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Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Movement Society

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Advocacy networks are one of the main vehicles for transnational activity around rights and social justice issues. Like activists in social movement organizations, activists in transnational advocacy networks seek to make the demands, claims, or rights of the less powerful win out over the purported interests of the more powerful. They do this by presenting issues in new ways (framing), seeking the most favorable arenas in which to fight their battles (paying attention to political opportunity structure), confounding expectations (disruption), and broadening the network's scope and density to maximize its access to necessary information (mobilizing social networks). Although they often include activists who are part of social movements, transnational advocacy networks are not themselves transnational "movements." If we define social movements as sustained, organized, contentious collective action around grievances or claims, these networks depart from the definition in various ways.¹ The clearest of these is in the mobilizational dimension: although advocacy networks may at times stimulate mobilized collective action, more commonly they are alternatives to mass action. This is especially true when the groups on whose behalf advocates organize are blocked from making demands at home—either because the rights violator is the state itself or because their voices are too weak to be heard domestically.

Transnational advocacy networks include those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.² They are *communicative structures* for political exchange. Network nodes (individuals and organizations) vary enormously in na-

ture, density of organization, resources, and domestic standing; their main collective currency is information. Besides nongovernmental actors, networks may include individual officeholders in states or multilateral organizations or even whole agencies.

The conceptual apparatus developed to study domestic social movements remains extremely valuable for understanding transnational advocacy networks. In this essay we first discuss the relevance of concepts of mobilizing structures, political opportunity structure, and framing for our discussion of transnational advocacy networks, and we consider why they travel so well. We then illustrate our points with examples drawn from transnational activity around women's human rights and environment. Finally, we will explain why we believe that much greater attention to the mechanisms of transnational diffusion and persuasion should precede attempts to characterize its results.

In distinguishing between social movements and advocacy networks, we are trying to separate an analysis of what activists in advocacy networks do from an account of the biographies of network members. We recognize that this is a purely heuristic exercise—in real life they are inseparable. As in social movements, activism in advocacy networks occurs “at the intersection of biography and history” in a special way—“as biographies and identities are modified in accordance with the newly perceived historical imperatives” (McAdam 1988, p. 11). Advocacy network activists often have a history of involvement with social movements; some social movement organizations are part of networks, and networks can provide crucial resources for movements. Or, conversely, movements and advocacy networks may compete for legitimacy in the same terrain. Some members of advocacy networks conceive of themselves as part of a transnational social movement; others most decidedly do not.

Core activists in advocacy networks most often work for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), in the United States, frequently called public interest groups or nonprofits. They are, in other words, career activists. These NGOs may be wholly devoted to international activities (e.g., human rights groups) or barely at all (most environmental organizations). Activists involved in an advocacy network may therefore be speaking for their organizations or may be using the organization as a platform on which to stand. In either case organizational affiliation matters, but the solidity of organizational linkages may affect the resources on which a network can draw.

A brief note on the subject of NGOs is in order. We use the term to refer to professionalized nonprofit organizations (with paid staff, fund-raising capabilities, and, except in highly repressive situations, juridical recognition). In developing countries, NGOs may be involved

in service provision or in advocacy and social promotion; many do both. Some are highly politicized, ranging from quasi-governmental fronts to vehicles for radical opposition; others are less so. The origin of the NGO sector varies widely from country to country. In advocacy networks NGOs involved tend most often to be run either by people with histories of activism in other areas (social movements, political parties) or by professionals (e.g., lawyers, ecologists, agronomists) seeking more engaged alternatives to traditional employment. Although NGOs can be involved in a wide range of activities, the ones we discuss in our work are devoted to social change issues.

Social Networks

Social movement theorists have repeatedly stressed the importance of social networks—concrete linkages that derive from locality, shared experience, kinship, and the like—as foundations on which movements are built. In recent explorations, Tarrow (1996a) questions whether or how the functional equivalent of these could be mobilized transnationally. But in fact, many social networks that nourish the creation of transnational advocacy networks and support their work reveal histories of personal relationships and shared experiences that parallel those found in domestic movements.

Just as domestic public interest groups often grow out of social movement struggles, many professional advocacy NGOs involved in transnational activity derive sustenance from earlier movements. Funding from private foundations and religious organizations has similarly played an important role. The Ford Foundation program in public interest law aided in the establishment of U.S. consumer and environmental groups (Berry 1993, pp. 30–33; Ingram and Mann 1989, p. 137); Ford, with NOVIB and other European funders also played a key role in financing human rights groups and Third World environmental advocacy. In developing countries, advocacy NGOs have appeared in response to the push of a particular movement or the pull of funding opportunities that coalesced with strongly held beliefs. During the recent democratic transitions in Latin America, activists involved in popular education or grassroots organizing established new institutes as “private organizations fulfilling public functions” in campaigns against violence and promoting rights of women, racial minorities, indigenous peoples, workers and the landless, the environment, human rights, and so forth (Fernandes 1994; Landim 1993). These professionalized groups, in turn, are linked through social networks forged in past struggles to other activists (Doimo 1995). In countries

lacking a history of freedom of association, mobilizing networks of trusted activists for particular campaigns is a more familiar mode of organization than establishing institutions.

