FRAMING ISSUES AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES: THE UN, NGOS AND THE CASES OF GENDER VIOLENCE AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND HEALTH

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On December 22, 1993, the UN General Assembly in New York adopted with unanimous consent the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women, condemning gender violence both within the private and the public sphere as a violation of human rights. Only a year later on September 13, 1994, at the UN Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) governmental delegates adopted with consensus a Platform of Action on Population that placed women's reproductive rights and health instead of demographic targets at the center in the management of population growth. Each of these events presented the culmination of a political process begun two decades earlier and that was initiated and driven primarily by the activities of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Both events provide an excellent opportunity to study why, how, and under what conditions NGOs are able to fashion shared understandings and influence the interests of states: While both cases exhibit similar outcomes with women’s organizations succeeding in placing women’s issues front and center on UN mainstream agendas, they reveal important differences regarding the process: Reproductive rights and health in contrast to violence against women was much more contested. Women’s organizations encountered tremendous opposition not only from conservative forces but also from within their own ranks. What accounted nevertheless for the success?

Conventional approaches of international relations offer only incomplete answers to the influence of NGOs on states’ interests. Presuming that the behavior of states is determined by material interests and perceiving non-state actors as epiphenomenal, Realists would attribute the inclusion of women’s issues on the UN’s agenda to changes in the distribution of power following the end of the Cold War instead to the pressure of NGOs. More specifically, with the decline of the Soviet Union, Realists would posit that with the U.S. as the only superpower remaining it is now in an unprecedented position to pursue its interests in democratization, individual rights and freedom, and the liberalization of markets in an unconstrained fashion (e.g. Mearsheimer 1994/95; or Waltz 1990). While the United States has indeed been a vocal proponent of women’s rights, Realists cannot explain, without referring to non-realist phenomena, why the U.S. perceived these issues in its interests in first place. By defining power exclusively in material terms, i.e. with economic and military strength, Realists ignore the power to (re-)define issues and to (de-)legitimize certain practices, and by doing so the role of NGOs.

Acknowledging the role of transnational actors more readily, liberal theories of international relations would locate the sources of women’s recent successes at the domestic
level (e.g. Moravcsik 1993; or Putnam 1988). Proponents of this school of thought would attribute the inclusion of these two issues on the UN agenda to domestic institutions and to the pressure exerted by domestic groups. Again, while I find some support for this thesis, liberal theories of international relations have two shortcomings. First, treating the domestic level as the site of interest formation, these theories ignore how states’ interests can be developed through their interactions with other actors, in this case NGOs, at the international level (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 4). Second, liberal theories define institutions too narrowly, equating it with the formal political apparatus only (see for example, Risse 1995). What liberal theorists neglect is the normative component of institutions (Barnett 1999: 8), i.e. the norms, values, symbols, and traditions, and the ways in which they privilege certain actors and actions while marginalizing others or provide an arsenal for collective action.

Recent constructivist approaches, on the contrary, emphasize the normative and ideational components of structures and the ways in which they constitute the identities and interests of actors through intersubjective processes and socialization (e.g. Adler 1991, 1997; Katzenstein 1996; Wendt 1992, 1994). These approaches would posit that the success of international women’s organizations is due to the expanding role of human rights norms which guide states’ interests. As insightful and fruitful as constructivist approaches might seem, their focus on social structures and norms comes at the expense of the actors who have helped to create them (Checkel 1998: 325). As Michael Barnett points out: “constructivism has tended to operate with an oversocialized view of actors, treating them as near bearer of structures and, at the extreme, as cultural dupes“ (Barnett 1999: 7). What constructivism cannot account for is agency, that is the way in which actors can be strategic and actively use normative structures to their advantage. In this particular case, it does not capture the ways in which international women’s organizations strategically and consciously defined the issues of violence against women and reproductive rights and health.

In light of the shortcomings of existing approaches of international relations, this study aims for a better understanding of the conditions under which NGOs can be more or less successful in defining states’ interests by drawing on various elements of the social movement literature. This literature is appealing for mainly two reasons: First, like social movements at the domestic level so are NGOs at the international level representatives of civil society and carriers of new ideas (Smith 1997; Smith et al. 1994). Second, the literature on social movements has already integrated social construction and intersubjectivity into its research program, taking account of the interaction of agents and structures, on the one hand, and that
of material and immaterial forces, on the other. In a nutshell I argue that international women’s organizations were able to mobilize state support for their initially contentious issues by framing them in a strategic fashion thereby exploiting the political opportunity structure in which they were embedded and the mobilizing structures they had available. The paper is divided into three parts: Part I discusses briefly the importance of agenda-setting for NGOs and introduces the concepts of framing, political opportunity structure, and mobilizing structures. Part II explores the explanatory power of these three concepts by tracing the historical campaign of NGOs with respect to gender violence and reproductive rights and health. It draws on in-depth interviews, UN documents, publications of international women’s organizations, and newspapers. Part III of this paper concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications for the study of international organization.

NGOs and UN Agenda-Setting: Framing, Political Opportunities, and Mobilizing Structures

Over the course of the past decade NGOs have been increasingly active at the UN trying to mobilize international state support for their concerns (Willetts 1996, 2000; Weiss and Gordenker 1995; Clark 1995; Clark et al. 1998; Warkentin and Mingst 2000). One place where their presence has been particularly evident is the specialized conferences which took place during the early 1990s beginning with the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and ending with the Fifth World Conference on Women in Peking in 1995. The choice of the UN as “venue” (Baumgartner and Jones 1991) is not surprising. In light of its decentralized structure, the UN offers NGOs many access points and thus a viable alternative to the domestic policy arena. Further, international organizations, such as the UN, are sites of identity and interest formation and offer material and symbolic resources on which NGOs can draw (see Adler 1997: 336). Lastly, agenda-setting in organizations such as the UN can be a crucial first “veto point” for NGOs in the decision-making process and a “primary tool for securing and extending power” (Light 1982: 2; see also Livingston 1992), because political skill and persuasion are as important as are material resources.

The agenda is equated here with that of the UN General Assembly. Compared to those of other UN bodies, it is broad enough to be responsive to issues NGOs are concerned with (e.g. human rights, the environment, or development). Further, while not enforceable, the agendas of the UN General Assembly have what Ines Claude (1966) refers to as a “collective
legitimation function”. Adopted with consensus, they signify to states what actions are considered appropriate within the international arena and which are perceived as inadequate. As such these agendas can be used by NGOs to exert pressure on their own states to follow through on their international commitments or to shame them by pointing out the gap between national practices and international agreements (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12-13). Finally, unlike the agencies of specialized agencies or secretariats, those of the General Assembly leave a paper trail. They are manifested in resolutions, declarations, or conventions.

