

Activists beyond Borders

ADVOCACY NETWORKS IN
INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

MARGARET E. KECK
and
KATHRYN SIKKINK

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CHAPTER 5

Transnational Networks on Violence against Women

Susana Chiarotti, one of the founding coordinators of Indeso-Mujer in Rosario, Argentina, has given a dramatic description of the moment when the issue of violence against women began to crystallize:

We began to make the connection between violence and human rights when a "compañera" from Buenos Aires brought us the article by Charlotte Bunch on "Women's rights as human rights," which she got at a meeting in California on Leading the Way Out. I was the only one in my group that read English and when I read it, I said to myself, "Hmmm . . . a new approach to human rights. This we have not seen before. And a new approach to violence as well." So I told the other women in my group, "It seems to me that this would be the key to end our isolation." Women's groups are not isolated from each other, but society's reception of us is "there are the women again with their stuff." "This new approach," I said, "would be very interesting, because we could recruit a lot of people who are not going to be able to say no." So I translated the article for them during our meetings. See how powerful theory is? I am an activist, but this theoretical piece made a great difference in our work. Later, we learned about the petition campaign calling for UN recognition of women's rights as human rights. We thought the petition was a useful tool because it was so well crafted. Its language is irrefutable; you would have to cover yourself with shame if you didn't accept it. This began a new conceptualization of the violence theme, and we started to bother people from human rights organizations to broaden their vision. . . . I think that for us it is a strategic lesson, in the

sense that it tells us, "Let's look for more allies. And to find them, let's look for languages that cannot be rejected."¹

Violence against women is an issue that has arrived late and dramatically for the international women's movement, differing radically from the classic issues of suffrage, equality, and discrimination around which women have long mobilized.² In the 1970s it was on the agenda of neither the women's movement nor international human rights groups. The main normative legal code on women's rights, the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (drafted in the 1970s and adopted in 1979), does not mention violence against women. The thirty articles of this otherwise comprehensive document establish detailed norms on matters of equality and opportunity. But they contain not a single word about rape, domestic or sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, or any other instance of violence against women.³ This chapter examines the transnational campaign on violence against women, exploring how international women's networks first converged around the issue and inserted it into global discourse.

Violence against women did not become a topic for transnational social movement or network actions until the early 1980s, and did not become an object of UN activity until 1985. Once on these agendas, however, the issue moved to the fore rapidly. By the mid-1990s it had become the most important international women's issue, and the most dynamic new international human rights concern. At the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, violence against women was a "centerpiece of the platform," one of four issues given special prominence.⁴ By mid-1995 violence against women had become a "common advocacy position" of the women's movement and the human rights movement.

How can we explain both its absence from international debate before the 1980s, and the rapid attention it attracted once it emerged? The story of the emergence of violence against women as an international issue shows how two previously separate transnational networks around human rights and women's rights began to converge and mutually transform each other. The network built around violence against women thus

¹ Center for Women's Global Leadership, *International Campaign for Women's Human Rights, 1992-1993 Report* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 1993), p. 24.

² Arvonne Fraser, "International Organizing on Violence against Women," public lecture, University of Minnesota, 12 November 1994.

³ The only mention is in one article that calls on governments to suppress traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution. Article 6, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by the UN General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979. Entry into force, 3 September 1981.

⁴ Steven Mufson, "UN Women's Meeting Settles Key Disputes," *Washington Post*, 14 September 1995, p. A15.

could draw upon preexisting communication networks that were receptive to the "new ideas of the incipient movement."⁵ Not all new ideas "resonate" with the submerged networks they seem made for; this one, however, resonated across significant cultural and experiential barriers. Other "women's issues" that seemed to be candidates for international campaign activity failed to do so. In the mid-1970s "women and development" began to be discussed in UN circles and by some governments and NGOs, and although it received significant institutional support, no major advocacy campaign was ever organized around the issue. Likewise, some activists urged international action against the practices of veiling and purdah in many Muslim societies, even going so far as to refer to it as "female apartheid." Yet veiling has not provoked an international campaign, but only isolated protests by women in these particular societies. Finally, one competitor to the women's rights movement at both the UN Population Conference in Cairo and the Women's Conference in Beijing was an international profamily and antiabortion network. Yet despite the extensive power the Catholic church hierarchy wielded in alliance with this movement, it failed to dominate the platforms of the two conferences, nor did it form as extensive or influential an international network as the one around women's human rights. How can we explain these differences in network formation and network success?

THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

The women's movement in the United States first popularized the modern usage of the word "network" to refer to interconnected groups of people when they coined the term "old boys' network" to criticize the informal contacts men used to further professional goals, often through exclusive men-only clubs. From that initial critique, women went on to imitate and innovate with the network model.⁶ More than any other groups, women's organizations use the terms "network" and "networking" to describe their interactions. Indeed, many international women's groups are named "networks" (The International Feminist Network, Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Network against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Asian Women's Research and Action Network).⁷

⁵ Jo Freeman, "The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement," *American Journal of Sociology* 78:4 (January 1973): 32.

⁶ Fraser, "International Organizing."

⁷ See, for example, *International Feminism: Networking against Female Sexual Slavery*, Report of the Global Feminist Workshop to Organize against Traffic in Women, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 6-16 April 1983, ed. Kathleen Barry, Charlotte Bunch, and Shirley Castley (New York: International Women's Tribune Centre, 1984); and Jessie Bernard, *The Female World from a Global Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 157.

Today's women's networks have their roots in the abolitionist movement of the 1800s and the subsequent international campaign for woman suffrage, discussed in Chapter two. Feminist theorists refer to the suffrage campaign as the "first wave" of feminism, and the movement beginning in the 1960s as the "second wave."⁸ Like the suffrage movement, second-wave networks were fostered by international conferences; the emergence of modern international organizations provided more arenas for women's issues.

The Inter-American Commission on Women, started in the 1920s, was one of the groups instrumental in getting the provision on equal rights for women into the UN Charter, and recommending the formation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established this commission in the late 1940s, along with the Commission on Human Rights (which received more institutional support).⁹

The second wave of international organizing on women began in the 1960s and early 1970s, as ideas originating with feminists in the United States and Europe sparked global debate.¹⁰ The Commission on the Status of Women drafted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1967, and then began work on a convention. Adopted in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women entered into force in 1981.

This convention dealt mainly with discrimination, defined as "any exclusion or restriction of women on the basis of sex in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." The 1967 declaration and the resulting convention mention discrimination and equality in practically every article, but never refer to violence against women.¹¹ Discrimination and equality were the master frames of the women's movement in the United States and in Europe, and the UN system. The discrimination frame did not always include the concerns of third world women's organizations, however, as revealed in many of the debates at the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975.

The emergence of international women's networks was more intertwined with the UN system than the other networks discussed in this book. Chronologies of the international women's movement are largely a litany of UN meetings: Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Vienna, Cairo, Bei-

⁸ Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (London: Unwin, 1984), p. 6.

⁹ Sandra Coliver, "United Nations Machinery on Women's Rights: How Might They Better Help Women Whose Rights Are Being Violated," in Ellen Lutz et al., eds., *New Directions in Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 28-32.

¹⁰ Bernard, *The Female World*, pp. 109-22.

¹¹ The convention mentions "discrimination" twenty-nine times, "equal" or "equality" thirty-four times, "human rights" five times, but makes no mention of violence, rape, abuse, or battery.

jing. The current wave of organizing internationally on women's issues gained momentum during International Women's Year (IWY) and the UN Decade for Women (1976-85),¹² which in turn catalyzed networks around women's rights. The three conferences—in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985)—that spanned the UN Decade for Women served as locations to build and connect the emerging international network. Preparations for the population conference in Cairo in 1994 and the women's conference in Beijing in 1995 further extended and solidified the network. In each of the cities, increasingly large parallel conferences of NGOs took place at the same time as the official conferences; more than 14,000 women from 150 countries attended the NGO forum in Nairobi, and 20,000 attended the one in Beijing in 1995.

International conferences did not create women's networks, but they legitimized the issues and brought together unprecedented numbers of women from around the world. Such face-to-face encounters generate the trust, information sharing, and discovery of common concerns that gives impetus to network formation. The NGO meeting in Mexico City encouraged a group of women to found the International Women's Tribune Centre, which used the mailing list generated at Mexico City to keep in touch with individuals and groups around the globe, and expanded it to include new groups. Lucille Mair of Jamaica, secretary general of the Copenhagen conference, said of the Mexico City conference: "Mexico City focused on some of the fundamental issues . . . but it also did something that, while less tangible, may be in some ways more important than anything else: It established a network."¹³ Today the Tribune Centre is a communication link for 16,000 individuals and groups working on behalf of women in 160 countries.¹⁴ The NGO meeting at the Nairobi conference spawned many new regional networks, including three on women, law, and development that would be especially involved in the issue of violence against women: the Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development, and Women in Law and Development in Africa.¹⁵ World conferences also sped up ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and prodded states to change practices.¹⁶

¹² On the origins of the IWY see Hilkka Pietila and Jeanne Vickers, *Making Women Matter: The Role of the United Nations* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 73.