Repressive regimes in Latin America (and elsewhere) have spurred the transnationalization of advocacy networks in two ways. Repression forces the externalization of domestic rights struggles. Unable to address issues like human rights, disappearances, and labor rights in situations in which the chief violators of rights were state institutions, activists formed alliances with their counterparts abroad. Together, they sought recourse either by approaching international institutions or by mobilizing foreign pressure to change the behavior of their governments.

Repression also generated diasporas. The thousands of Latin American political exiles who spent part of the 1970s in Europe and the United States inspired a generation of young people, already socialized into movement politics by the events of the late 1960s, with their stories. The exiles developed lasting friendships, political ties, and relations of trust. They also developed relationships with organizations in their host countries—universities, churches, foundations, and research institutes—that became key resources for them when they returned home. Some individuals gained international reputations. Thus, at the onset of democratization, former exiles played an important role in creating new NGOs in Latin America, securing funding, and acting as go-betweens for other initiatives. Some became active in new international NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International, Americas Watch) or other international organizations. Other kinds of international experience became more common as well. In the United States, networks appealed to a public socialized into more cosmopolitan worldviews through participation in student exchange programs, government programs like the Peace Corps, and lay missionary programs that sent thousands of young people to live and work in the developing world.

Social networks forged in earlier social or political struggles are not the only ones relevant to the formation of advocacy networks. Professional networks are also important, and increasingly so. Human rights and environmental lawyers, anthropologists, forensic and environmental scientists, health specialists, agronomists, all may become involved through professional activities in advocacy work. Besides NGO activists, crucial parts of advocacy networks are individuals in governmental agencies or intergovernmental organizations who share the activists' values and try to further their goals within organizations.

International conferences proliferated beginning in the 1970s, bringing activists from around the world together to discuss common concerns. Such meetings led to visits and exchanges. The precipitous fall

in airfares that made international travel accessible for more and more people was followed in the 1980s by a revolution in telecommunications. Fax and computer technology made almost instantaneous flows of information that could have taken weeks or never arrived at all. These transnational contacts built the social networks on which advocacy networks were founded; information was the currency by which they gained influence.

Although frequently undertaken by people with strong principled motivations, running effective organizations involves learned techniques and transferrable expertise. NGO or nonprofit management has increasingly become a profession. Transnational networking also involves skills taught by more experienced networkers to newer ones, just as more experienced movement organizers pass on the tools of campaigning to the next generation of campaigners.

Finally, networks have spawned networks (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Meyer and Whittier 1994). Connections forged in the mid-1970s among activists committed to working for a more equitable international economic order, campaigning around food and increasing corporate monopolies of plant germplasm in the International Coalition for Development Action, fed the organization of the International Baby Food Action Network, the Pesticides Action Network, and Health Action International. These in turn were important models for the creation of subsequent generations of health, environmental, and development action networks.

Political Opportunity Structure

Advocacy networks have been the most visible in situations in which domestic access of claimants is blocked or those making claims are too weak politically for their voices to be heard. In such instances, network activists have sought international or foreign venues in which to present claims, effectively transforming the power relationships involved by shifting the political context. Human rights activists brought the "dirty war" in Argentina to the U.S. Congress, producing significant reverberations in Buenos Aires; environmental activists took the problems of rubber tappers in the western Amazon to the multilateral development banks, producing (among other things) the creation of extractive reserves as a legal category.

We call the feedback that comes from this kind of venue shifting "the boomerang effect," and producing it is one of the most common strategic activities of advocacy networks. When the links between state and domestic actors are severed, it initiates the "boomerang": domes-

tic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside. Linkages are important for both sides: for the less powerful Third World actors, networks provide access, leverage, information, and material resources they could not expect to have on their own; for northern groups, they make credible the assertion that they are struggling with, and not only "for" their southern partners. Not surprisingly, such relationships can produce considerable tensions. Nonetheless, the practical activity they occasion helps to build the kinds of shared understandings that can form the basis for future work (Calhoun 1995a, pp. 173–76).