The agenda-setting process within the U.N. can be compared to those in so-called “organized anarchies” (Cohen et al. 1972) which are characterized by a multiplicity of actors with “problematic preferences” in the sense that they are unclear or contradictory and developed through trial and error; “unclear technologies” with actors having only a rudimentary understanding of the whole process because activities in one part of the organization are not coherently coupled to activities in others; and “fluid participation” with participants moving in and out of the decision-making process. In these “organized anarchies” the agenda-setting process can be captured with the “garbage-can model” developed by Michael Cohen et al. (Cohen et al. 1972; see also Kingdon 1984). The garbage can model likens decisions to choose agenda items to bins into which participants dump problems and solutions in various forms and different speeds of collection and removal. Three relatively independent streams provide the contents of the garbage cans: (1) the problem stream in which unacceptable situations are identified; (2) the policy stream which contains solutions generated not necessarily in response to a particular problem and ranging from education to redistribution of resources; and (3) the politics stream carrying motivations and justifications for political action. Agendas come about when these various streams are coupled (Kingdon 1984). Problems, solutions, and justifications, however, do not simply exist out there. As Guy Peter notes in his analysis of EU agenda-setting: “policy issues do not define themselves but rather are shaped through complex social and political processes” (Peters 1994: 18). They are the result of strategic framing processes.

NGOs attempt to gain governmental attention for their concerns through so-called “framing processes,” which “render[ ] events or occurrences meaningful,” and “function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al. 1986: 464, 1988; Rein and Schön 1991; Goffman 1974). Thus a frame “provides a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined and problematic situation can be made sense of and acted
upon (Rein and Schön 1991: 263). It offers a “mental map” but also determines practices and behaviors (Surel 2000: 498) by defining problems, offering solutions to resolve them, and by providing motives or rationales for why states should engage in political action in a particular issue area.\(^2\)

Seeking to explain the influence of NGOs in defining states’ interests, the concept of framing exhibits two characteristics which are crucial for our analysis. First, it captures what both liberal theories and constructivist approaches neglect. It takes account of the way in which “actors deliberately package and frame policy ideas to convince each other as well as the general public that certain policy proposals constitute acceptable solutions to pressing problems” (Campbell 1998: 381). Second, framing processes draw attention to the conflicts over meanings that lie at the heart in the definition of new issues and interests. As Schön and Rein point out: The struggles “over the naming and framing of a policy situation are symbolic contests over the social meaning of an issue domain, where meaning implies not only what is at issue but what is to be done” (Schön and Rein 1994: 29). Problems, solutions, and political motives introduced by NGOs frequently contradict and compete with the frames of other actors, and sometimes provoke counter-framing efforts. The challenge for NGOs then becomes to “align” or “extend” their issue frame in such a way that it “resonates” with the experiences and the empirical context of the targeted audience (Snow et al. 1986). If they succeed, a collective action frame has the potential of “becom[ing] part of the political culture—which is to say, part of the reservoir of symbols from which future movement entrepreneurs can choose”—it becomes a “master frame” (Tarrow 1992: 197; Snow and Benford 1992). The degree to which this is apt to happen is contingent on the strategic use of the political opportunity structure in which NGOs are embedded and the mobilizing structures they themselves have at their disposal.

The political opportunity structure captures the institutional context which imposes obstacles on and provides opportunities for framing processes (McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1994; Smith et al. 1997). It provides an arsenal for relatively resource-poor actors to pursue normative change at the international level. Structure is broadly defined here. It encompasses both the formal institutional setting, emphasized by liberal approaches, i.e. the political space,

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\(^1\) For an application to the international level see e.g. Gordenker et al. 1995 or Richardson (1996).

\(^2\) While the concept of framing has been applied to social movements in the domestic realm initially (e.g. Snow et al. 1986, 1988; Tarrow 1994; McAdam et al. 1996), recent studies have applied the concept to transantional networks and movements (e.g. Smith et al. 1997; or Keck and Sikkink 1998) and to policy-making within the EU.
in which NGOs aim to gain acceptance for their ideas, as well as the cultural and normative components which constructivist approaches consider important and which determine what frames are considered legitimate. The political opportunity structure affects framing processes in several ways: (1) it functions as “gatekeeper” (Mazey 2000) privileging certain frames and marginalizing others; (2) it provides a “tool kit” for action by providing material and symbolic resources for social actors (Swidler 1986); and (3) it creates “windows of opportunities” for action as a result of its dynamic nature.

Applied to the international level and the framing efforts of NGOs, three elements of the political opportunity structure appear particularly pertinent: First, the framing efforts of NGOs are contingent on gaining access to the institutions they seek to influence (Tarrow 1994). “Symbolic events” play an important role in this respect (Kingdon 1984; Keck and Sikkink 1998) because they can “recast or challenge prevailing definitions of the situation, thus changing perceptions of costs and benefits of policies and programs and the perception of injustice of the status quo” (Mayer Zald 1996: 268). These can be political crisis such as the end of the Cold War which placed existing policies into question or international meetings such as UN conferences which provide opportunities for lobbying and interaction. Access is vital because it enhances the chances for winning influential allies, the second component of the political opportunity structure. Influential allies can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they possess resources that these non-state actors themselves lack. Three types of actors appear particularly crucial: individual states (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Warkentin and Mingst 2000), UN offices such as specialized agencies and secretariats (Willetts 1996), and the international media (see Tarrow 1994; McAdam et al. 1996; Klandermans and Goslinga 1996; Gitlin 1980). In addition to access and influential allies, changes in political alignments and conflicts can create opportunities for NGOs. While changes in political alignments may bring into power actors whose perspectives and beliefs are more in alignment with the frames advanced by NGOs (Tarrow 1994), conflicts can be fortuitous for NGOs because their frames might serve as bridge for the divided parties (Surel 2000:501).

In sum, changes in political alignments or conflict, influential allies and access comprise the political opportunity structure in which NGOs are embedded. They facilitate their framing efforts, determine which frames are perceived as legitimate, and provide tools for influence. However, political opportunities by themselves are not sufficient for mobilizing broad-based

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(e.g. Mazey and Richardson 1997; Mazey 1998; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). For a critical analysis of the role of cognitive and normative frames in policy-making see Yves Surel (2000).
support of initially contested ideas. NGOs need to actively seize and use them to their advantage. This in turn is contingent on their own mobilizing structures.

