²¹ See also the example of Bethune House, an organization that supports foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong who have left their employer due to a civil (e.g., lack of payment) or criminal (e.g., assault) case (Ackerly 2012a).

Building community through connected activism

Connected activism is a way of finding and fostering political community while taking on injustice itself by, at a minimum, connecting one's actions to the actions of others and, more ambitiously, connecting one's plan to the plans of others.

In its everyday activities, BCWS develops partnerships, builds alliances with stakeholders, and cultivates political networks. BCWS leaders and mediators are aware of the landscape of potential partners. As I described in the introduction and in chapter 1, BCWS's network is vast. It includes worker rights organizations in and outside of Bangladesh, student and consumer groups around the world, and socially conscientious investors.²²

BCWS leaders assume that even if an issue is new to them, it is not actually new, and others have been addressing the issue directly or indirectly. Connected activism might include connecting garment manufacturing workers' right to safe working conditions to garment retail workers' right to predictable work hours in retail stores and to healthcare benefits. Potential connected activism can develop from making intersectional or cross-issue connections with like-minded people regardless of site or privilege. It includes networking, alliance building, stakeholder analysis (as in Akter's assessment of how to approach her speaking opportunity at the Walmart shareholder meeting), and partner analysis (as in BCWS leaders initially asking me not to tell their story, even though they knew that BCWS donors wanted to make their successes public). BCWS's partners and allies also partner with others on related movements.

As a principle-in-practice, connected activism transforms power inequalities by building political community, working across differences, and attempting to transform adversaries into allies. Perhaps more than the others, the principle-in-practice of connected activism depends on all of the core activities and is integral to the politics of just responsibility. Activism that takes responsibility for injustice itself using strategies that are guided by these principles-in-practice exhibits a normative commitment to transforming the exploited power inequalities and the norms that keep them unexamined within a political community and across the world.

Connected activism builds bridges between sites of relative privilege and struggle and in so doing fosters political community capable of taking on future and other injustices as well. For example, recall that workers and management at the

²² The list is long and includes International Labor Rights Forum, United Students Against Sweatshops, and Clean Clothes Campaign. Due to continued political and legal threats to BCWS and other labor rights activists in Bangladesh, and in order that the description of their work here not provoke the scrutiny of other actors, I have decided to remove references to partners inside Bangladesh and to those whose connections are not readily visible on the internet.

RL Denim factory were initially adversaries, but an external audit and BCWS's activism turned them into allies. In May 2009, Metro Group suspended its contract with RL Denim factory because an independent auditor, BSCI, found problematic safety and working conditions. Although the factory owner was an unlikely ally, BCWS began by identifying the common ground between workers and the factory owner—a productive factory. BCWS became the anchor of an international network of international and domestic unions and anti-sweatshop consumer groups that lobbied the global brand and convinced BSCI to do another audit, with the end result that Metro Group resumed production at RL Denim in June 2009.

One connected activism strategy, alliance building, is one of the most difficult and politically fraught aspects of a human rights practice. It requires finding common ground despite being disadvantaged in the predominant power inequalities, and it means utilizing those differences for transformative change. As discussed in chapter 4, this is the practice that Audre Lorde called for in her 1984 commentary on feminist theory and activism:

Those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.²³

Intersectional analysis, making cross-issue connections, and capacity building are all supportive of the principle-in-practice of connected activism. When organizations enable those they work with to build their own connections across sectors and levels, then they help their constituents transform the power inequalities in which they live and work.

Taking *just* responsibility for injustice itself means building a political community with networks and alliances that make the community better able to take on other injustices and to respond to injustice that initially appear to us as misfortune. Further, if we respond to misfortune using these principles-in-practice, then interaction effects and contingencies become opportunities for transformative politics as well, rather than occasions for social epistemologies and cognitive limitations to conceal injustice itself. One of the key insights of connected activism as a principle-in-practice for taking responsibility is that as we engage in connecting our actions and strategies, we broaden the political community engaged in connected activism.

²³ Lorde ([1984] 2007: 2).

In developing the political opportunity structure²⁴ for confronting known and emergent injustices, we might consider that when the Tazreen factory fire occurred on November 24, 2012, BCWS and many of the organizations that had already been working for worker rights in Bangladesh utilized the fire as a focusing event to coordinate their reactions. When, less than six months after the Tazreen factory fire, the Rana Plaza building collapsed, on April 24, 2013, actors like the US government and the ILO, which had supported earlier worker activism, became even more involved. The US government suspended Bangladesh's trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).²⁵ The ILO coordinated the victims' and survivors' compensation arrangement.²⁶

BCWS also works with other human rights organizations like the International Labor Rights Forum and Clean Clothes Campaign. Moreover, each of these organizations also works with other human rights organizations, some in Bangladesh and some in other parts of the world. Again, this is a way of working that enacts their values and political theory of change.