Transnational advocacy networks strategize by mapping relationships among a variety of domestic and international institutions. Their ability to get things done frequently depends on their ability to exert leverage over more powerful actors, mainly officials of states (their own or others) or international organizations. Environmentalists and indigenous rights activists lobby members of the U.S. Congress and Treasury Department to influence officials of the World Bank to put pressure on Brazil regarding indigenous land policy. NGO activists in Brasília provide information to mid-level European diplomats tasked with updating their governments on environmental issues, so that their governments, in turn, raise questions in international fora or with the Brazilian government. Mexican pro-democracy and human rights advocates brought Mexican electoral abuses before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. These moves involve strategic choices of activity predicated on an assessment of relations among governments and among national and international institutions. These "opportunities" are dynamic; the political opportunity structure relevant for this kind of activity has to do as much with political relations as with political institutions (Tarrow 1996b).³

Network members actively seek ways to bring issues to the public agenda, both by framing them in innovative ways and by seeking hospitable venues. Transnational networks normally involve a small number of activists from the organizations and institutions involved in a given campaign or advocacy role. The kinds of pressure and agenda politics in which advocacy networks engage rarely involve mass activism. Boycott strategies are a partial exception. Instead, network activists engage in what Baumgartner and Jones (1991), borrowing from law, call *venue shopping*. "This strategy relies less on mass mobilization and more on the dual strategy of the presentation of image and the search for a more receptive political venue" (p. 1050). Very occasionally, groups become such integral parts of policy networks that they spend very little effort trying to influence public opinion; this kind of

purely insider strategy is comparatively rare in transnational advocacy network politics (Walker 1991, p. 12).

In recent work in international relations theory, Thomas Risse-Kapfen (1995) stresses the importance of domestic structures in his account of transnational relations. Although crucial, domestic structures do not tell enough of the story. They may account for the more institutionalized and thus more durable aspects of opportunity—the existence of parliaments and Congressional committees, the formal relationship between the executive director of the World Bank and officials at the U.S. Treasury Department, the set of rules governing Mexican elections, the division of labor within diplomatic hierarchies, the policy networks within which information circulates about particular issues or areas. Knowledge of how these “structures” or “institutions” function is clearly an essential aspect of strategy. However, this misses the more dynamic, purely conjunctural, and sometimes even accidental aspects of political opportunity for which transnational networkers—like social movement activists—watch ceaselessly. Such elements might include the replacement of an agency head with another more sympathetic to a particular cause or having preexisting links with an advocacy network, the ability to make global warming and tropical deforestation seem more pressing because of drought and hot weather, recognition that plans for the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s voyages to the Americas opened space for indigenous rights agitation, and so forth.

Thus, beyond recognizing durable patterns of relationships and rules, activists in advocacy networks seek out agitational niches that may provide unexpected access for new ideas and arguments. But to gain access to these niches, they must frame the issue in question in a way that will capture the attention of decision makers.

Framing

Building cognitive frames is an essential component of networks’ political strategies. David Snow and his colleagues have called this strategic activity *frame alignment*—“by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 464–465; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992). *Frame resonance* concerns the relationship between a movement organization’s interpretive work and its ability to influence broader public understandings. Although initially new frames must be laboriously put into place, over time, “a given collective action frame becomes part of the political culture—which is to say,

part of the reservoir of symbols from which future movement entrepreneurs can choose" (Tarrow 1992, p. 197).

The ability of transnational advocacy networks to frame issues successfully is especially problematic, because unlike domestic social movements, different parts of advocacy networks need to appeal to belief systems, life worlds, and stories, myths, and folk tales in many different countries and cultures. This is even more problematic when networks link activists from highly industrialized and less developed countries. We argue that one of the kinds of issues most characteristic of issue networks—involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals—speaks to aspects of belief systems or life worlds that transcend a specific cultural or political context.

Why do these issues appear so prominently in international campaigns? Although the issue of bodily harm resonates with the liberal ideological traditions in the United States and Western Europe, it is also a component of basic ideas of human dignity. Not all cultures have beliefs about human rights (as individualistic, universal, and indivisible), but most do contain ideas of human dignity (Donnelly 1989, pp. 49–50). Of course, defining bodily harm, and claims about who is vulnerable or innocent, may be highly contested. Nevertheless, we argue that campaigns against practices involving bodily harm to populations perceived as vulnerable or innocent are most likely to be effective transnationally, especially where there is a short and clear causal chain or story assigning responsibility. Issues involving bodily harm also lend themselves to dramatic portrayal and personal testimony that are such an important part of network tactics. Finally, the stark immediacy of the power relationship implied by physical violence against vulnerable individuals relegates the kinds of power asymmetries that frequently divide networks to the background, making possible the development of shared practice that can contribute to a common frame.⁴

The adoption of new frames frequently involves the imagination of political entrepreneurs. The recent coupling of indigenous rights and environmental struggles is a good example of strategic reframing by *indigenista* activists, who found the environmental arena more receptive to their claims than human rights venues were. Although initially the argument that preserving forest peoples' livelihoods and conserving forests were inseparable provoked resistance from some conservationists, this frame very rapidly entered the accepted repertoire of environmentalist discourse (Keck 1995; Conklin and Graham 1995).