*Mobilizing structures* are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam et al. 1996: 3). They are the networks of NGOs. Mobilizing structures impute NGOs with agency. Through them they are capable of engaging in practices aimed at changing the normative context in which they are embedded. More specifically, because of them NGOs can translate opportunities in their institutional context into frames that are considered legitimate, i.e. they can be strategic. Mobilizing structures are the source of ideas and mobilizing energy. They provide NGOs not only with people power but also with information and knowledge (Smith et al. 1997: 60). Three elements of the mobilizing structure appear particularly relevant for NGOs in the UN context. First, *organizational entrepreneurs* are generally considered an asset (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998) because they are individuals or organizations who care enough about an issue to absorb the initial costs of mobilizing, bring with them a wealth of organizing experiences, are well-connected, and have frequently vision and charisma (see for example Oliver and Marwell 1992: 252). Moreover, organizational entrepreneurs are instrumental in the mobilization of a *heterogeneous international constituency* (Smith et al. 1997:62), the second mobilizing resource of NGOs. Comprised of people from diverse cultural and political backgrounds, a constituency can enhance the legitimacy of a frame by (1) making it more difficult for opponents to discredit it as representing only the interests of certain groups, (2) enabling NGOs to exert pressure at different levels with different strategies and tactics, hence, increasing their “repertoire of contention” (Tilly 1984), and (3) by having so-called “radical flank effects”, that is, with the presence of members with more radical perspectives strengthening the bargaining power of ones with more moderate views vis-a-vis established institutions (McAdam et al. 1996: 14). Finally, *experts* are part of the mobilizing structure that NGOs have at their disposal. Among them are directly affected individuals who can provide testimonies based on their experiences (see Keck and Sikkink 1998), “epistemic communities” consisting of scientists and academics who draw on technical and scientific

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3 The Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in New York constitutes one example of an organizational entrepreneur. To enhance women’s effectiveness at the UN specialized conferences, the organization invented the so-called women’s caucuses where representatives of women’s NGOs would meet every morning prior to the official governmental meetings to discuss, based on the negotiation results of the previous day, lobbying strategies and tactics for the following day (Chen 1996: 144-45).
knowledge (Haas 1991), and insiders who possess procedural knowledge in the sense that they are familiar with institutional rules and procedures (Kingdon 1984).

In summary, the frames employed by NGOs are reflections of both their own mobilizing structures and the political opportunity structure in which they are embedded. The political opportunity structure provides NGOs with a window to mobilize support for their problems, solutions, and justifications; it offers clues of how do define them; and it provides resources for action. Interacting with the political opportunity structure are mobilizing resources. Defined as networks, they reflect the beliefs and aspirations of NGOs, are the seeds of framing efforts, and enable NGOs to take advantage of institutional and international changes. The way in which the dynamic interaction between the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structure gives rise to different frames is illustrated in Figure 1 and explored in detail in the following empirical case studies of gender violence and reproductive rights and health.

Figure 1

The Case of Violence Against Women
While the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women only in the 1990s, women’s organizing around the issue began two decades earlier. It can be divided into three phases: (1) Beginning with the 1970s, when a small group of women organized an international tribunal bringing together women from over forty countries who identified all man-made forms of oppression as a problem and as violence against women; (2) continuing with the 1980s, when the UN Branch for the Advancement of Women conducted an expert-group meeting on domestic violence with special emphasis on women which called for the intervention of the criminal justice system and the prosecution of the perpetrator as a solution; and (3) concluding with the World Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993, when women’s organizations mobilized governmental support for the international recognition of all forms of violence against women as a human rights issue.

Defining the Problem: The International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, Brussels 1976

Between March 4-8 in 1976 a small group of primarily Northern women entrepreneurs organized the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels, Belgium, bringing together over two thousand women from over forty countries. It had been planned as a counteraction to the first UN Women’s Conference in Mexico-City in 1975 of which the organizers were very distrustful. The Tribunal highlights the power of testimonial knowledge. The personal statements by victims of male violence contributed to solidarity among women and the condemnation of all man-made forms of oppression as a crime against women. However, it also draws attention to the conflictual nature of initial framing processes. The participants of the Tribunal perceived the organizers as part of the existing power structure and felt excluded from the decision-making process.

According to Louis Kriesberg (1997), NGOs can never be wholly outside or above those structured inequalities and may pursue policies or reproduce leadership patterns that relatively disadvantaged persons view as supporting or reinforcing the inequalities (18). This was also the case at the Tribunal. For example, the organizers relied on national contacts and organizing committees for the selection of crimes as well as women who would testify about them. While intended to ensure broad participation, these committees reproduced inequalities at the international level. The majority of participants of the Tribunal came primarily from

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4 Among the participating countries were Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, England, France, West Germany, Greece, Guinea, Holland, Iceland, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Mozambique, the Netherlands Antilles, Norway, Philipinnes, Portugal, Puerto.
Northern countries where women’s movements were thriving and where financial resources were more readily available. In contrast, women from Southern countries constituted the minority and in many cases did not come personally because of fear of repercussions (Russell and Van de Ven 1976). Similarly, the moderators who had been appointed by the organizers with the objective to guarantee equal representation at the Tribunal were rejected by the participants since they had not been officially elected and reinforced in their eyes patriarchal structures. Conflict ensued also over the testimonies. While the organizers wanted to give victims the opportunity to talk about the violence they had experienced, many participants viewed them as a waste of time and “not feminist” since they were not questioning political, social and ideological structures (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 253).

The divisions between the organizers and the participants were reinforced through the location of the Tribunal. Brussels privileged the participation of Northern women. Moreover, the Palais de Congrès, where the Tribunal took place and which had been made available by the Belgian Cultural Minister at no charge, was not conducive to consensus-building because of its hierarchical architecture symbolizing man-made structures. For example, because of the way the microphones were wired in the main meeting hall, organizers had to sit on the stage what made them feel like “being stuck up here in a God-like position,” and reinforced the impression among the participants of them being “power-hungry, authoritarian, ... the enemy” (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 263). Subject to controversy was also the participation of the press. The decision of the organizers to exclude male journalists from the official proceedings based on past experiences and to give female journalists a chance to cover the event, triggered outrage from many newspapers, which called it a violation of “the ethic of the journalistic profession” and “the right to free access”. Even female journalists were divided. While some felt that the organizer’s decision would hurt their careers, others felt it was adequate given that men would in any way not report what women wanted (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 245-248). The opposition from the participants as well as the media prompted the organizers to change their strategy.