Likewise, although Akter is increasingly recognized as the go-to spokesperson of the garment workers' rights movement in Bangladesh, she does not wield this role to invert power inequalities or to create new ones. Instead, she practices connected activism in order to increase and strengthen the intersectional analysis, cross-issue awareness, capacities, and connected activism of other stakeholders in workers' rights. As well, many of the organizations and actors in her network are also building a web of networks for transformative politics through their own connected activism. These organizations include philanthropists such as the Global Fund for Women (which funds women's rights activism and networks around the world and across issue areas), worker organizations (such as the International Labor Rights Forum,²⁷ which works in multiple countries on multiple issues), and international organizations like UN Women and the ILO (which work on a range of sites and issues globally). The shared commitment to building community is not born of one

²⁴ Joachim develops a feminist application of the concept of political opportunity structure, "the institutional context which imposes obstacles on and provides opportunities for actors engaged in framing processes" (2003: 251). See also Tarrow (1994). Joachim's (2003) work draws on women's rights movements for reproductive rights and against violence against women, highlighting the ways in which women's rights organizations attempt to take advantage of both the "political opportunity structure" (context) and "mobilizing structure" (actors variously positioned to propose, lobby, and advocate) to achieve political transformation. The argument I am making is that these strategies also exhibit a normative commitment to building community, and thus, whether or not any particular effort is successful at transforming the formal institutions of human rights, they are an attempt to transform political community.

²⁵ ILAB News Release (2013).

²⁶ Coordination Committee (2015).

²⁷ The International Labor Rights Forum refers to networking and alliance building as cultivating "family ties" (Gearhart 2016).

organization and then spread to others, but rather the value is found across organizations and cultivated by connecting their activism.

Social change happens through collaboration among individuals and organizations with different skills and roles. Connected activism is distinct from *collective* action, in which actors work together by doing close to the same thing—for example, marching in the streets or writing letters. Although connected activism can be done by a group as part of their collective action, connected activism also describes the need to work politically, economically, socially, and *differently* to cultivate political networks for transformative political change. Connected activism emphasizes that we each work in different, complementary ways, acting in concert, but not through identical actions. Further, though any given actor may not be thinking about cross-scale dynamics, the feminist critical methodology urges all of us to think cross-nationally, nationally, and locally about the potential of connecting our actions.

This is not, however, a call for awareness-raising.²⁸ Rather, it is an appreciation of political responsibility for connecting our activism regardless of our positions. As we will see in chapter 7, not only social movement actors, but also corporations, governments, and international governance institutions, as well as consumers and citizens of any country, can be involved in many forms of connected activism. Recognizing that we cannot know all we need to know for connecting our activism to those of others, we make learning the fifth principle-in-practice.

Learning and ongoing commitment to political responsibility

BCWS is a learning organization. Its leadership never forgoes opportunities to learn and take on or take up the next challenge. Every new challenge is a new learning opportunity. New learning opportunities include speaking on television, at shareholder meetings, to donors, with students, and in stores.

Learning and ongoing commitment to political responsibility is a principle-in-practice of Third World feminist social criticism. In order to learn from practice, activists examine the strengths and weaknesses of their political communities and their connection to others, subjecting specific practices of intersectional analysis, cross-issue connection, capacity building, and connected activism to skeptical scrutiny and deliberative inquiry. Learning as a political responsibility entails using Third World feminist social criticism to revisit on an ongoing basis our understandings of what intersectional analysis and cross-issue connections require. Learning as a principle-in-practice commits us to a view of political accountability

²⁸ In chapter 3, I argued that although we do not and cannot know everything about injustice itself, a theory of responsibility must guide us nonetheless.

as a process. Strategic activities utilize skeptical scrutiny and internal evaluation. Whether for an organization, an actor, or a community, taking responsibility means learning to assess strengths and weakness, and then making and revising plans in light of these. Learning-informed plans and strategies take into account the analysis of their capabilities, political situation, and intersectional and cross-issue considerations.

As a principle-in-practice, learning is the political commitment to be engaged in all of the principles-in-practice and to do so in a way that constantly seeks out differences that can be used to transform political community. The feminist critical methodology is a general account of a learning methodology. The specifics of how people and organizations learn will vary. It is important to be clear that activists take responsibility for injustice, not responsibility for *knowing* everything they need to know in order to succeed. As a principle-in-practice, learning does not require knowledge, but rather commits us to taking responsibility for injustice in ways that are respectful of how partial our understanding of our work and its potential impacts can be.

Learning takes the form of both knowledge acquisition and skill development. These are always ongoing parts of taking responsibility for injustice. Because injustice itself is dynamic, being able to assess forces (political, economic, and social, global, national and local), being able to recognize connections across subgroups of people and across issue areas, being able to develop the capacities of others and one-self, and being able to build by partaking in a network of stakeholders will always be learning opportunities.

Learning is a tool for challenging injustice itself and for being prepared to confront emerging injustices. Learning is an essential principle-in-practice of a human rights practice of taking responsibility due to learning's inherent methodological commitments to critical reflection, which keeps the politics of transformative change dynamic even when conditions seem intractable. Learning includes the situational analysis of power inequalities, normalization, and their potential to be exploited. Learning entails assessing these conditions from near-term and long-term perspectives, and it entails reflecting on the merits and disadvantages of opportunistic strategies. Learning entails self-assessment in addition to the assessment of others and situations. It is also essential for making connections between self-reflection and future intersectional analysis, cross-issue reflection, capacity building, and connected activism. Like intersectional analysis, learning connects human rights practice to the critical, feminist, and grounded methodologies for confronting injustice itself. While taking on injustice itself does not require a particular level of understanding, it does require epistemic modesty and commitment to ongoing learning, always looking to better understand injustice itself and to reveal injustices beyond the horizon of our present considerations of justice.