Information flows in advocacy networks provide not only hard data but also *testimony*—stories told by people whose lives have been af-

fect. Moreover, they interpret facts and testimony: activist groups frame issues simply, as right and wrong, because their purpose is to stimulate people to take action. An effective frame must show that a given state of affairs is neither natural nor accidental, identify the responsible party or parties, and propose credible solutions. This requires clear, powerful messages that appeal to shared principles and often have more impact on state policy than advice from technical experts. An important part of the political struggle over environmental issues, for example, is precisely the degree to which they are defined primarily as technical questions, subject to consideration by "qualified" experts, or as questions that are properly the concern of a much broader global constituency.

Networks call attention to issues or even "create issues" by using language that dramatizes and draws attention to their concerns. A good example is the recent campaign against the practice of female genital mutilation. Before 1976, the widespread practice of female circumcision in many African and a few Asian and Middle Eastern countries was known outside these regions mainly among medical experts and anthropologists (World Bank 1993, p. 50). A controversial campaign, initiated in 1974 by a network of women's and human rights organizations, began to draw attention to these issues.

One of the main ways the campaign drew attention to the issue was to "reframe" it by *renaming the problem*. Previously the practice was referred to by more technical and "neutral" terms like female circumcision, clitoridectomy, or infibulation. The campaign around female genital mutilation raised its salience, literally creating the issue as a matter of public international concern. By renaming the practice, the network broke the linkage with male circumcision (seen as a personal medical or cultural decision), implied a linkage with the more feared procedure—castration—and reframed the issue as one of violence against women. It thus resituated the problem as a human rights violation. The campaign generated action against female genital mutilation in many countries, including France and the United Kingdom; the United Nations studied the problem and made a series of recommendations for eradicating certain traditional practices (Kouba and Muasher 1985; Slack 1988; Sochart 1988; United Nations 1986).

The tropical forest issue is fraught with scientific uncertainty about forests' role in climate regulation, their regenerative capacity, and the value of undiscovered or untapped biological resources. By reframing the issue, calling attention to the impact of tropical forest destruction on particular populations, environmentalists have made a call for action independent of the scientific status of the issue. Human rights activists, baby food campaigners, and women's groups play a similar

role. By dramatizing the situations of the victims, they turn the cold facts into human stories, intended to motivate people to action. For example, the baby food campaign that began in the early 1970s relied heavily on public health studies that proved that improper bottle feeding contributed to infant malnutrition and mortality and that corporate sales promotion was leading to a decline in breast-feeding (Jelliffe and Jelliffe 1978; Ambulatory Pediatrics Association 1981). Network activists repackaged and interpreted this information in dramatic ways designed to promote action. The British development organization War on Want published a pamphlet entitled *The Baby Killers*, which the Swiss Third World Action Group translated into German and retitled *Nestlé Kills Babies*. Nestlé inadvertently gave activists a prominent public forum when it sued the Third World Action Group for defamation and libel. In 1977, U.S. campaigners initiated the boycott of Nestlé that made the corporation increasingly a focus of controversy and brought more attention and resources to the issue.

Information Politics

Information binds network members together and is essential for network effectiveness. The main activity of advocacy networks is collecting credible information and deploying it strategically at carefully selected sites. Many information exchanges are informal: telephone calls, E-mail and fax communications, and the circulation of small newsletters, pamphlets, and bulletins. They provide information that would not otherwise be available, from sources that might not otherwise be heard, and they must make this information comprehensible and useful to activists and publics who may be geographically and/or socially distant.

Networks strive to uncover and investigate problems and alert the press and policy makers. One activist described this as the "human rights methodology—promoting change by reporting facts" (Thomas 1993, p. 83; also Lumsdaine 1993, pp. 187–88, 211–13). To be credible, the information of networks must be reliable and well documented. To gain attention it must be timely and dramatic. Sometimes these multiple goals of information politics conflict. The notion of reporting facts does not fully capture the way networks strategically use information and testimony to frame issues.

Testimony by people affected by the abuse being protested serves two informational functions: besides making a problem real to distant publics, it attests to the credibility and reach of the network. Thus, when indigenous rights advocates sponsor international tours for in-

indigenous leaders and environmentalists do so for forest people's leaders, it shows their connection to the people on whose behalf they make claims. The indigenous and forest people's leaders in turn show their compatriots that their claims are recognized abroad.

Even as we highlight the importance of testimony, however, we have to recognize the mediations involved. The process by which testimony is discovered and presented normally involves several layers of prior translation. Transnational actors may identify what kinds of testimony would be valuable, then ask an NGO in the area to seek out people who could tell those stories. They may filter through expatriates, through traveling scholars like ourselves, and through the media. A huge gap often exists between the story's telling and its retelling—in sociocultural context, in instrumental meaning, and even in language. Successful frames become stylized; conflicts told as morality tales may lose the specificity of their local construction as local actors are cast in roles written for them elsewhere. Local people, in other words, normally lose control over their stories in a transnational campaign. How this process of mediation/translation occurs is a particularly interesting facet of network politics.