¹³ Arvonne Fraser, *U.N. Decade for Women: Documents and Dialogue* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), p. 71.

¹⁴ *The Tribune: A Women and Development Quarterly*, newsletter 45 (July 1990).

¹⁵ Elisabeth Friedman, "Women's Human Rights: The Emergence of a Movement," in *Women and Human Rights: An Agenda for Change*, ed. Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 24.

¹⁶ Pietila and Vickers, *Making Women Matter*, p. 6.

Women's groups in Latin America took the lead in the use of network styles of communication, becoming models for other women's organizations around the world. Chilean women host one of two offices for ISIS International, a major women's information and communication service that links 150 countries. Latin American women often set up documentation centers connected to advocacy and grassroots groups.¹⁷

But at the same time that the Mexico conference encouraged network formation, it also revealed a major division among women's organizations. The conference disintegrated into a heated debate among feminists from Western countries who stressed discrimination, and women from the developing world who stressed what they considered the more pressing issues of development and social justice that affected both men and women. Often portrayed as a north-south split, these divisions also existed within northern and southern groups.¹⁸ They continued beyond Mexico City, and indeed were exacerbated by debates over Zionism and racism at the next conference in Copenhagen.

The north-south tensions within the women's movement began to recede at the UN women's conference in Nairobi in 1985, the first one that made substantial recommendations on the issue of violence against women. These two facts are not unrelated; convergence around the issue of violence against women was the result of creating a category for discussion and action that linked concerns of women around the world.

One of the first efforts to bridge the gap between north and south was the debate over women and development,¹⁹ stimulated by the overlap of the second UN Development Decade with the Decade for Women. Ester Boserup's pathbreaking 1970 book, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, had highlighted the issue, especially the key role of women as agricultural producers, and the U.S. Agency for International Development had created a Women and Development Bureau in 1973. The action plans issuing from the three women's decade conferences strongly reflected development language and concerns. Yet the issue of women and development never spawned a major global network or campaign. Its demands are important but prosaic: more credit opportunities for rural women, change in laws about property rights and inheritance, more equitable sharing of work between men and women, training programs, improved agricultural extension, water connections,

¹⁷ Catherine Reeve, "Latinas Lead the World in Networking," *Chicago Tribune*, 10 July 1994, Womanews section, p. 1.

¹⁸ See the discussion of divisions within the Latin American women's movement in Nancy Saporita Sternback et al., "Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo," *Signs* 17:2 (Winter 1992): 393-434.

¹⁹ We are indebted to Petrice Flowers and Helen Kinsella for helping us think about the evolution of the women and development movement, and how it related to the issue of violence against women.

roads, etc.²⁰ Even the most ardent advocates of the women and development approach began to be disillusioned by the mid-1980s with the disappointing results of early programs to increase women's economic participation. Many activists believed that women's economic position could not improve without addressing the root problems of women's subordinate status, and of global economic inequalities, but these concerns were so systemic that they defied individual or group efforts to effect change.

The issue of violence, on the other hand, appeared to offer clearer avenues for activism. Charlotte Bunch, head of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, says, "sometimes deceptively, sometimes usefully, you feel like you can do something about it. There are everyday things you can do about it, from wherever you are."²¹ Violence and development could also be linked, since in many cases violence against women limited the role they could play in development. Some of the most innovative groups to take on the women and development issue, like the Women, Law, and Development groups, later became leaders in the campaign for women's human rights.²²

NAMING THE PROBLEM: DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

From its first use, the term "violence against women" encompassed a range of practices in diverse locations, from household brutality to the violence of state security forces. But to start with definitions is to jump over the process through which the network helped "create" the issue, in part through naming, renaming, and working out definitions, whereby the concept "violence against women" eventually unified many practices that in the early 1970s were not understood to be connected.

What existed first was not the general category "violence against women" but separate activist campaigns on specific practices—against rape and domestic battery in the United States and Europe, female genital mutilation in Africa, female sexual slavery in Europe and Asia, dowry death in India, and torture and rape of political prisoners in Latin America. It was neither obvious nor natural that one should think of female genital mutilation and domestic abuse as part of the same category. The category "violence against women" had to be constructed and popularized before

²⁰ See the section on "Women, Poverty, Food Security, and Economic Empowerment," in "NGO Proposed Amendments to the African Platform for Action," 5th African Regional Conference on Women, NGO Forum, 12-15 November 1994, Dakar, Senegal, pp. 26-27.

²¹ Interview with Charlotte Bunch, New York City, 21 February 1996.

²² Margaret Schuler, "Violence against Women: An International Perspective," in *Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from around the World*, ed. Margaret Schuler (New York: UNIFEM, 1992), pp. 3, 6.

people could think of these practices as the "same" in some basic way. Yet activists cannot make just any category stick. This one caught on because in some way it "made sense" and it captured the imagination. As one Latin American activist pointed out, "the violence theme is very evocative. No woman can help but feel it as her own. I don't think any one of us can say that she has never felt violence against her. It crosses all our lives."²³ At the same time, the category served some key strategic purposes for activists trying to build a transnational campaign because it allowed them to attract allies and bridge cultural differences. This strategic focus forced transnational activists to search for a basic common denominator—the belief in the importance of the protection of the bodily integrity of women and girls—which was central to liberalism, and at the same time at the core of understandings of human dignity in many other cultures.

The earliest "official" definition of the term "violence against women" was developed not in the UN but in the Organization of American States (OAS), which adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women in 1994. It defined violence against women as "any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or private sphere."²⁴ This definition was considerably narrower than one proposed in 1991 which also included indirect acts that intimidated or humiliated women, maintained them in sex-stereotyped roles, or denied them human dignity, whether or not these acts caused physical or mental injury or suffering.²⁵

A new focus on violence in the private sphere was the major conceptual innovation that the issue of violence against women contributed to international human rights discourse. Traditional human rights work had focused on trying to get governments to stop doing something (for instance, torturing or imprisoning people). Certainly some violence against women is carried out by the state, as when rape is used as an instrument of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, or prison guards are particularly abusive in their treatment of women prisoners; but most violence against women is carried out by private individuals, within the household or community. In cases like female genital mutilation or dowry death, the

key perpetrators may even be other women, including mothers or mothers-in-law. The new international attention to violence against women implied rethinking the boundaries between public and private (as had the antislavery and anti-footbinding movements).²⁶

Like the inter-American convention, the nonbinding UN Declaration on Violence against Women stresses violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm occurring in public or private life.²⁷ The OAS convention includes a list of types of violence against women, such as rape, battery, sexual abuse, torture, trafficking in persons, forced prostitution, kidnapping, sexual harassment, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state. The UN declaration adds dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, nonspousal violence, and violence related to exploitation.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Scholars using demographic data estimate that between sixty and one hundred million women are "missing" in the world as a result of the most extreme forms of violence against female infants, girls, and women.²⁸ In China, which accounts for the majority of the missing women, births of some female children may not be reported to authorities, as a way of evading the strict one-child policy. But for the most part, "missing" means that these women and girls are prematurely dead from sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, differential access to food and medical care for girls, and other forms of gender violence. The figure of sixty million is larger than the combined combat death tolls from the First and Second World Wars yet the problem is virtually unknown to scholars and to the general population. Charlotte Bunch has argued that these women and girls should be considered just as much "disappeared" as are victims of state repression.²⁹

This phenomenon is only the tip of the iceberg, in that it accounts for only gender-based violence that leads to death. In millions of other cases gender-based violence does not kill its victims, but may scar them physically

²³ Susana Chiarotti, quoted in *International Campaign for Women's Human Rights 1992–1993 Report*, Center for Women's Global Leadership, p. 25.

²⁴ The convention was adopted by acclamation at the 24th regular session of the General Assembly of the OAS on 9 June 1994, in Belém de Pará, Brazil. As of 2 June 1997, twenty-six member states had ratified it.

²⁵ Inter-American Commission on Women, OAS, "Suggested Preliminary Draft for the Preparation of an Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women," in the "Report on the Results of the Meeting of Experts to Consider the Viability of an Inter-American Convention on Women and Violence," 5–9 August 1991, Caracas, Venezuela, p. 17.

²⁶ Karen Brown Thompson argues that the increasing global concern with women's rights and children's rights represents a shift in the international public-private boundaries that has far-reaching implications for state-citizen relations. "Global Norms concerning Women's and Children's Rights and Their Implications for State-Citizen Relations," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 27 April 1997.

²⁷ Article 1, "Declaration on Violence Against Women," UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1992 (adopted by the UN General Assembly, Fall 1993).

²⁸ Amartya Sen, "Millions of Women are Missing," *New York Review of Books*, 20 December 1990; Ansley J. Coale, "Excess Female Mortality and the Balance of the Sexes in the Population: An Estimate of the Number of 'Missing' Females," *Population and Development Review* 17:3 (September 1991): 521.