The principles-in-practice are not common moral principles, nor do they require full knowledge or common knowledge of injustice itself.²⁹ As we saw in part I, social epistemologies and cognitive limitations about misfortune, causal forces, power inequalities, and norms can render knowledge about injustice itself incomplete, particularly for those with relative privilege. Moreover, given the complexities of power inequalities and normalization, much of the injustice itself in the world and many of the specifics of injustice itself are unknown regardless of privilege. Finally, due to interaction effects and contingencies, much of injustice itself is unknowable or at least unforeseeable by most if not all of us. In these instances, just responsibility entails taking responsibility for injustice itself under incomplete information. As we saw in chapter 3, this requires dismissing or relaxing common philosophical and legal epistemologies of responsibility. Even if we do not confront a particular struggle directly, working in intersectional and cross-issue ways to build networks, we can participate in transforming political community even before we know what that transformation fully requires.

In this light, just responsibility requires making new connections for learning, not merely for criticizing or transforming those built through the institutions that we would like to transform, but for learning *outside* these as well. So while some may try to take on injustice itself by working through existing political processes like the formal institutions of the United Nations, national governments, and international regional instruments³⁰ or by taking on the processes of injustice such as injustice in the supply chain of food or garment production, political responsibility for injustice itself also means developing new politics of political community, accountability, and leadership not because they are new per se, but because by transforming relations of power we foster new relationships to challenge patterned ways of thinking.³¹ Our epistemologies of political responsibility follow from and do not have to precede our taking political responsibility for injustice itself.

²⁹ Butler (2005: 83ff.) emphasizes that responsibility also does not require knowledge of the self. Butler's (2005: 135) touchstones for this argument are Levinas, Adorno, Foucault, Laplanche, Nietzsche, and Hegel. I have been arguing that this view is embedded in the practice of human rights struggle and thus is an aspect of political knowledge that is available to us without mediation by philosophers of any intellectual tradition and yet is consistent with the moral conclusions of scholars as different as Kant and Butler. It is a political theory that can be supported by a range of moral philosophies. For more on the problem of moral knowledge and its implications for human rights theorizing see Rorty (1993). Likewise, just responsibility can be viewed within Rorty's pragmatist approach to human rights theory as an approach to human rights education and cultivation of sentiment, but again, this view comes not from Rorty but from those who work in the practice of human rights struggles.

³⁰ Gould (2014).

³¹ See also chapter 4.

We can be conscientious participants in political responsibility even with incomplete knowledge; in fact, we have to be conscientious participants in political responsibility *because* of incomplete knowledge. This may seem overwhelming in its ambition, but it is also as straightforward as a bumper sticker: *What would BCWS do?*³² While my argument for just responsibility is couched in a rigorous feminist grounded normative political theory, its prescriptions are straightforward to grasp and incorporate into taking political responsibility personally.

A HUMAN RIGHTS THEORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS POLITICS

The principles-in-practice described in this chapter are part of a normative political theory of human rights, community, accountability, and leadership. In what sense is this a *human rights* theory?³³

Other political philosophers of responsibility have developed a human rights approach to *why* we have responsibility for global justice. The grounded normative human rights theory of political responsibility that I excavate from activists' strategies is a human rights approach to how to discharge that responsibility. It is a political responsibility for transforming injustice itself. As activists use human rights in their work, they provide an enactment of a normative theory of both what we should do and how we should do it.

This understanding of the relationship between human rights and political action is not universally shared. Two other ways of conceiving of it have currency in contemporary political theory and international law. The first understands human rights as a standard of justice institutionalized in formal and informal institutions. The second views rights as entitlements, that is, as guarantees and limits on government power over its citizens.

I treat these as complementary and as important parts of the view I have been developing. Drawing on the first, human rights are the world's imperfectly institutionalized, imperfectly articulated, and imperfectly enjoyed shared principles for living together. Drawing on the second, these shared principles provide the guiding criteria for social and political criticism of our values, practice, norms, and the institutions that support them. Having rights means exercising them, enjoying them, and

³² In the United States, decals on people's cars sometimes convey political, moral, or humorous messages. (My proposed bumper sticker is a play on a common bumper sticker: "What would Jesus do?").

³³ The discussion in this section draws on Ackerly (2011). For a review of human rights approaches to responsibility see Caney (2005). Just responsibility is a political theory of how to take responsibility for global injustice that does not rely on any particular account of *why* individuals, nations, corporations, or other actors have a responsibility to do so. As I argued in part I, such an understanding as a precondition for taking responsibility for injustice itself is inherently conservative.

using them to transform exploitable power inequalities, including those that would rely on certain power inequalities among states to take on power inequalities within states. A human rights approach to politics entails utilizing these shared values of human rights as a guide for how to bring about transformation in local, national, and global systems such that there can be greater enjoyment of them.³⁴

This “activist” interpretation of human rights has a long history and is part of both formal and informal practices, particularly among those struggling for human rights recognition and enjoyment.³⁵ This political theory of human rights was part of the negotiations for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 1940s,³⁶ the global public deliberations about the realization of human rights in the United Nations conferences during the last decade of the twentieth century,³⁷ and much economic development work (including but not limited to that sponsored by the UN) since the 1990s.³⁸ As is evident from the range of sites in which it is deployed, this theory of human rights tells us not only what we should do but also how we should do it.