Nongovernmental networks link testimonial information with technical and statistical information. Without the individual cases, activists cannot motivate people to seek change policies. Increasingly, international campaigns by networks take this two-level approach to information. In the 1980s even Greenpeace, which initially had eschewed rigorous research in favor of splashy media events, began to pay more attention to getting the facts right. While testimony does not avoid the need to manage technical information, it helps to make the need for action more real for ordinary citizens.

A dense web of north-south exchange, aided by computer and fax communication, means that governments can no longer monopolize information flows as they could a mere half-decade ago. These technologies have had an enormous impact on moving information to and from Third World countries, where mail service has often been both slow and precarious. We should note, however, that this gives special advantages to organizations that have access to such technologies. A good example of the new informational role of networks occurred when U.S. environmentalists pressured President George Bush to raise gold miners' ongoing invasions of the Yanomami indigenous reserve when Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello was in Washington in 1991. Collor believed that he had squelched protest over the Yanomami question by creating major media events out of the dynamiting of airstrips used by gold miners, and a decade ago he would have succeeded. However, since network members had current information

faxed from Brazil, they could counter his claims with evidence that miners had rebuilt the airstrips and were still invading the Yanomami area.

The central role of information in all these issues helps to explain the drive to create networks. Information in these issue areas is both essential and dispersed. Nongovernmental actors depend on their access to information to help make them legitimate players. Contact with like-minded groups at home and abroad provides access to information necessary to their work, broadens their legitimacy, and helps to mobilize information around particular policy targets. Most nongovernmental organizations cannot afford to maintain staff people in a variety of countries. In exceptional cases, they send staff members on investigation missions, but this is not practical for keeping informed on routine developments. Forging links with local organizations allows groups to receive and monitor information from many countries at a low cost. Local groups, in turn, depend on international contacts to get their information out and help to protect them in their work.

Finally, the media plays an essential role in network information politics. To reach a broader audience, networks strive to attract press attention. Sympathetic journalists may become part of the network, but more often network activists cultivate a reputation for credibility with the press and package their information in a timely and dramatic way to draw press attention.

Campaigns

Advocacy networks organize around campaigns. For our purposes, campaigns are sets of strategically linked activities in which members of a diffuse principled network develop explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles toward a common goal (and generally against a common target). In a campaign, core (usually experienced) network actors mobilize others, initiating the tasks of structural integration and cultural negotiation among the groups in the network. Just as in domestic campaigns, they connect groups to each other, seek out resources, propose and prepare activities, and do public relations. They must also consciously seek to develop a "common frame of meaning," a task complicated by cultural diversity within transnational networks (Gerhards and Rucht 1992, pp. 558–59). Activist groups have long used the language of campaigning to talk about focused, strategically planned efforts. International campaigns by environmental and conservation organizations, for example, traditionally had a topical focus (saving furry animals, whales, tropical forests), while human rights

campaigns had either a country (the Argentina campaign) or issue focus (the campaign against torture) (Schiotz 1983, pp. 120-22).

Focusing on campaigns provides a window on transnational relations as an arena of struggles in ways that a focus on networks themselves or on the institutions they try to affect does not. This focus highlights *relationships*—connections among network actors and between activists and their allies and opponents. We can identify the kinds of *resources* that make a campaign possible—information, leadership, symbolic or material capital (McCarthy and Zald 1977). And we must consider the kinds of *institutional structures*—both domestic and international—that encourage or impede particular kinds of transnational activism. Finally, a focus on campaigning lets us explore negotiation of meaning while we look at the evolution of tactics; we can recognize that cultural differences, different conceptions of the stakes in a campaign, and resource inequalities among network actors exist, while we identify critical roles that different actors fill. Campaigns are processes of issue construction constrained by the action context in which they are to be carried out: activists identify a problem, specify a cause, and propose a solution, all with an eye toward producing procedural, substantive, and normative change in their area of concern. In networked campaigns, this process of “strategic portrayal” (Stone 1988, p. 6) must work for the different actors in the network and for target audiences.

The process we describe is interactive: nongovernmental organizations pressure for international events, such as declarations, treaties, theme years, theme decades, and conferences, which in turn serve as arenas for network formation. In the baby food campaign, network pressures motivated U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy to hold hearings on the issue in 1978. Kennedy in turn called on WHO/UNICEF to hold consultative meetings on the issue of the marketing of infant formula, a move favored by industry representatives, who believed that moving to an international venue would help to depoliticize the issue. Industry's expectations were frustrated when these meetings included not only representatives from governments, international organizations, industry, and academia but also NGO and consumer activists. This was the first time NGO activists were full participants alongside industry and government representatives in a United Nations consultation. At the conclusion of the 1979 consultative meeting, NGO activists present formed the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), which eventually brought together a hundred groups working in sixty-five countries on issues of infant nutrition. Network members played a crucial role in helping draft and lobbying government to vote for the WHO/UNICEF Code of Marketing for Breast-milk Substitutes, an

innovative effort to regulate transnational business activities in the interest of infant health (Sikkink 1986).