²⁹ Interview with Charlotte Bunch.

or emotionally. The World Bank estimates that between 80 and 114 million girls and women in the world have undergone genital mutilation, which can cause long-lasting physical pain and ongoing health problems.³⁰ The global health burden of such violence against women, as measured by healthy years of life lost, is "comparable to that posed by other risk factors and diseases already high on the world agenda, including AIDs, tuberculosis, cancer, and cardiovascular disease."³¹

But however serious the problem appears on the basis of this data, it did not in and of itself generate a response on the part of governments or international agencies. Only after a major social movement and network campaign emerged around the issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s did it begin to be incorporated into regional and international discourses. Having called attention to these issues, the network has begun to develop an information base and a normative consensus on change. As with all the networks we consider in this book, certain issues lend themselves more easily to transnational organizing, but change never occurs before actual groups organize and press for it.

This argument is consistent with one Mary Katzenstein makes in her work on getting gender violence onto the public agenda in India. Katzenstein argues that when body politics (rape, dowry death, wife beating, and burning of widows) reach the public agenda, "the prerequisite appears to be the activities of autonomous women's organizations as the initiators of public debate." While state-initiated actions put issues involving women's economic welfare on the agenda, it was women's groups outside of government that got body politics on the agenda.³²

Origins and Development of the Campaign

Feminists put issues of rape and domestic violence or battering on the agenda of the women's movement in the United States and Western Europe in the mid-1970s, but violence tended to concern the local rather than the mainstream national women's organizations.³³ The issue emerged

³⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report 1993: Investing in Health* (Washington, D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1993), p. 50.

³¹ Lori L. Heise, with Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain, *Violence against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*, World Bank Discussion Paper, #255 (Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1994), p. 17.

³² Mary Katzenstein, "Getting Women's Issues onto the Public Agenda: Body Politics in India," *Samya Shakti* 6 (1991-1992): 3-4.

³³ Leslie R. Wolfe and Jennifer Tucker, "Feminism Lives: Building a Multicultural Women's Movement in the United States," pp. 435-62, and Jane Jenson, "Extending the Boundaries of Citizenship: Women's Movements of Western Europe," pp. 405-34, in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*, ed. Amrita Basu (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), survey the development of women's movements in the United States and Western Europe, and mention the issues of domestic abuse and violence against women only in passing. We are indebted to Mary Katzenstein and Sally Kenney for bringing to our attention the centrality of issues of violence to local feminist groups in the U.S. and Europe, and for feminist writers of the 1970s.

locally as women organized in their communities to offer services to victims of rape and domestic abuse.³⁴ Violence was also a central theme of consciousness-raising groups, and of more radical feminist theorists who galvanized the women's movement in the 1970s.³⁵

Activists opened the first shelters for battered women in London in 1971 and in the United States in 1974. In 1975 Fran Hosken founded *Women's International Network (WIN) News*, a quarterly journal of information on women's issues excerpted from correspondence and other publications, which began with discussion of domestic violence as a crucial international issue. Hosken is best known for her outspoken and controversial leadership in the campaign over female genital mutilation, but *WIN News* was also a consistent source of information on many forms of violence against women. These fledgling efforts, however, were still too weak for the issue of violence against women to become a focus at the international women's year conference in Mexico City in 1975.

But at the March 1976 First International Tribunal on Crimes against Women, held in Brussels, two thousand women from forty countries spoke out on family violence, wife beating, rape, prostitution, female genital mutilation, murder of women, and persecution of lesbians (the proceedings were carried on radio in some parts of the world). The International Feminist Network (IFN), coordinated by ISIS International, grew out of the Brussels meeting.³⁶ The IFN was intended to serve as an action network similar to Amnesty International; in practice, however, it was more sporadic than its organizers had hoped.

The movement to combat violence against women also has roots in local action in the developing world. Locally based projects and coalitions such as GABRIELA in the Philippines, Mujeres por la Vida in Chile, and various women's groups in India and Bangladesh working on dowry-death had begun work on issues of violence in the mid- to late 1970s.³⁷ The two main strands of action came from women's groups in Latin America and from Asian groups working on the issue of so-called "comfort women" in army brothels used by Japanese soldiers during the Second World War. It is estimated that 200,000 women, 80-90 percent of whom were forcibly detained in Korea, were registered as sex slaves for

³⁴ See Claire Reinelt, "Moving onto the Terrain of the State: The Battered Women's Movement and the Politics of Engagement," pp. 84-104 in *Feminist Organizations*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

³⁵ For example, Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975); and Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

³⁶ *ISIS International Bulletin* 8 (Summer 1978).

³⁷ Jane Roberts Chapman, "Violence against Women as a Violation of Human Rights," *Social Justice* 17:2 (Summer 1990):61; and Radha Kumar, "From Chipko to Sati: The Contemporary Indian Women's Movement," pp. 65-66, and Roushan Jahan, "Men in Seclusion, Women in Public: Rokeya's Dream and Women's Struggles in Bangladesh," p. 102, in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*; Katzenstein, "Women's Issues," p. 6.

the Japanese army during the war.³⁸ The issue first attracted attention in 1976 when Korean activist Kim Il Myon published a pathbreaking book *The Emperor's Forces and Korean Comfort Women* based on government sources and war memoirs, though not on the testimony of the comfort women themselves.³⁹

Later, women's groups in Korea and elsewhere drew attention to the experience of the comfort women as it applied to current violence against women. For many years the main concern of Korean women's groups had been the prevalence of sex tourism, mainly from Japan, and of prostitution around U.S. bases. In the 1980s some of these groups began to see that the history of the comfort women, "simultaneously shocking from the standpoints of morality, feminism, and patriotism," could be used to arouse feelings against sex tours.⁴⁰ The campaign was hampered, however, by the lack of firsthand accounts by comfort women themselves. Despite the trauma they had suffered, women were afraid to come forward, use their real names, or offer public testimony because of the shame such an admission would bring to their families. One of the first women to testify publicly about her experiences as a comfort woman and initiate legal action against the Japanese government did so only because all her immediate family were dead.

The case of the comfort women underscores the importance of personal testimony for networks in diverse cultural settings, even where such testimony is perceived as profoundly shameful. "All the research, rhetoric and war memoirs were as nothing until the women were prepared to come forward and speak out against their exploitation. . . . It was not until the comfort women rose to cry out, that research and activists could turn the subject into an issue."⁴¹

The comfort woman issue, like the issue of female genital mutilation, involves language distinctions that may be important for network campaigns. While many thought that the term "comfort women" masked the brutality of the practice, most NGOs working on the issue used that expression nonetheless. More recently, however, the Korean Council for the Matter of Comfort Women has started to use a different title: Council for the Women Drafted into Sexual Slavery by Japan.

Diverse groups throughout Latin America began to work on issues of violence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many were initially concerned with state violence against women. Activists pointed to the unique vul-

³⁸ Charlotte Bunch and Niamh Reilly, *Demanding Accountability: The Global Campaign and Vienna Tribunal for Women's Human Rights* (New York: Center for Women's Global Leadership and UNIFEM, 1994), p. 34.

³⁹ George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), pp. 22, 278.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

nerability of women prisoners for whom rape, torture, and sexual enslavement were often a routine part of imprisonment. When scholars began to recognize such acts not only as aberrant behaviors but part of broader "societal archetypes and stereotypes" that were manipulated by torturers,⁴² they focused attention on deeper patterns of subordination and violence against women, in the private as well as the public sphere. Although women's organizations still encountered arguments that gender equality was less important than class and political oppression, they expanded their work on gender violence during this period, often with strong support from working-class women.⁴³

The seeds of an international network on violence against women were planted in a series of meetings at the UN Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. Charlotte Bunch, who had organized a set of panels on international feminist networking at the nongovernmental forum held parallel to the official conference, recalls:

We observed in that two weeks of the forum that the workshops on issues related to violence against women were the most successful . . . they were the workshops where women did not divide along north-south lines, that women felt a sense of commonality and energy in the room, that there was a sense that we could do something to help each other. . . . It was so visible to me that this issue had the potential to bring women together in a different way, and that it had the potential to do that without erasing difference. Because the specifics of what forms violence took really were different. There were some things like domestic battery that really were everywhere, but what people chose to put as their first issue was different. So you get a chance to deal with difference, and see culture, and race, and class, but in a framework where there was a sense that women were subordinated and subjected to this violence everywhere, and that nobody has the answers. So northern women couldn't dominate and say we know how to do this, because the northern women were saying: "our country is a mess; we have a very violent society." So it created a completely different ground for conversation. . . . It wasn't that we built the network in that moment. It was just the sense of that possibility.⁴⁴

One of the earliest attempts to realize that possibility came in 1981 at the first feminist Encounter for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1981. Participants proposed to call November 25 the "Day against Violence against Women," in honor of three sisters from the Dominican Republic

⁴² Ximena Bunster-Burotto, "Surviving beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America," in *Women and Change in Latin America*, ed. June Nash and Helen Safa (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), p. 299.

⁴³ Sonia Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 134-36.