Changes in alignments can bring into power groups whose frames are more consistent with those of the targets (Tarrow 1994). Shortly after the beginning of the Tribunal, the organizers left their place on the stage and turned the proceedings over to the participants. Even though the transfer of power resulted in anarchy with those determining the course of Rico, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, the U.S.A., Vietnam and Yemen (Russell and Van de Ven 1976).
the meeting who were the most organized and the newly appointed moderators engaging in practices that would have been previously subject to conflict, the program was more accepted. In contrast to the organizers who had been known only to a few and had not been approved, the new moderators enjoyed legitimacy in the eyes of the participants (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 266). The shift in power had also substantive consequences. It resulted in the emergence of a “we-feeling” among the participants manifested in solidarity statements. In these statements women condemned all forms of man-made oppression as violence against women and a crime against humanity. This did not mean that differences had disappeared. Instead, women felt their alignment was a strategic necessity to fight against a system that wanted to keep them apart (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 200). Solidarity was also exhibited in a series of action frames. In particular, the Tribunal inspired the creation of international networks such as the International Feminist Network, coordinated by ISIS International as well as action at the national level (e.g. women in Latin America and Asia began to work on issues ranging from rape, to dowry-death, and comfort women) (Schuler 1992). In all of these frames women placed emphasis on independence and autonomy because they distrusted state institutions and considered it therefore necessary to construct alternative ones (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 198). The solidarity exhibited among women is surprising giving the divisions among women exhibited at the beginning of the Tribunal.

The Tribunal highlights the way in which personal testimonies can be a catalysts for collective actions (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 19; see also Price 1999). First, the testimonies of women made apparent that violence against women may differ across regions and countries but that it is a universal phenomenon. Second, in their testimonies, women assigned blame to patriarchal structures and traditions for the existence of the problem. Lastly, the testimonies were dramatic. As one participants put it: “Women at the Tribunal where deeply involved, sometimes shouting in anger, sometimes clapping and booing, or crying, or being intensely quiet” (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 267). The testimonies by themselves, however, were not sufficient. The solidarity among women was reinforced by other institutional events, such as the already mentioned UN Women’s Conference in Mexico-City in 1975, which was highly political due to the divisions between Northern and Southern countries (Allan et al. 1995; Stienstra 1994) and in the eyes of the participants “a hypocritical and token gesture” that “would achieve little beyond window dressing” and “result in a co-optation of women’s energy” (Russell and Van de Ven 1976: 218). Moreover, the solidarity among women was also solidified by further extra-institutional events, such as the or the Global Feminist
Workshop to Organize Against Traffic in Women in Rotterdam in 1983, where thirty-four women from twenty-four countries gathered for a week to document and strategize about problems of female sexual slavery (Bunch 1995), or the Third World Forum on Women, Law and Development (WLD) in 1986, which sparked efforts to clarify strategies related to gender violence (Schuler 1992).

In sum, the Tribunal provided a forum for women to come together to exchange personal experiences and through them overcome structural and ideological differences that had previously divided them. The Tribunal became, as I will show later, a master frame for women’s organizations. It enhanced international awareness about gender violence and helped women’s activist to gain institutional allies. However, these alignments had their price: women’s activists lost somewhat control over how their issue was defined.

The Solution: Expert-Group Meetings on Domestic Violence, 1986

From 8-12 December 1986, the Branch for the Advancement of Women together with the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch of the Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs organized an expert-group meeting in Vienna on Violence in the Family with Special Emphasis on Women. Catalyst for this meeting had been the third UN Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985, where in response to the pressure of women’s organizations, domestic violence had been identified as a priority issue in the coming decade requiring special attention (see Joachim 1999: 146-148; Keck and Sikkink 1998: 179). Invited to the meeting had been twenty-four experts, including lawyers, criminologists, and sociologists from around the world. While the meeting was intended to provide for the first time systematic evidence about both the causes as well as the consequences of domestic violence and to develop solutions to counteract the problem, the experts had initially difficulties of gaining access to information about the problem.

One reason for the lack of information regarding domestic violence had been prevailing assumptions about the family. In many countries the family was perceived as “private” and “sacred realm” which needed to be protected from outside interference (UN 1989: 49). It was viewed as an institution based on love and security and as such suited for raising children or the development of its members (UN 1989: 14). This normative frame, contributed to the “invisibility” and secrecy of domestic violence (UN 1986:16). Moreover, it constrained access to information about the victims.
According to Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink “the process by which testimony is discovered and presented normally involves several layers of prior translation” so that there is frequently a gap between the story’s original telling and its retelling (Keck and Sikkink 1986: 19). This was also the case with the experiences of the victims of domestic violence. Even though violence was a universal problem, the stereotypical image of the victim was that of a poor, working-class woman (UN 1989: 17). Contributing to this skewed image was a translation process involving scientists who used conventional definitions of couples, thus excluding, for example, unmarried women from their studies; victims themselves who remained silent because of fear of further violence and shame; and the responsible authorities such as the police or hospitals who did not keep adequate records (UN 1989: 17-18).

The prevailing frame regarding the family and the assumptions about the victim had contributed, on the one hand, to the widely shared view that domestic violence was a “societal ill” and that the victim as well as the perpetrator were abnormal or sick. On the other, these assumptions, gave rise to therapeutic or welfare frames, which emphasized mediation between the perpetrator and the victim as appropriate solutions with the aim of maintaining and restoring the family unit (UN 1989: 51). In the eyes of the experts both the problem as well as the solution frame were inadequate. While the former, did not explain the extent of domestic violence, the latter provided insufficient protection to the victims (UN 1989: 30).

To gain attention for their issues, NGOs use language that dramatizes (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 19-20). Contrary to the traditional problem frame, but concurrent with the participants of the Tribunal in Brussels in 1976, experts considered violence against women in the family as a crime that needed to be treated as any other crime, justifying their decision in a normative fashion. Violence was inconsistent with the human dignity of the victim who had a right to protection and to remain with her children within her home. The criminalization of the problem opened up new venues for the amelioration of the problem: in this case access to the criminal justice system. Experts considered intervention through the courts or the police in the event of domestic violence desirable for two reasons. First, the justice system had symbolic significance. Through the prosecution of the perpetrator society communicated that violence was unacceptable and made the offender personally responsible (UN 1989: 52). Second, it had real consequences. Studies showed that the probability of repetitious violence decreased (UN 1986: 17). The solution frame proposed by the experts constituted a radical departure from the traditional therapy and welfare frame. Nevertheless, it was widely accepted within the UN. How can this change be explained?
In contrast to the Tribunal, where testimonial knowledge had been crucial, technical knowledge played an important role in framing an acceptable solution. The case studies prepared by the experts provided for the first time statistics and systematic evidence, especially from developing countries and countries in transition. They revealed that violence had long-lasting effects for women and their children as well as society at large (UN 1989). In addition, to the technical knowledge the status of its carriers was also critical. As scientists, the experts enjoyed institutional legitimacy. Moreover, they were a representative group. The experts came from twenty-four countries with the majority from developing countries whose traveling had been made possible in large by the Dutch government (UN 1989: 5). The increased access to information with respect to women particularly in developing countries reflected a shift in political alignments in the UN away from Northern dominance and towards the increased influence of Southern countries. The Third UN Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 was symbolic in this regard where women in development (WID) was a major theme of discussion and a series of surveys and studies were conducted in preparation for the conference (see Patton 1995; Fraser 1987).