The Global Campaign on Violence against Women

The role of transnational networks of women's groups organizing on violence against women shows how a network can draw attention to issues, set agendas, and influence the discursive positions of states and international organizations. Violence against women is an issue that arrived late and dramatically for the international women's movement, departing from the classic issues of suffrage, equality, and discrimination around which women have long mobilized (Fraser 1994). The 1979 Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women does not even mention rape, domestic or sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, dowry death, or any other instance of violence against women. Nonetheless, by the mid-1990s violence against women had become the most important women's issue on the international agenda and the most dynamic new international human rights concern. At the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, violence against women became a "centerpiece of the platform" (Mufson 1995). The story of its emergence as an international issue shows how two previously separate transnational networks around human rights and women's rights began to converge and transform each other. The network built around violence against women drew on preexisting communications networks that were receptive to the "new ideas of the incipient movement" (Freeman 1973, p. 32). But not all new ideas "resonate" with the submerged networks that must adopt them. This one was especially striking in that it resonated across significant cultural and experiential barriers.

The idea of "violence against women" as a global issue did not initially exist. Instead, activists campaigned independently around different 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 people could think of these practices as the "same" in some basic way. Once created, the category allowed activists trying to build a transnational campaign to attract allies and bridge cultural differences. It focused on a most basic common denominator—the belief in the importance of the protection

of the bodily integrity of women and girls—at the core of understandings of human dignity in many cultures.

The seeds of an international network on violence against women grew out of a series of meetings at the 1980 UN Women's Conference in Copenhagen. Activist-scholar Charlotte Bunch (1996) had organized a set of panels on international feminist networking at the nongovernmental forum held alongside the official conference. Later she recalled:

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. . . . And they felt there were common issues. I personally had never worked on the issue of violence against women before that. . . . 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. . . . 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.

Bunch's comment captures the potential of networking. Networks are usually not one-way streets by which activists in one country "help" victims in another. More often they are part of an interactive process by which people in faraway places communicate and exchange beliefs, information, testimony, strategy, and sometimes services. In the process of exchange, they may change each other.

One of the earliest attempts to realize that possibility came in 1981 at the first feminist *Encuentro* for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1981. Participants proposed to call November 25 the International Day to End Violence against Women, in honor of three sisters from the Dominican Republic who were murdered by security forces of the Trujillo dictatorship on that day in 1960 (Anonymous 1988). Many Latin American women's organizations began to stage annual events to commemorate this day. Likewise, women's groups in Asia, Europe, and the United States began to mobilize around issues of violence against women in their regions.

As global consciousness and mobilization around women's human

rights grew, four phenomena came together to heighten attention and stimulate action around the issue in the early 1990s: (1) preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights to be held in Vienna in 1993; (2) international news stories that appeared just before the conference, describing the use of rape as an instrument of the ethnic cleansing campaign in the former Yugoslavia (Fraser 1993; Thomas 1995); (3) proactive funding of the issue by the Ford Foundation and other progressive European and U.S. foundations; 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.

The absence of any discussion of women's rights in the preparatory documents for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights stimulated and focused women's organizing efforts. Conference preparations in the early 1990s solidified relations between the international human rights and women's networks. Women's networks increasingly applied the "human rights methodology" of careful factual documentation to abuses of women's rights, and mainstream human rights organizations gained greater appreciation of women's rights (Fraser 1993, p. 33; Thomas 1993, p. 83).

The issue coalesced in the early 1990s around the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights coordinated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University. When the CWGL took up the issue, the groundwork had already been laid by the activities of existing international networks around the issue. Nevertheless, the CWGL played a crucial catalytic role, pulling diverse strands into a single symbolic and visible campaign.

Under its new director, Charlotte Bunch, the center chose to organize around the theme of "women, violence, and human rights," hoping to realize the issue's potential to bridge cultures that Bunch had sensed in Copenhagen in 1980. The preparation for the campaign offers a remarkably clear example of global moral entrepreneurs consciously strategizing on how to frame issues in a way likely to attract the broadest possible global coalition. Participants in an international planning meeting in 1990 and in Women's Global Leadership Institutes helped to develop strategies for linking women's rights to human rights. The two central tactics included the "Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence" campaign to call attention to violence against women through local actions from November 25 (International Day to End Violence against Women) to December 10 (Human Rights Day). By 1993 the Sixteen Days Campaign was being carried out by groups in 120 countries (Bunch 1990, pp. 146-47; Red Feminista 1994, p. 12). It symbolically linked two formerly separate themes—violence against women and human rights—into a single unified theme. In a

second tactic, the Center for Women's Global Leadership joined the International Women's Tribunal Center (IWTC) and the International YWCA to initiate a highly successful worldwide petition drive "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" (Friedman 1994; Bunch 1993, p. 146; CWGL 1992).