⁴⁴ Interview with Charlotte Bunch.

who were murdered by security forces of the Trujillo dictatorship on that day in 1960.⁴⁵ Subsequently many Latin American women's organizations began to have annual commemorations, which in part led to the global campaign "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence," a key campaign for raising global awareness on the issue.

In 1983, inspired by the sense of possibility at the Copenhagen workshops, Charlotte Bunch and Kathleen Barry put together a global feminist workshop to organize against traffic in women. Thirty-four women from twenty-four countries, half from the developing world, gathered for a week in Rotterdam to document and strategize about problems of female sexual slavery.⁴⁶ Although the workshop publication refers extensively to networking, no real network emerged from the meeting, for a number of reasons. First, the issue of traffic in women provoked debate between those who argued that all prostitution should be abolished and those who advocated less drastic positions. Second, third world women did not want the network to be based in the north, but no organizations in the south could shoulder the financial and infrastructural burden of coordinating it. This problem would plague women's efforts to organize internationally for years.⁴⁷

Yet the Rotterdam workshop was important in a number of ways. It explicitly argued that the issue of sexual slavery needed to be situated in a broader debate about women's human rights, and it rejected a campaign which would promote "one-way benevolence and the continued designation of certain exploited groups as the other." In this sense the movement transcended the historical patterns evident in the earlier campaigns against footbinding and female genital mutilation. Kathleen Barry made the point forcefully.

What this means is that Western women must be as concerned with the exploitation and enslavement of women in their own countries and cultures as they are with that of women in other parts of the world. It is only in this context that feminists can begin to work with a full definition of women's human rights by beginning with the self, the subject, and therefore extending into international work not through concern for the objectified other but as woman to woman, subject to subject. It is there that authenticity of international feminist work is established.⁴⁸

This quotation captures the potential of networking. Networks are usually not one-way streets whereby activists in one country "help" victims

⁴⁵ See "Por que el 25 de noviembre?: Un dia de denuncia de la violencia hacia las mujeres," *Mujer/Fempress* (January 1988), p. 2.

⁴⁶ *International Feminism*, pp. 119-21.

⁴⁷ Interview with Charlotte Bunch.

⁴⁸ Kathleen Barry, "The Opening Paper: International Politics of Female Sexual Slavery," in *International Feminism*, p. 31.

in another, but part of an interactive process by which people in far-flung places communicate and exchange beliefs, information, testimony, strategy, and sometimes services. In the process of exchange they may change each other. Lori Heise, a U.S. activist who had worked on domestic violence at home, was exposed to violence against women as an international concern while doing research on women's environmental movements in India. "The big 'ah-hah' for me came around 1985 in northern Garwhal, where I was interviewing women connected to the Chipko movement, a well-known women's movement. So I would ask the women, 'If something could change in your life to make it better, what would it be?' I was fishing for 'not having to walk five miles for firewood,' but over and over they would raise issues of alcohol abuse and domestic abuse."⁴⁹

The issue of violence against women was not squarely on the UN agenda until the Nairobi conference in 1985, at the end of the Decade for Women. Nairobi was the first step in securing agenda attention to the issue, for initiating the change in discursive positions of governments, and for strengthening linkages among women's groups working on the issue. Local activists at the NGO tribunal at the Nairobi conference formed the International Network against Violence against Women (INAVAW), a communication network for activists; still, the issue had yet to attract substantial international attention.⁵⁰

By 1987 sufficient interest and pressure had built, that the UN organized a meeting on violence in the family and commissioned a study, *Violence against Women in the Family*, the first comprehensive survey of research on the subject.⁵¹ From this point on there was growing attention to the issue, with an "explosion of organizing" in NGOs.⁵²

Key groups in the north included the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP), the Institute for Women, Law, and Development, and a Canadian-based group, MATCH International. All three groups worked with their own networks of counterpart organizations in the developing world. An international survey which MATCH had carried out to identify the primary concerns of women's organizations around the world indicated that "violence against women was the overwhelming priority of all groups surveyed."⁵³

Latin Americans were among the most active participants in the new global conversation. Activists set up the Southern Cone Network against

⁴⁹ Interview with Lori Heise, Washington, D.C., 27 September 1995.

⁵⁰ Chapman, "Violence against Women," 57-58.

⁵¹ UN, *Violence against Women in the Family* (New York: United Nations, 1989) Sales No. E.89.IV.5.

⁵² Fraser, "International Organizing."

⁵³ Helen Kinsella, "Transnational Networks on Violence against Women," unpublished paper, December 1994.

Domestic and Sexual Violence in 1989, and the Latin American and Caribbean Network against Domestic and Sexual Violence in 1990, with subregional coordinators in Peru, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Argentina, and Costa Rica.⁵⁴

Women's groups began to form regional networks in Asia as well. By the 1990s an Asia-wide movement had emerged on the issue of comfort women which involved groups in the Philippines, Okinawa, Indonesia, Korea, and Japan, and was formalized as the Asia Solidarity Network on the Forced Military Comfort Women Problem at a conference in 1992. One of the key goals of the network was "to enlist the cooperation of world human rights organizations such as the UN for the solution to the military comfort woman problem."⁵⁵

Partly as a result of these pressures from women's networks, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the beginning of normative development on the issue of violence against women in the UN and in the inter-American system. Women moved away from the well-institutionalized frame of discrimination, already embodied in the 1979 women's convention, toward the "rights" frame implicit in the language of violence against women. Even though rights issues were firmly embedded in the UN system, the human rights bodies and treaties paid little attention specifically to women's rights. Furthermore, the public-private divide within human rights discourse posed a significant problem for women's organizations that hoped to claim that domestic violence, dowry death, and female genital mutilation, though all carried out in the household, were nevertheless violations of women's rights for which states could and should be held responsible.

The international women's movement in the late 1980s took on this challenge with surprisingly successful results. The first step was to modify existing conventions to reflect the new concern. In response to network pressures, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which oversees the implementation of the 1979 convention, "read into" the convention an obligation to take steps in relation to violence against women (the convention itself does not explicitly refer to it).⁵⁶

In the context of this increasing global consciousness and mobilization around women's human rights, four phenomena that heightened attention and stimulated action around the issue of violence against women converged in the early 1990s: (1) preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights to be held in Vienna in 1993; (2) international news

⁵⁴ Red Feminista Latinamericana y del Caribe Contra La Violencia Doméstica y Sexual, *Boletín* 6 (November 1994): 1.

⁵⁵ Hicks, *Comfort Women*, p. 254.

⁵⁶ Andrew Byrnes, "Women, Feminism and International Human Rights Law: Methodological Myopia, Fundamental Flaws or Meaningful Marginalisation: Some Current Issues," mimeo, p. 32; UN CEDAW 11th sess., New York, 20–31 January 1992, General Recommendation no. 19.

coverage about the use of rape in wartime as an instrument of the ethnic cleansing campaign in the former Yugoslavia;⁵⁷ (3) proactive funding of work on the issue by the Ford Foundation and progressive European foundations, supported by the intermediary work of the Global Fund for Women; and (4) the crucial catalyst role played by the Global Campaign on Women's Human Rights organized by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University.

Development of the issue of violence against women resembles the pattern we see in other global networks. An emerging, dispersed network of groups begins to create global awareness about the issue. These efforts intensify and unite with the emergence of a "target" (in this case the World Conference on Human Rights, and later the Beijing conference) and a "condensation symbol" which "evoke[s] the emotions associated with the situation"⁵⁸ and provokes mass responses because it condenses threats or reassurances into one symbolic moment. In the case of the woman's movement the routine use of rape in the former Yugoslavia as a tool of ethnic cleansing condensed into a single set of events the fears and threats many women feel in their daily lives—that they will be the targets of special violence by virtue of their gender. Other events likewise heightened the symbolic power of the issue. In the United States the rape and beating of a woman jogging in Central Park dramatized the danger that women confronted in their daily lives. In India two cases focused public attention on the issue of violence against women: in the late 1970s police raped a young woman in custody, and the court found the police innocent because she was of "loose morals"; and in 1979 the deathbed statement of a young Delhi woman said her in-laws had killed her because her parents could not meet their dowry demands.⁵⁹ The "catalyst campaign" of the CWGL pulled together the awareness created by these symbolic events into a visible political campaign with concrete outcomes. This pattern—DISPERSED NETWORK→TARGET→CONDENSATION SYMBOL→CATALYST CAMPAIGN→STRONG NETWORK AND HEIGHTENED GLOBAL AWARENESS—is one that appears many times in the stories of successful networks.

FUNDING OF THE NETWORK

A handful of key foundations facilitated the growth of the network around women's human rights. After the UN International Women's

⁵⁷ Arvonne Fraser, "The Feminization of Human Rights," *Foreign Service Journal* 70:12 (December 1993): 31; interview with Dorothy Thomas (director, Women's Rights Project, Human Rights Watch), New York City, 20 October 1995.

⁵⁸ Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Kumar, "From Chipko to Sati," p. 67.

Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975, the Ford Foundation's board of trustees set aside reserve funds that field offices could claim for funding projects on women's issues, leading to significant Ford funding on the issue of violence against women in the late 1980s. Major U.S. foundation grants on projects on women's rights and violence against women increased from eleven grants totaling \$241,000 in 1988 to sixty-eight grants totaling \$3,247,800 in 1993. Ford Foundation grants account for almost one-half of the total dollars from large U.S. foundations on the issue during this period.⁶⁰ Exact amounts are not available for European foundations, but interviews indicate that many European semipublic and private foundations increased their funding on women's rights in the same period.

The increase in foundation funding in 1990, after the explosion of NGO activity in the late 1980s, suggests that foundations did not lead, but did greatly facilitate the growth of work on women's human rights in the period 1989-93. Some important funders of traditional human rights activity increased funding to women's rights and violence against women in the late 1980s. Sometimes these funding patterns can be traced to staff changes within foundations. The Shaler Adams Fund financed many of the groups that work on violence against women in large part because the director felt "passionately" about the issue of violence against women, and the MacArthur Foundation got involved when Carmen Barrosa joined the staff, bringing with her the premise that you can't deal with population issues unless you deal with women's rights.⁶¹ The overall trend suggests a broader pattern at work, where foundation staff respond to new and exciting issues in the NGO realm. Foundations were key supporters of the organizing efforts that made women's groups a powerful presence at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, as well as the Cairo Population Conference and the Beijing Women's Conference.

Foundation funding introduces significant asymmetries into networks. Almost all the money for network activities comes from foundations in the United States and Western Europe. These foundations have criteria for funding, such as "absorptive capacity" or "financial accountability," that may preclude participation of many NGOs based in the developing world. Few staff members in small NGOs have the time or experience to write demanding funding proposals to large foundations, and foundations are often unwilling to evaluate small seed or start-up grants that new NGOs need most. As a result, the bulk of foundation funding goes to the larger and more professional of the northern NGOs. Some "pass-

⁶⁰ Data calculated from Dialogue Database File #27, based on the *Foundation Grants Index 1988-93* (New York: Foundation Center).

⁶¹ Interview with Marsha Freeman, Minneapolis, Minn., 1 March 1996.

through" programs like the Global Fund for Women have been developed to deliver money to smaller NGOs in the developing world, but these account for only a portion of total funding. Grants to the Global Fund for Women from U.S. foundations accounted for one-third of the total grants on women's rights from major U.S. foundations, and slightly more than one-fifth of the total dollars.⁶²

One network activist from Nigeria complained that northern NGOs claim to represent southern groups when all groups are desperately seeking funding. She asked: "Why should we link hands? Local NGOs cannot get support for their work so we have to affiliate with international NGOs. Then we all hold up our hands to the 'gates of heaven.' When the international NGOs arrive at the gate, they drop us and do the talking on our behalf."⁶³

THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAME

The preparations for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights spurred organizing efforts. Women's rights did not figure in the advance preparatory documents for the conference, something that "got people angry and also gave them a target to be organized around."⁶⁴ Many activists saw the conference as a pulpit from which to gather support for their positions.

The preparations for this conference strengthened connections between the international human rights network and the women's network.⁶⁵ The result was the application of the "human rights methodology" to the cause of women's rights, and a fuller appreciation within mainstream human rights organizations of the problems with the public-private divide that had characterized their work. The human rights methodology has been summed up as "promoting change by reporting facts." Aimed at holding governments accountable for abuses, it requires that NGOs: "a) carefully document abuses; b) clearly demonstrate state accountability for those abuses under international law; c) develop a mechanism for effectively exposing documented abuse nationally and internationally."⁶⁶ These aims are the essence of the "information politics" strategy discussed in Chapter 1 that is one of the principal tools of networks.⁶⁷

⁶² Figures calculated from data from *Foundation Grants Index*.

⁶³ Joanna Kerr, "Strategies for Action," in *Ours by Right: Women's Rights as Human Rights*, ed. Joanna Kerr (London: Zed Books, 1993), p. 166.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dorothy Thomas.

⁶⁵ Fraser, "The Feminization of Human Rights," p. 33.

⁶⁶ Dorothy Q. Thomas, "Holding Governments Accountable by Public Pressure," in *Ours by Right*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Thus women's issues were incorporated into a "rights" frame, or master frame, supplementing the "discrimination" frame of the 1979 women's convention and the "development" frame in the women in development debate. But not everyone agrees that the human rights frame, model, and methodology are always appropriate for the women's network. Marsha Freeman argues that the human rights methodology works well where you can do fact-finding, but breaks down when you are talking about systematic oppression in patriarchal societies. "Women are rarely prisoners of conscience but they are always prisoners of culture."⁶⁸ Other activists, especially from the developing world, believe that the rights frame privileges certain political and civil rights to the exclusion of economic, social, or cultural rights, and that its excessive focus on individuals obscures structural inequalities among classes and states. Even some of its advocates consider the rights frame just a starting point for organizing networks that could take on more controversial issues such as social justice or sexuality.

When mainstream human rights organizations began to take on the issue of women and human rights in the late 1980s and early 1990s, most restricted themselves to instances where states, rather than private individuals, had perpetrated the abuses. Women activists, professional staff, and contributors pressured the mainstream groups to work on women's rights. Although women's rights projects are now permanent parts of the mainstream organizations, they are often marginalized, underfunded, and understaffed.

THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

The issue finally coalesced in the early 1990s around the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights coordinated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers. When the Center took up the issue of women's human rights, the ground had already been prepared by the activities of international networks discussed above and of local groups in many countries. But the work of CWGL played a crucial catalytic role, cementing the consciousness created by the existing groups into a single symbolic, visible campaign.

The Center chose the theme of women, violence, and human rights "because it crosses national, class, racial, age, and ethnic lines" and because working on it offers "unique opportunities to build bridges across cultures, to learn from similarities and differences, and to link strategies globally." In 1990 the new director of CWGL, Charlotte Bunch, wrote an

⁶⁸ Interview with Marsha Freeman, Minneapolis, Minn., 5 May 1994.

influential article which made the theoretical and practical linkages between violence against women and international human rights norms.⁶⁹ Bunch had first sensed at the Copenhagen Conference in 1980 that concerns about violence could bring women together. By 1983 she became convinced that human rights language offered a vehicle to approach the violence issue from a feminist perspective.⁷⁰ The article was short, powerful, and struck a responsive chord; it was reprinted, circulated widely, and had a profound influence on many individuals and groups.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership held an international planning meeting in May 1990, at which twenty-one women from diverse regions and projects reviewed ongoing work and offered suggestions for priorities.⁷¹ The preparation of the campaign offers an unusually clear example of global moral entrepreneurs consciously strategizing on how to frame issues in a way likely to attract the broadest possible global coalition. The planning session generated what Bunch later referred to as "network thinking" that informed the continuing work of the center.

CWGL held its first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991, with grassroots activists from twenty countries. Participants helped develop strategies for linking women's rights to human rights; these included the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" campaign of local actions from November 25 (International Day against Violence against Women, around which Latin American feminists had been organizing since 1981) to December 10 (Human Rights Day). The "16 days" campaign was carried out by groups in 25 countries in 1991, 50 countries in 1992, and 120 countries in 1993.⁷² Its very conception symbolically made the connection between violence against women and human rights. The campaign accommodated varied local activities that generally involved a combination of symbolic and information politics.⁷³ During the sixteen-day campaign in 1991, for example, a women's group in Fiji organized radio discussions, street theater, and film events. Korean women's organizations held a memorial service for victims of gender violence, and British women held a demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

In February 1993, CWGL held the International Women's Strategic Planning Meeting to bring together women from around the world to prepare for the Vienna Meeting. The Center for Women's Global Leader-

⁶⁹ Charlotte Bunch, "Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Revision of Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 12 (1990): 486-98.

⁷⁰ Interview with Charlotte Bunch.

⁷¹ Center for Women's Global Leadership, *Women, Violence, and Human Rights: 1991 Women's Leadership Institute Report* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 1992), p. 8-10.

⁷² Bunch, "Women's Rights as Human Rights," 146-47; Red Feminista Latinoamericana y Del Caribe Contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual, *Boletín* 6 (November 1994), p. 12.

⁷³ Interview with Charlotte Bunch.

ship joined the International Women's Tribunal Center (IWTC) and the International YWCA to initiate a worldwide petition "calling on the 1993 Conference to comprehensively address women's human rights at every level of the proceedings and demanding that gender violence be recognized as a violation of human rights requiring immediate action." The drive eventually gathered more than 300,000 signatures in 123 countries and twenty languages. Over eight hundred groups joined as cosponsors of the petition.⁷⁴ The drive continued after the Vienna conference, and by November 1994 had gathered more than 500,000 signatures and 2,000 cosponsoring groups.