When activists talk about and use “universal human rights” to justify their work, they are reaching for the wide moral and political legitimacy that “universal human rights” has gained in the struggles for the enjoyment of rights for individuals,³⁹ migrant workers,⁴⁰ women,⁴¹ children,⁴² indigenous people,⁴³ and persons with

³⁴ Ackerly (2011); Ackerly and Cruz (2011). Consider Ingram’s (2008) review of three “images” of human rights, which he labels “human rights politics as implementation,” “human rights politics as right,” and “human rights politics as democratic action.” My argument is consistent with the third and shares Ingram’s reservations, particularly with the idea that “[t]he politics of human rights is, seemingly of necessity, something the powerful do for the powerless” (see also Brown 2004; Ingram 2008: 405). In this view, human rights politics is bound up with state sovereignty and the aspiration of limiting and shaping the ways in which states exercise power over their citizens. This view is consistent with the entitlement approach discussed later.

³⁵ For accounts of human rights politics as democratic action see also Goodhart (2005), Ackerly (2008a, 2011), and Zivi (2012).

³⁶ E.g., Maritain et al. (1949).

³⁷ E.g., Friedman (1995).

³⁸ In the 1990s gender mainstreaming and human rights mainstreaming were two bureaucratic mandates to integrate gender analysis and human rights commitments into all aspects of UN-sponsored work (Parisi 2010b).

³⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, Supp. No. 16 at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, Supp. No. 16, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, G.A. Res. 39/46, U.N. GAOR, 39th Sess., Annex, Supp. No. 51 at 197, U.N. Doc. A/39/51 (1984); International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, G.A. Res., December 20, 2007 (adopted, but not entered into force).

⁴⁰ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, G.A. Res. 45/158 of December 18, 1990 (2003)

⁴¹ United Nations (1979); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, G.A. Res. 34/180, U.N. GAOR, 34th Sess., Supp. No. 46, at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46 (1981).

⁴² United Nations (1989); Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. GAOR, 44th Sess., Supp. No. 49, at 161, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989).

⁴³ United Nations (2007b).

disabilities.⁴⁴ They are aspiring to delegitimize colonial legacies of race,⁴⁵ heteronormativity, gender, and other systems of privilege and discrimination. No one who reaches for this language has confidence in its historical record of securing justice for all individuals and groups who have made such appeals. Rather, in using this language, movement actors seek to affirm the moral and political legitimacy of their particular claims while reinforcing a worldview in which the rights of all humanity are enjoyed by all of humanity, including themselves through their reification in formal and informal institutions.⁴⁶

Human rights as enjoyment

While human rights activists support the claim that rights should be universally enjoyed, they do not think that human rights strategies look the same everywhere.⁴⁷ They even question whether the human rights approach is appropriate in some struggles.⁴⁸ Indigenous activists wonder if the approach, which strongly affirms a state-based system of global governance, can protect their self-determination.⁴⁹ Some activists working on sexual orientation and gender issues wonder if the human rights approach imports a language that undermines some local activists' claim to authenticity, the insinuation being that rights are Western and therefore a claim to rights is locally illegitimate.⁵⁰ However, even those who choose not to pursue a human rights approach recognize its broad moral and political use and acceptance.⁵¹

Although the rights language has legitimacy within states and the international system, it has not been a tool of only powerful international actors serving their

⁴⁴ United Nations (2007a); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, G.A. Res. 61/106 (2007).

⁴⁵ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, G.A. Res. 2106 (XX), U.N. GAOR, Supp. No. 14, at 47, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966).

⁴⁶ In *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference* (2008a), I argue that human rights are conceived, used, and reconceived in a political terrain of difficulty in which the claims of what constitutes a "human rights" claim are adjudicated and always open to contestation even as much of what counts becomes undisputed (cf. Josh Cohen's "terrain of deliberation" (2004: 194–195) or Amartya Sen's "terrain of continued dispute" (2004: 355–356)). I go on to illustrate how that happens. That argument was grounded in what women's human rights activists say in their reflective moments. The theory in the present book is about a different topic. My earlier book is about the sense in which human rights are universal commitments despite differences and disagreements about meaning around the world and within sites of struggle. This book is about how human rights guide taking responsibility for those commitments. Grounded in what women's human rights activists do (and plan to do), this is an argument about how human rights norms guide our action, strategy, and politics of taking responsibility.

⁴⁷ Donnelly (2003, 2007); Ackerly (2008a); Stammers (2009).

⁴⁸ Foxen (2000); Mackey (2005); Bradshaw (2006).

⁴⁹ Holder (2005).

⁵⁰ Rothschild, Long, and Fried (2005).