During this period, foundations played a key role in funding groups to do work on women's human rights. Major U.S. foundation grants on projects on women's rights and violence against women increased from less than \$250,000 in 1988 to more than \$3,000,000 in 1993. Ford Foundation grants account for almost one-half of the total dollar value of grants during this period. Exact amounts are not available for European foundations, but interviews suggest that many increased their funding on women's rights in the same period. The important increase in funding came in 1990, after the explosion of NGO activity in the late 1980s. It suggests that foundations did not lead but did greatly help the growth of work on women's human rights in the period 1989–1993 (*Foundation Grants Index*).

The developmental path 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 dispersed efforts intensify and unite with the emergence of a "target" (here the World Conference on Human Rights, and later the Beijing Conference) and a condensation symbol. "Condensation symbols evoke the emotions associated with the situation" (Edelman 1995, p. 6). They provoke mass responses because they condense threats or reassurances into one symbolic moment. The routine use of rape in the former Yugoslavia as a tool of ethnic cleansing spotlighted the problem of violence against women. It 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. In the wake of these symbolic events, the "catalyst campaign" of the CWGL pulled the awareness thus created together 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 often in the stories of successful networks.

Network pressures helped to integrate women's concerns into the human rights field, drew global attention to the issue of violence against women, and contributed to institutional innovations, like the naming of a new UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Also, many governments have adopted new procedures that give

women more arenas in which to seek recourse. It remains to be seen what impact the campaign can have on changing practices and ensuring accountability for the abuse of women's rights.

Advocacy Networks and Social Movements

Campaigns undertaken by transnational advocacy networks may include a variety of social movement activity along with the politics of information and pressure more typical of network activity. There is an evident synergy between the locally specific social movements around violence against women and the work of transnational network activists that helped to place female sexual slavery, wife battery, dowry death, and female genital mutilation in the same cognitive frame. There are also cases of frame conflict between social movement groups and particular advocacy networks with which they may be temporarily associated. We can see this quite clearly if we reexamine one of the cases used in Gerhards and Rucht's fine 1992 article on mesomobilization in two West German protest campaigns in the light of an analysis of transnational advocacy networks.

The 1988 Berlin demonstrations during the annual meeting of the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]) were the objects of a deliberate process of bringing together various available networks (*mesomobilization*) around a unifying frame (which the authors identify as anti-imperialism). The mobilization was highly successful: a week of events, including a march where eighty thousand demonstrators gathered, garnering extensive media coverage. However, this highly successful local organizing effort must also be seen in the light of two international campaigns in which the Berlin events were embedded and to which they contributed. One was a campaign around Third World debt, in which the IMF's structural adjustment programs were a prime target of the critique. The other was the environmentalists' campaign around the impact of multilateral bank lending on the environment and indigenous peoples.

Spearheaded in the United Kingdom by Oxfam and War on Want, the U.K. debt crisis network formed in the mid-1980s, as did a U.S. Debt Crisis Network made up of New York- and Washington-based NGOs. Over the next few years countless European development and environmental organizations became involved; in 1987-88, several Dutch NGOs (including NOVIB) sponsored an effort to form an international coordinating body, FONDAD (Forum on Debt and Development), and also a network of Latin American groups (Donnelly, forthcoming; Potter 1988). This network has foundered and been re-

vived many times, and it has suffered more than many from long-term divisions between reformist and radical members; nonetheless, the time of the Berlin events in 1988 was arguably a high point in its early development.

The Berlin events were in fact the third annual set of parallel events to the meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions, though they involved much more public mobilization than did the first two. The World Bank and IMF meet annually, but only every third year do they meet outside Washington, D.C., where they are headquartered. (The first parallel meeting and demonstration were held in Washington in 1986). The tone of the Washington meetings tends to be different from those held abroad, with more attention to information sharing and relations among the NGOs present than to public protest. This is due in part to the less radical profile of the Washington NGOs active in the multilateral bank campaign network, most of which are actively involved in lobbying government and multilateral organization officials.

The different campaigning contexts within which social movement activists and advocacy network members situated the 1988 Berlin events thus influenced their interpretations of events. While anti-imperialism may effectively have provided a mobilizational frame for the demonstrations in Berlin, for many foreign participants the international linkages expressed in the various meetings and events, as well as the demonstrations, were the main lesson. The Brazilian *Tempo e Presença*, the magazine of the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI), headlined its extensive coverage of Berlin "New Internationalism" (Ramalho 1989). Although these approaches were certainly not contradictory, they nonetheless implied different goals and different standards by which to measure success or failure.