In other efforts to prepare for the meeting, the Dutch cofinancing agency, NOVIB, convened a "reference group" of regional networks of women's groups from Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and North America to discuss strategies for both Vienna and the 1995 Beijing conference.⁷⁵ At the same time, the International Women's Rights Action Watch advised its members on how to get input into the Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing conferences and the regional preparatory conferences, either directly by sending recommendations to the groups preparing background documents, indirectly by participating in the regional preparatory conferences, or by gaining a seat on or influencing official delegations to the conferences.⁷⁶ Women's networking efforts got support from mainstream human rights organizations, especially Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, both of which had initiated major programs on women's rights in the late 1980s.

VIENNA AND BEIJING

The role these networks of women's organizations eventually played at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 is an example of a network's ability to draw attention to issues, set agendas, and influence the discursive positions of both states and international organizations. Most conference participants agree that the one major advance at Vienna in the international protection of human rights was integrating women's concerns into the human rights agenda, which was the direct result of lobbying by the women's rights network. The main demand of

⁷⁴ Elisabeth Friedman, "Women's Human Rights," pp. 18–35 in *Women's Rights, Human Rights*; and Charlotte Bunch, "Organizing for Women's Human Rights Globally," pp. 141–49 in *Ours by Right*. The list of international sponsoring groups to this petition includes the key groups within the network, and can be found in *Demanding Accountability*, pp. 122–23.

⁷⁵ Interview with Mario Weima (NOVIB), The Hague, Netherlands, 3 November 1993.

⁷⁶ "World Human Rights Conference in 1993," *The Women's Rights Action Watch* 5:4 (April 1992): 1.

the network petition campaign was that the UN "comprehensively address women's human rights at every level of its proceedings" and recognize gender violence as a human rights violation. The final document from Vienna explicitly recognized gender-based violence, including rape and sexual slavery, and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation as human rights issues. Governments at the Vienna conference urged the UN General Assembly to adopt a draft declaration on violence against women. One of the more specific accomplishments of the women's rights network was the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women and its causes, an idea endorsed by the Vienna conference and mandated by the Commission on Human Rights. In 1992 the U.S. State Department added the category of violence against women to its annual human rights reports.

These norm-setting activities on women's rights are mainly the result of the concerted work of the international network. More than 3,000 participants representing over 1,500 NGOs from all regions of the world participated in the Vienna conference, and 49 percent of the participants were women. Grants from European and North American governments and foundations provided travel and accommodation funds for many NGO participants, especially from the south.⁷⁷

The most dramatic network activity at the Vienna conference was that of the Tribunal for Women's Human Rights. Inspired by various people's tribunals, and by the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in 1976, the Vienna tribunal originated in the CWGL strategic planning meeting in 1993 and was carried out by an international coordinating committee. Thirty-three women from twenty-five countries testified before three judges and an audience about their own experiences with violence or as advocates for others. The Tribunal heard specific stories of what violence means for women's lives and how human rights instruments could begin to address it. The testimonies attracted the attention of conference delegates and the media.

Preparations for the Vienna conference increased the synergy of diverse national and international efforts on violence against women,⁷⁸ and the momentum continued to build afterwards as movement activists prepared for the population conference in Cairo and then the women's conference in Beijing. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy of Sri Lanka, presented her preliminary report to the Human Rights Commission in 1995, which summarized and highlighted much of the information that academics and women's rights activists had put forward over the pre-

⁷⁷ Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, "World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, Austria, 14–25 June 1993," *NGO Newsletter* 4 (July 1993): 1.

⁷⁸ Interview with Dorothy Thomas.

vious five years. On the controversial issues of family, culture, and religion the report was forceful: though a source of positive values, the family was a main site for violence against women and for socialization processes that can lead to its justification. Coomaraswamy argued that negative cultures and traditions involving violence against women "must be challenged and eliminated." Follow-up reports would examine the three major sites of violence against women—the family, the community, and the state—as well as specific issues.⁷⁹ The first of these issue reports, on military sexual slavery in Japan and Korea during the Second World War, provoked a hostile reaction from the Japanese government.⁸⁰

The initial program document for the Beijing conference was full of bracketed language indicating areas of disagreement. One activist remarked that such disagreement illustrated just how fragile the global consensus around women's human rights was going into the Beijing meeting.⁸¹ But the international women's movement had developed sophisticated strategies for lobbying governments. By monitoring the status of bracketed issues and suggesting language to government delegations, representatives of NGOs and networks had real input into the final document.⁸² In some cases government delegations incorporated language suggested by NGOs directly; in others governments consulted with NGOs to shape their positions on issues.⁸³ The final documents of Beijing and all UN world conferences are only policy statements; they are not binding on governments. Nevertheless, many activists believe that the debates at world conferences and the final documents produced are useful for raising the awareness of governments and for holding them accountable for their practices.

The downside of the network's intensive preparations for the Vienna and Beijing conferences is that many organizations were so focused on these that they neglected their own communities. The conferences stimulated global awareness and networking, but there was still a considerable distance between the new resolutions and changing actual practices.

⁷⁹ "Towards a New World Order in Human Rights: Analytical Report of the 51st Session of the Commission on Human Rights," *Human Rights Monitor* 28 (May 1995): 26.

⁸⁰ See Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Report on the Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan on the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime," UN Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 52d sess., 4 January 1996.

⁸¹ Interview with Dorothy Thomas.

⁸² Marissa Navarro, plenary session "Report from the 5th World Congress on the Status of Women, Beijing," 19th International Congress, Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 28 September 1995.

⁸³ Interview with Marsha Freeman.

OTHER ADVOCACY NETWORKS

It may be useful to contrast the work of the transnational network on women's rights with that of another advocacy network with which the women's rights activists clashed at the Cairo and Beijing conferences. A transnational network of pro-life or antiabortion activists has gathered strength in recent years; one list of international NGOs contains fifteen international right-to-life organizations.⁸⁴ Two key organizational players in the network are the International Right to Life Committee (IRLC), and Human Life International, which works with affiliate organizations in thirty-seven countries. Both groups sponsor regional and international gatherings of activists and try to influence international organizations as well as their own governments. Over forty countries sent delegations from IRLC affiliates to the Cairo population conference.⁸⁵ These NGOs found powerful allies in the Vatican and the governments of a number of Middle Eastern countries. The resulting antiabortion, profamily coalition attempted to block what it considered the Western feminist thrust at the Cairo meeting and later at Beijing as well.⁸⁶

The Vatican made several strategic discursive moves in their Cairo campaign. First, they framed their position in terms of universal human rights—not only the right of the unborn child, but also the right to have a large family. But the Vatican also invoked the counterclaim of cultural imperialism, charging that Westerners were attempting to impose immoral and inappropriate ideologies including "abortion on demand, sexual promiscuity, and [a] distorted notion of the family."⁸⁷ The Vatican also referred to another theme frequently stressed by third world countries and some transnational environmentalists: the problem is not overpopulation but overconsumption, particularly in the West.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, analysis of the media coverage of the Cairo meeting suggests that although the antiabortion activists captured rapt media attention and stalled negotiations over the wording of key phrases, they failed to impose their vision either on the overall work of the conference or on the final document. The antiabortion network succeeded in changing a

⁸⁴ *Encyclopedia of Associations: International Organizations 1995*, 29th edition, ed. Jacqueline Barrett (Washington, D.C.: Gale Research, 1995), p. 2972.

⁸⁵ "Pro-life Movement Worldwide," *Christianity Today*, 19 February 1990, p. 31; brief telephone interviews with staff of Human Life International and National Right to Life Committee, 30 January and 27 February 1995.

⁸⁶ This section draws heavily on Michael Riley, "Transnational Networks, the Media, and the Battle over Meaning: A Case Study in Cairo," unpublished paper, 9 November 1994.

⁸⁷ Cardinal John O'Connor, quoted in the *New York Times*, 15 June 1994, cited in Riley, "Transnational Networks," p. 20.

⁸⁸ *Washington Post*, 5 September 1994, cited in Riley, "Transnational Networks," p. 10.

reference to abortion in one paragraph of a 113-page plan, but it had little effect on the conference's other policy recommendations.⁸⁹

The explanation for the relative lack of influence of the antiabortion forces is not completely clear, but several factors stand out. First, although the Vatican overshadowed the NGO participants, its legitimacy at the Cairo and Beijing conferences was undermined by certain contradictions inherent in the situation. One of its critics questioned the authority of the Holy See, a "so-called country" with a "citizenry that excludes women and children . . . to attract the most attention in talking about public policy that deals with women and children."⁹⁰ Second, the Vatican's population control message at the Cairo meeting was that abstinence and rhythm were the only appropriate birth control methods. To a conference of experts, pragmatic politicians, and advocates, the impracticality of these proposals may have limited the Vatican's influence on the broader policy agenda. While other actors within the antiabortion network may have had a more pragmatic and positive population control agenda, their views were outweighed by the Vatican's.