In sum, technical knowledge provided by social scientist helped to legitimize the intervention of the criminal justice system as a response to domestic violence within the UN and overcome the problem of access posed by the privacy of the family. The expert group meeting stimulated extensive research on the subject. Following the meeting, the UN commissioned the first comprehensive survey on *Violence Against Women in the Family*. However, the involvement of social scientists and the support of UN secretariats also had drawbacks. In contrast to the Tribunal in Brussels in 1976, where violence against women had been framed rather broadly, violence in the context of the expert group meeting was confined to the domestic realm, prompting women’s organizations to reassert control over the issue.

*The Politicization: The World Human Rights Conference, Vienna 1993*

The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in the summer of 1993 provided an excellent opportunity for women’s organizations to politicize violence against women and mobilize government support. Shortly after the Commission on Human Rights in the Geneva, the conference secretariat, announced that such a conference was to be held, the Center of Women’s Global Leadership in Newbrunswick, New Jersey, under the directorship of Charlotte Bunch, emerged as an entrepreneur. It organized a series of so-called leadership
institutes, bringing together approximately twenty women from different regions of the world who had been selected based on their leadership at the national level on the issue of gender violence (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 1992). While the women brought with them experience in organizing, they nevertheless had difficulties in gaining access to the human rights agenda.

One reason for the difficulties in gaining access was the prevailing division between women’s rights and human rights inside the UN. This division was justified in human rights circles with the argument that violence against women, in contrast to human rights, occurs exclusively in the domestic arena and is perpetrated by private individuals (Romany 1994; Sullivan 1995; Ashworth 1999). It was symbolically reinforced through the location of the respective UN agencies. While the Human Rights Commission is headquartered in Geneva, the Commission on the Status of Women is located in New York.

NGOs engage increasingly in a dual strategy to legitimize their issues by employing technical and testimonial knowledge simultaneously (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 21). This was also the case for violence against women. On the one hand, Charlotte Bunch published an article entitled “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” in the prestigious journal Human Rights Quarterly in 1990, providing a scientifically-grounded explanation for why women’s rights were human rights (Bunch 1990). On the other, women’s organizations organized the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, with symbolic activities ranging from vigils to tribunals throughout the world linking the 15th November, the day of gender violence with the 10th of December the Human Rights Day (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 1993). The linkage between technical and testimonial knowledge helped women’s NGOs to win influential allies.

The media is an important ally and prompts NGOs to frame their issues in specific and dramatic ways (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 22; Tarrow 1994: 26). In contrast to the Tribunal in Brussels in 1976, where participants still had been divided over the media’s involvement, women’s organizations in the 1990s were convinced about the necessity to engage it. To gain attention, women’s organization conducted an 18-hour Tribunal at the conference. In addition to such symbolic actions, they actively sought to influence the reporting by hiring their own media consortium, selecting their own “experts” to give interviews, and by providing media kits. While dramatic and symbolic actions can be conducive to mobilize the international media, they might be counterproductive to win institutional allies. As Gamson and Meyer
note: “The media rewards novelty, polemic, and confrontation, but institutional politics prizes predictability, moderation, and compromise” (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 288).

In institutions, the support of like-minded groups can enhance the legitimacy of a contested frame because they provide access to information necessary to the work of NGOs (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 21). In the case of violence against women, human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch began to establish Women’s Human Rights Programs which investigated women’s rights violations perpetrated or condoned by state agents. These organizations exemplified the political nature of gender violence and enhanced the issue’s legitimacy among states because they were known for credible and reliable information.

Governmental support is vital for NGOs and their framing processes. At the World Conference on Human Rights, the U.S. assumed leadership on the issue. Several forces contributed to its support. First, domestic women’s groups had placed the issue on the domestic agenda since the 1970s (see Heise and Roberts Chapman 1992). Second, the issue fit the world views and beliefs of the Clinton administration which was generally supportive of women’s issues. Shortly after have been in office, President Clinton called for the documentation of women’s rights violations in the human rights reports compiled by State Department. Third, the U.S. support for the issue reflected a also a change in the international environment.

Symbolic events are effective for NGOs because they take place in concert with others (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 22). The campaign against gender violence did not take place in a vacuum. The end of the Cold War unleashed a series of events that were beneficial to women’s organizations. In particular, security within the UN was redefined: contrary to the security of the state, the well-being and rights of individuals were increasingly emphasized, a frame that was more commensurable with that of women’s rights (Bunch 1995). Further, ethnic conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, or Rwanda and the associated mass raping demonstrated the political nature of gender violence, because women were raped by soldiers and policemen to perpetuate a certain race (Carrillo 1995). Finally, the end of the Cold brought with it changes in political alignments, reducing the formerly three blocs within the UN (the North, South and East) to two: the North, comprised of the so-called JUSCANZ (Japan, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and the European Union countries, on the one hand, and the South, represented by the Group of 77, on the other. These two blocs were divided over the definition of human rights at the Human Rights
Conference in Vienna. While Northern countries emphasized civil and political rights, Southern ones advocated economic and social rights. The division opened a window of opportunity for women’s organizations, which had organized across these political lines and had an issue that transgressed these distinctions (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 1993).

The inclusion of violence against women on the UN agenda had positive ramifications. Shortly after the Conference, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and appointed a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. In addition, the experiences gained by the activist, the networks created through this campaign, the institutional changes accomplished, and the expansion of the UN rights frame created opportunities to mobilize state support for a more contested gender issue: reproductive rights and health.