⁵¹ See, for example, the work of the India-based National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) described by Keating (2004).

particular interests. From the beginning, small and politically marginal countries were influential participants in constructing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁵² Furthermore, developing the meaning of “rights enjoyment” has been pushed by those who are politically marginalized and their advocates.⁵³

Often, the most marginalized are the most ardent articulators of human rights. For example, the stories of women seeking asylum in Canada from gender-based persecution in their home country,⁵⁴ human rights defenders working on sexual orientation and gender issues,⁵⁵ and indigenous activists working against environmental degradation in remote parts of the Amazon rainforest⁵⁶ provide just three illustrations of where and why enjoyment is foundational to human rights.⁵⁷

Looking at the development of the language in conventions and other treaty documents since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), we discern a clear trend toward the goal of human rights law as the full and equal enjoyment of human rights, not just the formal institutionalization of those rights. The most recent of the core human rights treaties, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), makes explicit the multiple forces—political, social, and economic—that determine rights enjoyment. Article 1 reads as follows:

The purpose of the present Convention is to *promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment* of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which *in interaction with various barriers* may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (Emphasis added)

While the UDHR and other early documents focused on rights as *entitlements*, later conventions, such as Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and most recently the CRPD, clearly reflect the growing realization that legal entitlements may secure human rights, but these entitlements (also referred to as “legal rights” or “positive rights”) are not the rights themselves. Rather human rights are realized in their *enjoyment*.

⁵² Waltz (2001, 2002).

⁵³ Bunch (1995); Friedman (1995); Petchesky (2003).

⁵⁴ Alfredson (2009).

⁵⁵ Rothschild, Long, and Fried (2005).

⁵⁶ Herbert (2010).

⁵⁷ Ackerly (2008a) cf. Ishay (2004: 3–4).

On this view, the goal of human rights activism includes changes in legal rights and laws that affect access to education, health, and other entitlements for all. But these “first-order” achievements do not necessarily secure rights enjoyment. As we saw in part I, poverty and other geopolitical and infrastructural conditions can prevent some from enjoying health and education, and social norms can prevent certain groups of people from realizing their rights. The conventions, which have the role of clarifying what the UDHR requires, enumerate the social, economic, and political transformations necessary to deliver on rights enjoyment. That is, the conventions attempt to take on injustice itself.

Within human rights approaches to social change, we might see two approaches: one describing the substantive area of rights *advocacy* and the other describing a way of working that in itself promotes rights *enjoyment*. In the first instance, a human rights approach could mean that the substance of the activism focuses on rights through awareness-raising, political activism, advocacy, or case-work. Much human rights advocacy uses practices that promote rights enjoyment, but it does not do so by definition and this is not the sense in which we identified the human rights strategies discussed in chapter 5.

In the second instance, “human rights” describes an approach to rights advocacy as well as to a broader range of substantive areas of work, including economic development,⁵⁸ health,⁵⁹ and peace.⁶⁰ In this second use, “human rights” describes those tactics and strategies that enhance rights enjoyment. As an illustration, this meaning of “human rights” is consistent with the women’s human rights activism that led to the inclusion of women’s rights in the Platform for Action that was the concluding document of the 1993 UN human rights conference in Vienna.⁶¹ Women’s rights advocates networked transnationally to bring into the international sphere of UN politics insights about the meaning of human rights violations from the perspective of women who had experienced trafficking, economic deprivation and discrimination, domestic violence, and torture at the hands of state actors or of non-state actors due to a lack of state respect for women’s rights.⁶²

In sum, the enjoyment theory of human rights that is embedded in the human rights conventions and in self-advocacy co-constructs human rights as both an aspiration and a way of achieving that aspiration. The enjoyment theory of human

⁵⁸ Uvin (2004); Chen (2005); Corría (2005); Bradshaw (2006); Cornwall and Molyneux (2006); Croll (2006); Enslin and Tjiattas (2006); Kerr (2006); Vargas (2006).

⁵⁹ Petchesky (2003).

⁶⁰ Confortini (2011).

⁶¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1993).

⁶² Friedman (1995). On how the human rights approach was used in the area of women’s health see Petchesky (2003).

rights has four dimensions. First, the realization of rights lies in their enjoyment; a formal recognition of an entitlement unrealized for individual, social, political, or economic reasons is not the enjoyment of the right. Such obstacles may be the result of *structural patterns* or individual circumstances against the backdrop of such structures. They may include the rule of law, political participation, nondiscrimination in economic and social life, and the removal of formal, environmental, and attitudinal barriers. In short, the enjoyment view of human rights takes on injustice itself. Second, even when the structural requirements of rights can be carefully identified, securing them through institutional mechanisms may be insufficient for securing rights enjoyment. In fact, many human rights violations take place in spaces untouched by formal instruments of justice. For example, the rule of law is inaccessible to 4 billion people in the world, most of whom live in poverty.⁶³ Or, to take another example, cultural norms render the people who experience certain harms (such as domestic violence, rape during war, or complications from birthing) invisible.⁶⁴ In addition, politicians have little incentive to challenge that invisibility⁶⁵ even in the case of genocide.⁶⁶ Third, although human rights may be usefully enumerated for expository purposes, rights themselves are *indivisible*. No right is secure if all rights are not secure. Fourth, while we have many conventions clarifying the meaning of rights enjoyment for particular groups—migrant workers, women, children, persons with disabilities, and others—the rights of all humans are *interrelated*. If the rights of some are not secure, the rights of others are not secure. Structures of privilege may make it unnecessary for people to rely on rights claims for their security, but were they to lose that privilege or were the system of privilege to change, they would rely on the legitimacy of rights as the underprivileged do now.