Women's rights networks anticipated the approach that antiabortion forces would take and tried to develop a counterattack. They argued, for example, that the Vatican's position was merely a "smokescreen" for its efforts to limit women's equality and control over their own lives.⁹¹ Realizing the power of the religious message behind the antiabortion network, the Ford and Pew Foundations had funded and convened a gathering of religious thinkers in Belgium before the Cairo conference to prepare a religious response to the antiabortion network.⁹² Progressive foundations also provided extensive funding for a transnational religious pro-choice organization, Catholics for a Free Choice, especially for their Latin American programs.⁹³

The battle at Cairo was a skirmish in an ongoing struggle. Regardless of the weight of an actor like the Catholic church, the antiabortion network is clearly a transnational advocacy network fueled by powerful and emotionally charged principles. The antiabortion campaign fits our definition of one of the kinds of issues around which transnational networks can organize successfully—because it invokes images of bodily harm to vulnerable individuals. Only 40 percent of the world's population lives in countries where abortion is available on demand. The trend of most legislative reform on this issue, however, is toward liberalizing abortion

⁸⁹ Riley, "Transnational Networks," pp. 1–2, 25.

⁹⁰ Francis Kissling (president of the U.S.-based Catholics for a Free Choice), quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, 8 September 1994, cited in Riley, "Transnational Networks," p. 23.

⁹¹ Joan Dunlop (president of the International Women's Health Coalition), quoted in *New York Times*, 15 June 1994, cited in Riley, "Transnational Networks," p. 13.

⁹² Riley, "Transnational Networks," p. 13.

⁹³ Dialog Database File #27, *Foundation Grants Index 1988–1993*.

laws.⁹⁴ Pro-life groups have emerged in the wake of liberalization,⁹⁵ so antiabortion networks will no doubt increase in the future unless technological advances on the so-called "morning-after pill" effectively take the issue out of the public realm.

An illuminating example of an issue around which a strong women's network campaign has not developed is the issue of veiling or purdah. Purdah does not reflect a single cultural pattern but rather a core set of values about the importance of sheltering and separating women, which are expressed variously in different cultures. Its common elements are that women will wear veils covering their faces and bodies while outside their houses, and will not talk to men as a rule.⁹⁶ Justifications for purdah are similar to those given for footbinding among the Chinese: it is a sign of social standing and prestige and it emphasizes the primacy of the domestic realm in women's lives.⁹⁷

There is a significant movement of advocates of Muslim women's rights, including the Women Living under Muslim Laws network, formed in 1985–86, but these groups have not made veiling or purdah one of their core foci. Instead they focus on the rights to education and to own and inherit property, and on the reform of Muslim family law on issues such as divorce and custody of children.⁹⁸ Particularly interesting is that Muslim women recognize that a struggle over the interpretation of texts, especially the Qur'an, is central to their enterprise. The call for education for women, including religious higher education, is important because it would give women "credibility in interpreting the texts" in a way that is more favorable for the rights of women.⁹⁹ One important activity of groups such as Women Living under Muslim Laws has been to publish excerpts to allow women to start interpreting the Qur'an for themselves.¹⁰⁰

Veiling has not been the object of an external campaign in part because of its multiple and contested meanings for women themselves. For young women in Algeria, or in Iran under the Shah, veiling became an act of personal liberation and a statement of national sentiment. For many Islamic women the veil offers a form of dignity, protection, and

⁹⁴ Rebecca Cook and Bernard Dickens, "International Developments in Abortion Laws: 1977–1988," *American Journal of Public Health* 78:10 (1988): 1305–11.

⁹⁵ J. Christopher Soper, "Political Structures and Interest Group Activism: A Comparison of the British and American Pro-Life Movements," *Social Science Journal* 31:3 (1994): 322.

⁹⁶ Sylvia M. Hale, "Male Culture and Purdah for Women: The Social Construction of What Women Think Women Think," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 23:2, (1988): 280.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 279–80.

⁹⁸ "Women's Rights Gaining Attention within Islam," *New York Times*, 12 May 1996, p. A3.

⁹⁹ Boutheina Cheriet, as quoted in "Women's Rights," *New York Times*.

¹⁰⁰ Women Living under Muslim Laws, "Women in the Qur'an," from a meeting on Qur'anic interpretation by women, Karachi, 8–13 July 1990.

even empowerment. It offers "freedom from the oppression of an overbearing western world, which they see as morally degenerate; freedom from unwanted male advances and insults."¹⁰¹

In Chapter 1 we argue that issues involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals or issues about legal equality of opportunity are most likely to result in successful transnational networks. Veiling invokes neither of these concerns. Only in Iran and Afghanistan, where veiling is legally mandated, does the issue of legal equality of opportunity arise. Elsewhere it is a matter of personal choice within contexts of varying degrees of social coercion. Many of the strongest proponents of the veil are women themselves. In this sense it differs from apartheid, (with which some have compared it), which involved the legal separation of and discrimination against people based on race. Despite many interpretive disputes about issues relating to violence against women (especially female genital mutilation), a greater consensus has emerged around the idea that violence against women is unacceptable and should be ended, than has emerged in opposition to the veil.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NETWORK ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Let us now consider the effectiveness of the network activity around the issue of violence against women, using the five stages of effectiveness discussed in Chapter 1: (1) issue attention, agenda setting, and information generation; (2) discursive change, or establishing prescriptive status of norms; (3) procedural changes, such as treaty ratification or cooperation within international organizations; (4) changes in policies; and (5) influence on behavior of state and nonstate actors.

Before the campaign, the issue of violence against women was not on the policy agendas of international organizations. It was absent both from the conclusions of the 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City and from the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the Beijing conference, however, it was a centerpiece of the final document. In twenty years the issue had moved from no international attention to a high level of awareness.

To show that discursive change has occurred, or that a norm has gained prescriptive status, we need to show that actors "refer regularly to the rules both in characterizing their own behavior and in commenting on the behavior of others."¹⁰² An example of lack of prescriptive status on this issue

¹⁰¹ Lama Abu-Odeh, "Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Considering the Differences," *New England Law Review* 26 (1992): 1530; see also "The Kinder, Gentler Face of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Sunday Times* (Singapore), 17 January 1993.

¹⁰² Volker Rittberger, "Research on International Regimes in Germany," in *Regime Theory and International Relations*, ed. Volker Rittberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 10-11.

would be, for example, the statement by a parliamentarian during floor debates on wife battering in Papua New Guinea: "Wife beating is an accepted custom . . . we are wasting our time debating the issue"; or the response by the assistant to the public prosecutor in Peru when a woman reported being sexually molested by police officers while in custody: "Are you a virgin? If you are not a virgin, why do you complain? This is normal."¹⁰³

Important discursive change has occurred at both national and international levels, as reflected in the positions governments took condemning violence against women at the UN conferences at Nairobi, Vienna, and Beijing. By 1994 the UN General Assembly had adopted a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.

It could be that states have made rapid discursive change because they perceive the women's rights campaign as less threatening than the mainstream human rights campaigns that focus on human rights abuses carried out by the state. Yet many feminists believe the documents from these conferences and the UN and OAS declarations and conventions indeed give them leverage with their governments. They hope to engage in accountability politics, demanding that their governments uphold the positions they supported.

Some procedural change has occurred as well. One innovation of the OAS convention was its inclusion of stronger enforcement mechanisms than those of any existing convention on women's issues. This convention sets out a specific section on the duties of states to refrain from engaging in violence against women and to prevent, investigate and impose penalties for violence against women in the public and private sphere. The convention permits any person or group of persons, or any NGO legally recognized in one or more states of the OAS to lodge petitions with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights containing denunciations or complaints of violations of Article 7 of the convention (which lists the duties of the states) by a state party. As of September 1995, fifteen months after it was adopted, twelve member states have ratified the convention and another ten have signed but not yet ratified it.

Change in discursive positions, procedural innovations, and policies are also occurring at national levels. Bolivia, for example, participated actively in the elaboration of the convention, ratified it promptly, and proposed a National Plan for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women.¹⁰⁴ It set up a subsecretariat for gender issues as part of

¹⁰³ Heise et al., *Violence against Women*, p. iii.