**The Case of Reproductive Rights and Health**

The international campaign on reproductive rights and health culminating in the inclusion of the issue at the ICPD in Cairo 1994, exhibits similar patterns as that regarding violence against women: in the mid-1980s Northern and Southern women conducted an international tribunal protesting against existing population control programs and calling for greater attention to women’s reproductive rights and health; during the late 1980s women’s health activists engaged in a dialogue with members of the population establishment to develop more women’s centered population policies; and in the 1990s women’s organizations politicized the issue of reproduction at the Cairo conference mobilizing governmental support. Yet the case of reproductive rights and health exhibits also important differences. It constitutes a “hard case.” Contrary to violence against women, the issue itself was much more contested with women’s organizations encountering tremendous opposition from conservative forces and within their own ranks. I argue that women’s organizations nevertheless succeeded in legitimizing the issue within the UN because of the procedural expertise they had gained through pervious campaigns.

*Defining the Problem: The International Tribunal and Meeting on Reproductive Rights in Amsterdam, 1984*
In July 1984 a group of Northern women from the International Contraception, Abortion, and Sterilization Campaign (ICASC) in London, as well as the Dutch, Belgian, and Luxembourg abortion campaigns organized an International Tribunal and Meeting on Reproductive Rights in Amsterdam similar to that in Brussels in 1976. The Tribunal had grown out of a series of International Women’s Health Meetings that had been held in Rome (1977), Hannover (1980), and Geneva (1981). It was intended as a means to expand the until then exclusively Northern constituency to the South, by bringing together almost four hundred women from sixty-five countries to talk about issues such as population control policies, contraception, abortion, sterilization, having children, sexuality, infertility, and many other women’s health issues. Even though the Tribunal had by now emerged as a “master frame” for organizing (Tarrow 1994) and women had gained significantly in organizing experience since the 1970s, benefiting from the already existing international networks, difficulties in mobilizing international support continued to persist.

To begin, the participation of Southern women in the Tribunal was constrained because of its location. Amsterdam was difficult to get to. Further, attempts to raise money from foundations proofed not very fruitful and as a result, the coordination group could provide funding to only some of the many Southern women who had actually applied for it. In addition, at the Tribunal itself, the participation of Southern women was hampered because of differences in language and insufficient translation services (Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights 1986: 2-3). Moreover, women were culturally divided. While women in the North could freely talk about issues related to reproduction, many women in the South were inhibited because of religious and cultural traditions. They also had different priorities. In contrast to Northern women, for whom obtaining access to the right to abortion was crucial, Southern women were fighting for access to basic health services. Finally, the participation of Southern women was a source of conflict because it came at the exclusion of other minority groups such as lesbians, handicapped women, and Northern women of color who accused the organizers to be racist and who perceived their attempt to win Southern women for their cause as a strategy to enhance their own power base (Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights 1986: 63). The divisions and conflicts among women

5 While the coordination group had originally intended to hold the meeting in Latin America, it settled for a European location after failing to secure a site and following the U.S. invasion in Grenada as a result of which traveling was deemed unsafe (Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights 1986).
weakened their power vis-a-vis the population establishment and prompted them to reconsider their strategy.

The Tribunal gave rise to an alliance between Northern and Southern women mirrored in the expansion of the reproductive rights frame to exclude reproductive health. Rejecting international family planning and population control policies, women tried to improve their situation by establishing their own institutions and through the exchange of information. Crucial in this regard was the establishment of international networks, such as the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) in Amsterdam (Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights 1986: 69). Founded at the Tribunal with the intention to promote solidarity and to facilitate cooperation between Northern and Southern women through the circulation of a newsletter—WGNRR News—and the conduct of international campaigns, WGNRR turned out to be, as I will show later, a source of conflict within the women’s health movement during the 1990s. The solidarity among Northern and Southern women at the Tribunal and the formation of international networks seems surprising in light of the difficulties participants were faced with at the outset. What contributed to this collective consciousness among women?

As in the case of the Tribunal in Brussels, the testimonies of Southern women, made Northern women aware of the problems they were confronted with. However, also critical in the mobilization process were two symbolic events. The first, was the dumping of unsafe contraceptives, such as Dalkon Shield intra-uterine devices (IUDs) and Depo-Provera injectable progestin, by Northern family planning organizations and pharmaceutical companies in developing countries. While the distribution of these drugs had been prohibited by the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S., they were sold in developing countries under less than sanitary conditions, where women suffered from anemia and infections, pelvic inflammatory diseases, unintended sterilization, tubal pregnancies, and even deaths (Ehrenreich et al. 1979). The U.S. was also at the center of the second symbolic event. At the UN Population Conference in Mexico City in 1984, the U.S. delegation announced that it would no longer fund international family planning organizations providing abortion services, and reduce funding for international family planning more generally (Fox 1986). The announcement came as a surprise to many and sent shock-waves through developing countries.

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6For example, while Dalkon Shields IUDs had been sold in the U.S. in individual, sterilized packages with a sterile, disposable inserter for each device, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) distributed...
because the U.S. had been the main engine behind population control efforts since the 1950s. The U.S. Mexico City policy reflected a change in administration from a Democratically-led to a Republican one. In contrast to his predecessors, Kennedy and Carter, who had perceived population growth as a threat to national security, Ronald Reagan depicted it as a "neutral phenomenon", the policies of the 1960s and 1970s as a "demographic overreaction," and preferred the free reign of market forces instead of the continued support of family planning programs (Finkle and Crane 1985). In addition to reflecting the administration's conservative views, the Mexico City policy was also indicative of the lobbying work of pro-life groups to which the administration seemed particularly receptive in light of the upcoming elections.

In summary, the exchange of personal stories of Southern women at the International Tribunal in Amsterdam together with the negative effects of the dumping of unsafe contraceptives and the U.S. Mexico City policy made Northern women aware of the situation in developing countries and sparked a search for solutions.

The Solution: Women's-Centered Population Policies and Dialogue Meetings during the late 1980s

During the late 1980s several international women's organizations entered into a dialogue with individual members of the population establishment with the intention to develop more women-centered population policies. While there were several organizations that participated in the dialogue, the one that emerged as organizational entrepreneur was the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) in New York. This was no coincidence. The IWHC had close connections to the population establishment. On the side of the population establishment, the organizations that participated most regularly in the meetings were ones that played a major role in the conception and development of international family planning
policies, including the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction of the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland; the Population Council and the Rockefeller Foundation in New York (Kyte 1995). The dialogue meetings exhibit important differences to the Expert Group Meeting on Domestic Violence in Vienna in 1986. Contrary to the latter, women’s health activists were active participants in the dialogue meetings. However, their participation was also a source of conflict as their experiences and views on how to bring women more in the center of population policies were initially incommensurable with those of the members of the population establishment who perceived the issue in a technical manner. Particularly telling in this regard was one of the various dialogue meetings, entitled "Creating Common Ground: Women's Perspectives on the Selection and Introduction of Fertility Regulation Technologies," and held in Geneva, February 20-22, 1991. The meeting had been jointly organized by the IWHC and the Special Programme. While the eighteen scientists--primarily physicians--and the fourteen women's health advocates who had been invited to the meeting agreed about the need to bring women's perspectives and experiences to bear in the development, selection, and introduction of fertility regulation technologies, collaboration and the search for shared values proved difficult.