Human rights as entitlement

Some legal and philosophical theories of human rights⁶⁷ take a more limited view of human rights as merely entitlements and in so doing mistake a part of the practice of human rights for the whole. As we have seen, entitlement is but one pillar of the portico.⁶⁸ Human rights as entitlements can function as a reference point for

⁶³ Haugen and Boutros (2010: 52); see also chapter 2, note 49 and related text.

⁶⁴ MacKinnon (1985, 1993); Rorty (1993). Recently, these particular issues have received some attention from the media and the United Nations. The United States generally continues to focus on the prurient harms experienced by non-Western women (Narayan 2010).

⁶⁵ Consider even the reflection of the journalists Kristof and WuDunn (2009) on the lack of coverage of gender injustices by mainstream media.

⁶⁶ Power (2002).

⁶⁷ This is the view of human rights at which Brown (2004) and Mutua (2001) take aim.

⁶⁸ Buchanan (2013). Note that it is possible to confuse the distinction between rights as entitlements and rights as enjoyment as a distinction between individual and group rights.

critically evaluating outcomes of political and economic behavior, policies, and even the global basic structure.⁶⁹ This understanding has been important for the development of the politics of human rights enjoyment around the world.⁷⁰ In human rights as entitlements, human rights is an outcome assessment tool: Are people in this place and time formally and informally entitled to these rights?⁷¹ The interpretation of human rights as entitlements is parasitic on the common legal understanding of rights as entitlements directly connected to corresponding duties:

A right in this sense can be thought of as consisting of five main elements: a right-holder (the subject of a right) has a claim to some substance (the object of a right), which he or she might assert, or demand, or enjoy, or enforce (exercising a right) against some individual or group (the bearer of the correlative duty), citing in support of his or her claim some particular ground (the justification of a right).⁷²

Historically, the idea of rights has embodied two foundational claims. First, that there is an identifiable subject who has entitlements; and secondly, that to possess a right presupposes the existence of a duty-bearer against whom the right is claimed.⁷³

This view dominates much human rights framing, even that of scholars who use human rights as a basis for criticizing structural injustice.⁷⁴

A practice-based approach to theorizing about human rights does not necessarily challenge the narrow view of human rights as entitlements. In his introduction to *The Heart of Human Rights*, Buchanan argues that the theory of human rights is found within the function, efficacy, and means of the practice of human rights.⁷⁵ He goes on to find within the practice an entitlement view of rights, and only the entitlement view.⁷⁶ I am arguing that human rights politics are not practiced the same way by all actors and therefore that theories of human rights within “the practice” vary by practitioner. For example, in humanitarian aid, responsibility

⁶⁹ Pogge ([2002] 2008). In my earlier discussion, I disaggregate these as Ingram (2008) does (see also this chapter, note 33). Here as elsewhere, I emphasize what these approaches have in common: the use of the entitlement concept of rights.

⁷⁰ Ackerly (2017).

⁷¹ Caprioli and Douglass (2008).

⁷² Vincent (1986: 8).

⁷³ Dunne and Wheeler (1999: 3–4).

⁷⁴ Pogge ([2002] 2008); Mills (2010); Buchanan (2013); Ackerly (2017). For a critical view of this approach see Ackerly (2008a) and Mills (2010).

⁷⁵ Buchanan (2013: 22).

⁷⁶ For a critical reading of Buchanan see Ackerly (2017).

to protect, and some examples of development, a rights-based approach can reinforce the privilege of the donor and undermine the capacities for self-rule of recipients.⁷⁷

Another way to think of the entitlement view as instrumental to the political enjoyment of human rights is to think of human rights legal entitlements as a step on the path toward more transformative politics. For example, the right to organize without threat is essential for ensuring that workers' political power is commensurate with their employers' economic power. In certain contexts, then, securing human rights entitlements is the front line of social justice politics. In this sense, rights as entitlements has a role in just responsibility as a transitional concept for legal and social norms and practice.⁷⁸ In practice, people often mobilize politically for their rights even without the protection of an entitlement to do so. The human rights approach to responsibility relies on each person's political agency, agency that often includes agreeing *not* to agree on the moral foundations of that agreement.⁷⁹

Human rights as entitlements is not a wrong concept. It is a concept that is in use. But it is not the only concept of human rights in use, and it is not the concept used by much human rights activism, including the activism discussed in chapter 5, because it is too narrow. It is silent as to politics, as to how these entitlements should be secured. Treating human rights as merely entitlements is politically conservative. Moreover, without the broader framework of rights enjoyment, human rights as entitlements can be an excuse to protect the vulnerable (through military intervention, for example) without a commensurate commitment to undermining their vulnerability. Despite the potential for political abuse, as part of the portico, human rights as entitlements are a tool that contributes to the politically transformative goal of rights enjoyment.⁸⁰

In practice, human rights are a basis for *political struggle* every day, not merely a reference point for formal and informal claims by individuals whose rights are violated. Although the aspiration to enjoy rights is universal, human rights are not enjoyed universally. Where we wish to take responsibility for rights unfulfilled, *What should we do?* and, more important, *How should we do it?*

⁷⁷ Note that in the fields of development and foreign aid, the "rights-based approach" is common discourse; however, even those programs intending to use a rights-based approach or required to do so by institutional mandate have difficulty doing so.