¹⁰⁴ Ministerio de Desarrollo Humano, Secretaría Nacional de Asuntos Etnicos, de Género y Generacionales, Subsecretaría de Asuntos de Género, "Plan Nacional de Prevención y Erradicación de la Violencia Contra la Mujer," Documento de Trabajo, La Paz, Bolivia, October 1994.

the Ministry of Human Development, and opened the Office of Battered Women, which runs a shelter. The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, and Malaysia have criminalized domestic violence, and a number of others have similar laws under consideration. Some countries in Latin America have created women-only police stations to facilitate the reporting of domestic abuse. Other recent government initiatives against gender-based violence include national programs, committees, and/or special constitutional provisions to combat violence against women in Canada, Chile, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. At the same time, reform and training projects have been carried out in the United States, Zimbabwe, Costa Rica, and Malaysia to sensitize the judiciary and the police to issues of rape and violence against women. Most governments took these initiatives in the period 1988–92 after networks helped put the issue of violence against women on the international agenda.¹⁰⁵

THE INFORMATION PARADOX

One of the most important (and often overlooked) functions of networks is the generation of information, either through their own activities or through pressures on other institutions. This function sometimes creates a paradoxical situation for evaluating effectiveness. Prior to the campaign on violence against women very little data was available on the incidence of domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, or other kinds of gender-based violence. As a tool in the campaign, and as a by-product of it, networks began to help generate more reliable data. But by doing so they sometimes create the impression that the incidence of violence against women has increased, because there is now better reporting of the practice. When women or police stop viewing a practice like wife battering as ordinary behavior and begin seeing it as violence or domestic abuse, they begin reporting the practice in larger numbers. For example, in Brazil, in response to pressures from the woman's movement, special police stations for women were created beginning in 1985. "Everywhere they have been instituted, the number of complaints has grown, and they have made visible the physical, sexual, and emotional aggression women experience."¹⁰⁶

We might call it a success of the movement that such violence is more visible, and that complaints are up. Such a definition of "success," however, makes it difficult to document the effectiveness of networks. Ideally, effective networks should lead to a decline in the number of cases of vio-

lence against women. But because of the cycle of issue creation and issue attention as the necessary antecedents to discursive and behavior change, the problem may at least appear to get worse before it gets better. It is also possible that trends such as urbanization or situations such as economic stagnation may be leading to an actual increase in domestic violence. In the absence of accurate baseline studies, it will be very difficult for a number of years to say whether the practice is declining or increasing.¹⁰⁷ Still, the presence of the network appears to be the precondition for drawing enough attention to the issue so that accurate studies begin to be conducted.

CONCLUSIONS

With remarkable speed, violence against women emerged as a "common advocacy position" around which women's organizations in many parts of the world could agree and collaborate. Why did this way of framing the problem of women's inequality resonate across cultural divides so much more powerfully than either the Western feminist "discrimination" frame or the "women in development" frame?

We believe that part of the answer is intrinsic to the issue itself. Opposition to practices that result in bodily harm to vulnerable individuals are most likely to mobilize transnational networks, especially where the causal chain between the perpetrator and the victim is short. The preservation of human dignity, including protection from physical abuse, appears to be a transcultural value. Some political theorists have argued for essentialist understandings of a set of basic capacities that permit "human flourishing."¹⁰⁸ The most basic of these are life and bodily integrity.

Concern with bodily harm appears to avoid both the indifference resulting from cultural relativism and the arrogance of cultural imperialism. Participants from more than twenty different countries in the first Women's Leadership Institute on Women, Violence, and Human Rights struggled with developing international standards that could be applied across cultures. They were trying to avoid both "culture bashing" and the opposite tendency to accept all customs simply because they are grounded in culture. "The phrase 'practices that are physically harmful

¹⁰⁷ For example, a 1993 survey on interfamily violence in Costa Rica (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Swedish Agency for Research and Cooperation with Developing Countries) found that there were relatively few existing studies on the issue of violence against women in Costa Rica. Leonardo Mata, "Encuesta Nacional Sobre Violencia Intra-Familiar, Costa Rica Urbana, 1992" (San Jose: Asociación para la Investigación de la Salud y PRISMA Consultoría, 1993), p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20:2 (May 1992): 202–46.

¹⁰⁵ Heise et al., *Violence against Women*, pp. 31–33.

¹⁰⁶ Vera Soares et al., "Brazilian Feminism and Women's Movements: A Two-Way Street," in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, p. 317.

to women or girls' held some appeal as a first approximation of such a standard. The group added the qualifier 'physically' to the phrase widely used by the World Health Organization because a standard based on physical injury seemed easier to apply cross-culturally than notions of emotional or psychological harm.¹⁰⁹

The frame of violence against woman resonated with this transcultural consensus and innovated within it, thus exemplifying an important test of usefulness raised in Chapter 1. It helped women's groups attract new allies by situating them within the larger "master frames" or "metanarratives" of violence and rights. At the same time, this frame forced human rights groups to rethink their agendas. Women's rights activists, by appealing to the human rights discourse, succeeded in convincing publics of what Charles Tilly has suggested might be called an "adjacency principle." Because states have accepted their obligations to protect certain forms of human rights, if activists can convince publics and policymakers that women's rights are human rights, then they can make the case that states also have obligations to protect women from violence. What made the adjacency argument convincing was that both central human rights norms and violence against women involved severe physical harm. The issue gained attention because of the intrinsic power of the idea, but it was the activists themselves who created the category, and who, through their organizing, placed it on the international agenda.

The women's rights campaign is a story of self-conscious activists who are simultaneously principled and strategic. They are principled in their motivation for action: international feminist activists believed deeply in equality and rights for women everywhere. But they chose their organizing foci and campaign tactics strategically. They hoped to build alliances with women worldwide, knowing it would be difficult. The issue of violence against women came most forcefully from women's groups in the third world, but it found an echo among groups working on battered women in the north. Strategic networkers identified it as an issue that could build bridges internationally, and initiated global campaigns. Women's global interactions served as a microcosm of international resonance, and the issue's bridge-building potential was borne out in the broader arena. As in many transnational advocacy networks the primary motivation is normative, but the means used to carry out campaigns are strategic. Principled goals and strategic means sometimes come into conflict with each other, as in the ERA campaign in the United States, but as activists learn from past campaigns their strategies will develop accordingly.

The campaign on violence against women picked up on issues that were not initially the dominant strands in the mainstream national

women's movement in the United States and Europe in the 1970s. Concerns about rape and domestic abuse were more common in local women's groups, and among more radical feminists. The impact of transnational linkages on the U.S. feminist movement is similar to that of the transnational network in the British suffrage debate when it supported the radicals' demand for the vote for married as well as single women. International linkages appeared to amplify and extend the concerns of domestic groups in the United States, producing a more radical critique of the social order. In this sense the influence of transnational networks is important for the politics of domestic movements as well; as it selects those issues with transcultural resonance, it also may boost the legitimacy of marginalized opinions within a domestic movement.

Although the discrimination frame remains important in the debate over women's rights, the frame of violence against women has gained more prominence and led to more rapid institutional change. However closely related, they still represent significantly different ways to frame women's predicament, and the choice of frames influences how the issue resonates with different audiences and which institutional arenas women have access to for redress.

Critics sometimes argue that transnational networks are vehicles for imposing concerns of Western states, foundations, or NGOs upon social movements in the third world. The violence frame helped women overcome this often sterile north-south debate by creating a new category: when wife battering or rape in the United States, female genital mutilation in Africa, and dowry death in India were all classified as forms of violence against women, women could interpret these as common situations and seek similar root causes. In one form or another violence affects large numbers of women in all countries—developed and less developed. For example, the initial campaign on female genital mutilation (FGM) had become an explosive topic for the women's movement by the Copenhagen conference in 1980. Some women and men from countries where it was practiced argued that for Western feminists to criticize genital mutilation was inappropriate and even a form of "cultural imperialism" and racism. Other African women's organizations recognized the problems associated with the practice but wondered why it got so much more attention than other pressing problems of health and development. At the same time, some Western feminists worried that the uproar over FGM might come more from a certain lurid fascination with the practice rather than from a real concern with women's rights. When the opposition to FGM was resituated within a broader campaign against violence against women, it was defused and legitimized. At that point opposition to FGM was embraced by a wider number of groups, including especially groups of African women.

¹⁰⁹ CWGL, *Women, Violence, and Human Rights*, p. 44.

The violence against women issue sometimes plays a similar "bridging" role within national women's movements as well. In countries as diverse as Mexico, Turkey, and Namibia, activists have mobilized around violence against women across numerous divisions (politics, race, ethnicity, class, rural vs. urban).¹¹⁰ Still, it is important to remember that at the same time that a given frame facilitates some kinds of relationships, it may constrain others. Some women's rights activists now admit that they jumped into the rights frame without fully thinking through the consequences for their movement.¹¹¹ What the human rights discourse implied was that if women's organizations were going to use international and regional human rights bodies and machinery, they would have to enhance their knowledge of international law. This requires privileging lawyers and legal expertise in a way that the movement had not previously done nor desired to do. The wisdom of this approach is still being debated within the transnational network, and some activists are now trying to reframe violence against women as a health issue. They note that the human rights frame has been important for raising consciousness about the issue, but they fear that it won't be as effective for prevention and treatment. By framing violence against women as a health issue, especially with reference to health care practitioners and international health organizations, they hope to draw additional attention to the issue and help victims receive treatment.

Clearly, asymmetries continue to exist within the network, created by funding flows and the resulting strategic dominance of U.S. and European organizations and individuals. But the emergence of a common advocacy position around violence against women is the result of much more complicated interplay than is suggested by the "human rights is cultural imperialism" model. Like the new understandings of the diversity of relationships between human beings and nature that evolved within environmental networks during the 1980s, the commonalities discovered in advocacy around violence illustrate the important role that networks play as political spaces.

¹¹⁰ Dianne Hubbard and Colette Solomon, "The Many Faces of Feminism in Namibia," p. 180, and Marta Lamas et al., "Building Bridges: The Growth of Popular Feminism in Mexico," p. 343, in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*.

¹¹¹ Interview with Lori Heise.