Conclusion

What we have described is a process of connection involving exchanges of information, shared ideas, conflict over and negotiation of meanings, and coordinating strategies to motivate action. As advocacy networks multiply, they become an increasingly routinized part of activists' strategic repertoire. Although few networks could be called institutions, the practice of networking has quickly begun to be institutionalized, in the sense that Meyer and Tarrow use the term in the introduction to this volume.

Networks demarcate a nonterritorial space of regularized interaction. As a nonterritorial space, however, the extension of these interactions is unbounded. Core network participants are activists, whose

identities are bound up in shared practices of contention and resistance that resonate across borders; the resources to which they have access, however, continue to depend largely on their location. Still, within the loosely defined identities and roles of network participants, there is room for ambiguity, contingency, and even opportunism. Strange bed-fellows abound.

We do not believe that the transnational advocacy networks we have studied are accurately understood as transnational social movements. Why not call them transnational social movements? After all, we began this essay by demonstrating the utility of social movement theorists' insights about social networks, political opportunity structure, and framing for the discussion of advocacy networks. Furthermore, our stress on activists and campaigns is consistent with the editors' suggestion that the model of social movement organization is no longer the mass organization of European social democracy but a more fluid and contingent one in which professionalized activists mobilize occasional publics around specific campaigns.

In some situations involving transnational advocacy networks, this might be a reasonable characterization. Clearly, participants in transnational advocacy networks include social movements; it seems equally clear, however, that the networks are not, themselves, social movements. They are not social movement organizations; they are too ephemeral and mobile for that and represent ideas, not constituencies. Where there is significant overlap between principled beliefs and particular bounded constituencies, as with Islamic brotherhoods or militia movements, for example, it may be more appropriate to talk about transnational social movements. However, these groups differ from advocacy networks almost by definition; they require clandestinity, whereas the fundamental currency of the latter is information.

The strategic deployment of information may involve mobilization; more often it involves lobbying, targeting key elites and feeding useful material to well-placed insiders. For activists who cut their teeth in a tradition of intransigent resistance, this kind of activity is hard to take; the *choice* not to mobilize makes little sense if one imagines that the key resource of movements is their capacity for disruption. Because the key resource of networks is information, the choice not to mobilize may be perfectly consistent with the desire to present information and ideas in the most compelling fashion and get it into the hands of politically influential actors.

Not mobilization, perhaps, but "events" serve as points of reference for networks. This has been especially true for women's networks, where international conferences punctuate the standard chronologies of their development. The relationship between such "events," the di-

rectionality of information flows in networks, the kinds of strategies imagined, and the types of shared understandings (or misunderstandings) generated by network practices are all areas in which we need further research if we are to grasp the sources and impact of these new linking processes.

We also believe that looking at the constitution and functioning of transnational advocacy networks without seeing links to state actors as central, rather than incidental components, would frequently miss the point. Networks often include actors within states and frequently target the bulk of their activities at states or intergovernmental organizations. Power and money are not the media for all network interactions, but they have not vanished from the story; efforts to leverage more powerful actors are central to network strategies, and network dynamics and effectiveness are at least partly dependent on resource flows.

Nonetheless, whatever we call it, something is happening here. We believe that the current stage of theorizing is better served by examining linkage processes than by trying to draw the outlines of the new patterns these linkages may be producing. The processes we describe and explain in this chapter may contribute eventually to the evolution of transnational social movements, or even to a global civil society. But what we have seen so far is much more fragile, contingent, and contested. However much we are seeing the increasing interpenetration of domestic and international politics, transposing sets of categories from one to the other seems unlikely to make sense of the simultaneity of both. As networks and other kinds of communicative practices multiply, difficulty in determining what is significant and what is noise in international society is likely to persist for a very long time. Still, unless we listen to the full cacophony, we are unlikely to make sense of it at all.

Notes

1. This is similar to their definition by Sidney Tarrow (1996a, pp. 13–14) as “sustained sequences of collective action mounted by organized collective actors in interaction with elites, authorities and other actors in the name of their claims or the claims of those they represent.”

2. This discussion of transnational advocacy networks draws heavily on our book, *Activists Beyond Borders*, though this chapter takes steps beyond the book in relating our argument more explicitly to debates in social movement theory.

3. By political opportunity structure, Tarrow (1996b, p. 54) means “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements. . . . The most salient kinds of signals are four: the open-

ing up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites" (*italics in original*).

4. We concur with Craig Calhoun (1995, p. 173) in his stress on practice as a basis for the development of shared understandings. He writes, "Indeed, both the translation and metadiscourse models [of shared understandings] are too static, too inattentive to the extent to which our mutual understandings are in fact constructed through processes of historical change, and too exclusively individualistic. . . . [We need to grasp] the historical and political processes by which people come to shared understandings without translations or metadis-courses."