⁷⁸ For those who understand rights as entitlements, starting with rights as entitlements is appropriate.

⁷⁹ See also note 33 of this chapter and Caney's (2005) review of human rights approaches to responsibility. According to Jacques Maritain, the success of the political agreement on the content of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was contingent on *not* requiring agreement on the moral foundations of commitments to those rights (Maritain and al. 1949).

⁸⁰ For more on this distinction see Ackerly (2008a, 2011, 2016a, 2017).

Human rights politics

The grounded normative insights from human rights politics open up new terrain for the political theory of responsibility. This terrain is a social epistemology for the praxis of rights and responsibility. On this terrain we understand rights enjoyment as entailing the political responsibility to enjoy our rights through the practice of the five principles-in-practice and the related politics. That is, we *enjoy* our rights by practicing a human rights politics. In chapter 7, I set out that politics. Here, let us review why an alternative social epistemology of responsibility is necessary.

In practice, human rights require a political society that sustains rights enjoyment. The *process* by which we promote human rights has a normative and empirical effect on the form of political society. If we understand human rights merely as entitlements, then the process by which we work toward them is not important. However, if we understand human rights as a qualitative description of the kind of political life we live together, or want to live together, then it matters very much how we promote human rights and how we take political responsibility for rights enjoyment.

As we saw in chapter 2, violations of human rights entitlements—like the right to food or to a safe workplace—are often indicators of injustice itself. However, as we saw in chapter 3, much of injustice itself cannot be identified through such indicators. Focusing on tragedies and entitlement violations conflates the consequences of injustice with injustice itself and supports a conservative view of what it takes to secure human rights.⁸¹ This view is more conservative than the rights conventions. It is more conservative than the United Nations' efforts to "mainstream" human rights. It is more conservative than the view developed by activists discussed in chapter 5.⁸²

Throughout my development of a grounded normative human rights theory of political responsibility for injustice itself, I have discussed other theorists who have taken a view of what responsibility for injustice requires. There has been a broad spectrum. At one end, there is Peter Singer, according to whom we have a moral obligation to respond to suffering by transferring to those who suffer some of our income and wealth through charities. This model has no diagnosis of injustice itself; in fact, it has no account of justice, only a view of good and bad. The calculus is based solely on "suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care," which are "bad."⁸³ In addition, Singer's model neither aspires to a political response nor gives

⁸¹ Critics of human rights generally have this view of human rights in mind. For example, when critics decry the Bush administration's cynical use of concern for women's human rights as a justification for military action in Afghanistan, they have in mind the Bush administration's narrow focus on the human rights of women as entitlements, but of course no one (including women) can enjoy their human rights in a context of war. For a review of feminist criticism of human rights see Parisi (2010a). See also Brown (2004) and Mutua (2001).

⁸² Mertus ([2005] 2009); Parisi (2010b).

⁸³ Singer (1972: 231).

an account of a political responsibility to transform the global structures of injustice itself that are behind the “bad.”⁸⁴ Setting aside the question of justice, his concern is moral, and his admonition is for us to give more. Note that the shortcoming of Singer’s account is not its utilitarianism per se; it is his eschewing of structural considerations. Utilitarian calculations do not have to eschew structural considerations. John Stuart Mill’s form of utilitarianism viewed addressing structural injustices of the political economy⁸⁵ and of social norms⁸⁶ as a maximally effective form of delivering the greatest happiness to the greatest number.

At the other end of the spectrum, Iris Marion Young understands the injustice of the global basic structure⁸⁷ as itself creating a *political* responsibility to transform that structure.⁸⁸ This means having a historical analysis of injustice itself: “to live in a society with others is to be historical.”⁸⁹ The purpose of our historical analysis is not to trace moral blame for injustice itself, but rather to cultivate political responsibility by enabling us to appreciate that a certain injustice is structural.⁹⁰ Young argues:

The social connection model of responsibility says that those who participate in the production and reproduction of structural processes with unjust consequences share a responsibility to organize collective action to transform those structures.⁹¹

Moreover, those who are privileged by these structural processes are likewise called

to act on an obligation to work on transforming the institutions that offer this privilege, even if this means worsening one’s own conditions and opportunities compared to what they would have been.⁹²

Unlike Singer, Young is committed to political transformation and to the responsibility of those with privilege to engage in such transformation. Young ties the

⁸⁴ Singer (1972, 2015a). See also Singer’s ([2002] 2005) response to Andrew Kuper. During a public question and answer session at Vanderbilt University, Singer reiterated the point (Singer 2016). Deveaux (2015) criticizes Singer’s comparison of someone in poverty to a drowning child as distractingly incorrect in that it ignores that someone in poverty has agency and can understand and confront her or his situation.

⁸⁵ Mill ([1869] 1998).

⁸⁶ Mill ([1859] 1989, [1869] 1998).

⁸⁷ Young (2006b, 2010: chap. 2).

⁸⁸ Young (2006a, 2010: chap. 7).

⁸⁹ Young (2010: 172).

⁹⁰ Young (2010: 173, 179ff., 185).

⁹¹ Young (2010: 184).