The two groups were divided and distrustful of each other due to different frames of reference. While women’s health advocates evaluated family planning programs based on their potential to improve the health and well-being of women, scientists measured the safety and effectiveness of contraceptives based on their potential to reduce the overall population growth, justifying it with societal goals such as the benefits of family planning programs for the largest number of people. In line with their different the two groups also favored different solutions to bring down population growth. In contrast to scientists, who preferred provider-controlled methods (e.g. IUDs and injectables) because they were „efficient“ and „safe“, women’s health advocates opted for user-controlled ones (e.g. diaphragms or condoms) due to their reduced side-effects, the protection they provide from sexually transmitted diseases, and the freedom they give to women in the regulation of their own fertility (World Health Organization 1991: 11). These different priorities and standards were reflective of the different sources of information. While the women’s health advocates relied on the personal experiences and encounters they had with women as physicians or as counselors, the scientists relied on quantitative data from introductory trials, clinical assessments, tests in laboratories, and field studies (World Health Organization 1991: 12). Despite these differences, a
consensual framework emerged from the dialogue between women’s health advocates and members of the population establishment.

The dialogue meetings culminated in the “quality of care” framework, intended as solution to ensure the consideration of women’s concerns in population policies. The framework linked women's experiences with technical knowledge. On the one hand, quality of care reflected the perspectives of the users of family planning, i.e. women and men in developing countries. It stressed among other things the choice among a range of contraceptive methods; the availability of full information about all methods and side-effects; providers' technical competence combined with interpersonal skill; and structural incentives for maintaining the availability of an appropriate constellation of services (IWHC and Population Council 1986). On the other, Judith Bruce of the Population Council wrote an article entitled “Quality of Care: A Simple Framework.” in the journal Family Planning in 1990, grounding the framework theoretically as well as demonstrating its potential successfulness with references to field studies (Bruce 1990). Since the publication of the article major family planning organizations such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) or the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) have integrated the proposal into their programming activities. The consensus among women’s health advocates and members of the population establishment is rather striking. What contributed to the alliance between the two groups?

Conducive for the alliance between women’s health advocates and members of the population establishment was a change in the international climate following the Population Conference in Mexico-City in 1984. First, political alignments within the population establishment began to shift away from, what Dixon-Mueller refers to as the "supply-siders" of family planning--i.e. the Northern countries--and toward the "demand-siders" of family planning--i.e. the Southern countries (Dixon-Mueller 1993: 69). Contrary to Northern countries which had been advocating the setting of population targets, Southern countries linked population growth directly to development (see Joachim 2000). Second, Mexico City had helped to shatter the political consensus on population challenging orthodox views. In so doing, it made alternative perspectives more valid, including those of women’s health advocates (Higer 1999: 128). Third, the population conference in 1984 created a tactical incentive for women’s health advocates and members of the population establishment to

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10 The frame approximates what had been advocated and to some degree already been implemented by a number of women’s groups in response to the lack of health care in developing countries (Rogow 1986).
cooperate. Both had a mutual interest in maintaining women’s access to birth control, though for different reasons, and found a common enemy in the Reagan administration (Hartman 1987).

In summary, changes within the political climate following the Mexico City conference in 1984 helped women’s health advocates gain access to what was previously considered an exclusively "technical" domain and forge an alliance with members of the population establishment. However, the integration of women into the population framework was not unanimously supported. Instead, it became subject of contestation at the ICPD.

The Politicization: The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, 1994

As soon as after the first Preparatory Committee for the ICPD had come to a close and it became apparent that women’s rights had hardly been mentioned in the draft Platform of Action, the IWHC organized the so-called London meeting in the spring of 1992, inviting a small group of friends of other women's health organizations. Agreeing that the upcoming UN Conference on Population in Cairo presented an excellent opportunity to generate greater awareness about reproductive rights and health, participants formed, what came to be known, as the Women's Alliance and adopted Women's Voices '94: The Women's Declaration on Population Policies. The Declaration specified seven ethical principles that population policies and programs should honor in order to ensure the centrality of women's well-being (Antrobus et al. 1993). While Women's Voices '94 had been intended by the Alliance as a lobbying instrument to mobilize support around the issue of reproductive rights and health, it proofed to be highly divisive, triggering substantial criticism and counter-framing activities from the Vatican as well as sections from within the women's health movement.

Reproductive rights and health challenged and was incommensurable with the values and perspectives of the Vatican. The issue, according to the Vatican, presented a "fundamental threat to the family," and violated the rights of the "unborn life" as well as the dignity of

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11The list of participants were: Amparo Claro of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network and ISIS-International, Sonia Correa and Peggy Antrobus of Women in Development for a New Era (DAWN), Joan Dunlop and Adrienne Germain of IWHC, Claudia Garcia-Moreno of Oxfam International who also served on the British delegation to Cairo, Francis Kissling of Catholics for Free Choice, Rose Petchesky of the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group, Jacqueline Pitanguy a Brazilian women's health activist, and Julia Scott, director of the National Women's Health Project. Many of these women would also contribute to the co-edited volume by Adrienne Germain, Population Policies Reconsidered, which was prepared as a resource for policy makers in preparation for the Cairo conference (Higer 1996: 75).

12By the time of the second PrepCom for the ICPD, the Declaration had been endorsed and signed by a total of 2,539 individuals and organizations from over one hundred and ten countries (Antrobus et al. 1993).
women. Moreover, reproductive rights and health was a radical pro-choice position and stood for the "unrestricted right to abortion" (Vatican 1994). To prevent its inclusion on the conference agenda, the Vatican together with Catholic countries responded entering into an “unholy alliance” with fundamentalist Islamic countries despite their ideological differences. The alliance blocked discussion on the issue of women’s reproductive rights and health by making ample use of UN rules and procedures, such as the issuing of frequent oral interventions and the demand for brackets. Their behavior and opposition attracted the attention of the international media. Guided by professional norms such as the preference for dramatic and visible events (Kielbowicz and Sherer 1986: 75-6), international newspapers and TV stations amplified the Vatican’s position and enhanced controversy by zeroing in on the abortion issue.13 In addition to the Vatican, the position of the Women’s Alliance was further weakened by the opposition it encountered from radical women’s organizations which were critical of Women’s Voices and framed the issue of reproduction in a much broader fashion.