⁹² Young (2010: 187).

obligation to engage in these transformative politics to having benefited from injustice itself:⁹³

Those who are beneficiaries of racialized structures with unjust outcomes, however, can properly be called to a special moral and political responsibility to recognize our privilege, to acknowledge its continuities with historical injustice, and to act on an obligation to work on transforming the institutions that offer this privilege, even if this means worsening one's own conditions and opportunities compared to what they would have been.⁹⁴

Whereas Singer implored us to *give* more, Young implores us to *do* more.

The theory of political responsibility embedded in the human rights theory of political responsibility makes two important departures from our clarifications of Young's argument that together give more direction as to how to do (and give) more to take on injustice itself. First, the obligation to address injustice itself is not merely a special responsibility of those who can appreciate that they benefit from privileges created by injustice itself. This view of special responsibility based on a privileged relationship to and benefit from structural injustice has been an important argument in the field of responsibility for injustice itself,⁹⁵ and I do not mean to take issue with the argument such as it is. However, if we recognize that that same privilege and injustice itself often prevent us from being aware of injustice itself (as we saw in chapter 2) or from appreciating our privileges (as we saw in chapter 3), then we have to understand the project of addressing all forms of injustice itself as a political obligation that is not predicated on a moral obligation, but rather is predicated on the more general recognition of what it means to live in society. Amartya Sen argues:

As competent human beings, we cannot shirk the task of judging how things are and what needs to be done. As reflective creatures, we have the ability to contemplate the lives of others. Our sense of responsibility need not relate only to the afflictions that our own behavior may have caused (though that can be very important as well), but can also relate more generally to the miseries that we see around us and that lie within our power to help remedy. That responsibility is not, of course, the only consideration that can claim our attention, but

⁹³ Others who argue that benefiting from privilege is one reason for taking responsibility include Caney (2010), Miller (2005, 2007), Eckersley (2015), and Page (2012).

⁹⁴ Young (2010: 187).

⁹⁵ See chapter 3, note 30, and this chapter, note 93, on benefit-based views.

to deny the relevance of that general claim would be to miss something central about our social existence. It is not so much a matter of having exact rules about how precisely we ought to behave, as of recognizing the relevance of our shared humanity in making the choices we face.⁹⁶

By turning to those in struggle for insights about how we ought to behave, we invert the perspective on what redressing injustice itself requires. These actors may appeal to calculations like those of Singer and Young when they seek support for their transformative politics. But they understand those calculations as offering a basis for people acting against their own self-interest in support of justice. These calculations are also *not* an account of how we should act.

This brings us to the second departure from Young's theory of political responsibility. Even if we understand our obligation as moral, taking responsibility for injustice itself means acting politically in ways that transform the politics. This might mean that we are called to utilize our privilege as citizens of more powerful states to try to transform relations of power between states.⁹⁷ Young called us to engage in such politics collectively.⁹⁸ The human rights theory of responsibility gives that call more definition and substance. But it also provides a caution: that we do so without transforming our privilege into a new privilege. The human rights theory of injustice itself is a transformative politics, one that undermines political inequalities and makes those that exist and persist less vulnerable to exploitation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I began to apply the general methods of grounded normative theorizing and a feminist critical methodology to the project of developing a normative theory of responsibility for injustice itself. Analyzing the ten core strategic activities that those not privileged in the hierarchies of local and global politics use to take on and transform those power inequalities, values, practices, and norms, I argued that these ten core activities exhibit five normative commitments. These five principles-in-practice are norms with corresponding practices: utilizing intersectional analysis, making cross-issue connections, capacity building, building community through connected activism, and learning. Both the core activities and the principles-in-practice constitute a normative approach to transformative political activism and provide the basis for a practice-based normative theory for taking responsibility for

⁹⁶ Sen (1999: 283); see also the introduction, note 39, and associated text.

⁹⁷ Both Pogge ([2002] 2008) and Deaton (2015) make this proposal.

⁹⁸ Young (2010: 184).

injustice itself. I illustrate both by chronicling how BCWS takes responsibility for injustice *in a just way*.

I have argued that a human rights theory of political responsibility for injustice itself entails an enjoyment-based understanding of human rights. In the scope of its anticipated political transformation and use of human rights, just responsibility means working toward global justice in ways that are attentive to the *potential* for any actions to exploit or reify power inequalities. These normative strategies provide a theoretical and methodological improvement over approaches to injustice that treat rights as individual entitlements,⁹⁹ rely on charity,¹⁰⁰ get their analytical purchase from vulnerability,¹⁰¹ or use actors' social connection through the global structure (rather than through their political potential) as the foundation of connected activism.¹⁰²

In chapter 7, I discuss how those with specific forms of privilege—consumers, philanthropists, advocates, and activists—can work in politically responsible ways. I then go on to describe the implications of just responsibility for three dimensions of politics—political community, accountability, and leadership. Throughout we gain a richer understanding of what distinguishes *political* responsibility from *moral* responsibility and what it means to take political responsibility regardless of whether our personal basis for doing so is moral or political.

⁹⁹ Buchanan (2013); Pogge ([2002] 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Singer (1972, 2015a).

¹⁰¹ Goodin (1985); Goodwin (1999); Fineman (2013).

¹⁰² Young (2006b, 2010).