Among the most vocal organizations expressing their disagreement with the Declaration were WGNRR which had been established at the Tribunal on Reproductive Rights to facilitate cooperation and networking between Northern and Southern women, the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (ICG-FINRAGE) in Hamburg, Germany, and the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment (CWPE) in Amherst, Massachusetts. These organizations criticized Women's Voices '94 for both procedural as well as substantive reasons. In particular, they felt that the Declaration had been put together in an undemocratic fashion because it had been “drafted by an exclusive group of women whose perspectives were not representative of the entire women's movement, but rather that of its more pragmatic wing” (Dutting 1995). In response radical women's organizations issued a “Critical Appraisal of the Women’s Declaration on Population Policies” in the January-March 1993 edition of the WGNRR Newsletter criticizing the document for its "lack of principled criticism of population policy... [because it] add[ed] to a growing general consensus among established organizations and increasingly among women’s groups, that population policies are unavoidable to solve major problems like poverty and environmental degradation,

13For example, on 6 September 1994, the New York Times published an article with the headline “UN International Conference on Population and Development tried to avert showdown over abortion – but a proposed compromise was unlikely to ease a tense standoff with the Vatican” and CNN commented on the ICPD on 7 September 1994, in the following manner: “The world population conference just can’t seem to get past the abortion issue.”
whereby the underlying causes are once more neglected” (4). In contrast to members of the Women's Alliance who perceived the population policy framework as an adequate channel to gain acceptance for women's reproductive rights and health, the authors of the "Critical Appraisal" considered it as ill-suited because it reinforced the very same power structures, which these organizations perceived as the fundamental sources of population growth. In addition to the ideational basis, the opposition of radical women’s organizations had also a strategic one. Radical women’s organizations feared co-optation and that working within the population policy framework would silence critical women's voices (Hartmann 1996). Together the opposition of women's organizations and the unholy alliance between the Vatican and Islamic countries prompted the Women's Alliance to rethink and alter its strategy.

Shortly before the ICPD took place, the IWHC organized another symbolic event in Rio de Janeiro in the spring of 1994: the International Women's Health Conference for Cairo entitled "Reproductive Health and Justice." (IWHC 1994: 1). The Conference signaled that the IWHC had learned from its past mistakes. In contrast to the London meeting in 1992, the Rio Conference was much more inclusive. Despite severe budgetary constraints, more than two hundred participants had been invited to the Conference. Instead of "friendship," the criteria for their selection had been nationality, culture, age, sexual orientation, income level, profession, and philosophy (Kyte 1995). Moreover, by holding the meeting in Rio de Janeiro, it was much more accessible for Southern women. Although the diversification of the Women’s Alliance slowed down and complicated the decision-making process, the Rio Conference contributed to a more inclusive issue and action frame. First, the inclusion of radical women’s organizations into the Alliance resulted in a change of strategy. In light of the Vatican’s fierce opposition and the short amount of time left, participants at the Women's Health Conference decided to work together as a "united front" and in "solidarity." This did not mean, however, that differences between the various groups had disappeared. However, instead of viewing them as an obstacle, women’s organizations decided to turn their differences into a strength. Pragmatic organizations, on the one hand, relied on their connections within the population establishment and pushed for a reproductive rights and reproductive health agenda inside the UN. Radicals, on the other, continued to work outside

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14The "Critical Appraisal of the Women's Declaration on Population Policies" was signed by WGNRR; the Forum Against Oppression of Women, Bombay, India; the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Preselection, Bombay, India; the Women's Group Against Genetic Engineering, Reproductive Technologies and Population Policies (ANTIGENA), Zurich, Switzerland.
established institutions, mobilizing political pressure, maintaining a critical voice in the process, and holding those working inside the UN accountable (IWHC 1994: 31-33).

Second, in addition to these changes in strategy, the diversification of the Women’s Alliance had “radical flank effects” (McAdam et al. 1996: 14) with the presence of more radical groups prompting more moderate ones to adopt more extreme positions. Participants adopted a twenty-one point statement considerably broader in scope than Women's Voices '94, in which they strongly voiced their opposition to population policies intended to control the fertility of women and that do not address their basic right to secure livelihood, freedom from poverty and oppression (IWHC 1994: 4). Moreover, contrary to the women's declaration which had justified women's ability to control her own fertility almost exclusively in terms of human rights, the twenty-one point statement placed it squarely into the development framework. It claimed inequitable development models and strategies to be responsible for “the underlying cause of growing poverty, marginalization of women, environmental degradation, growing numbers of migrants and refugees, and the rise of fundamentalism everywhere.” (IWHC 1994). It called for "alternative development strategies" and "social development policies starting from the concerns and priorities of women" (5-6). In sum, the twenty-one point statement was much more critical of the population establishment than Women's Voices. It seems therefore counter-intuitive that the Women’s Alliance started to gain leverage at the ICPD following the Rio Conference.

The presence of radical organizations made moderate ones more acceptable negotiation partners vis-a-vis governmental delegates at the ICPD in Cairo and helped them to win influential allies for their campaign. As in the case of gender violence, the U.S. delegation, headed by former Colorado Senator Timothy Wirth, was supportive also of reproductive rights and health including the right to safe abortion, highlighting the dynamic nature of the opportunity structure. Only a decade ago at the Population Conference in Mexico City in 1984, it had been an outright opponent. However, since the role of the U.S. has already been discussed at length in the first case, I will focus here on the support of the Secretary General of the ICPD, Nafis Sadik, instead. It offers insights into how UN officers can enhance the legitimacy of NGOs. Sadik engaged in a series of actions that worked to the advantage of women’s organizations. First, using the prerogatives of her office as secretary general, she

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15A declaration drafted by a number of participants from Latin America, with the input of women from other regions proposed for participants to even “reject population policies.” However, due to the lack of consensus
revised the Platform of Action more than a dozen of times until it had lost much of its demographic character and the rights of the individual had gained more in prominence (McIntosh and Finkle 1995: 230), a frame that was more in alignment with that of reproductive rights and health. Second, interested in the success of the conference and seeking to prevent the politicization of previous UN conferences, Sadik together with her staff organized a series of preparatory meetings at the national, regional, and international level. While primarily intended to provide a forum for governments to air and resolve their disagreements before coming to Cairo (McIntosh and Finkle 1995: 229), these preparatory meetings gave women's organizations ample access points to lobby. Finally, Sadik’s position as secretary general enabled her not only to influence the wording of the conference document and the proceedings, but it also gave her significant freedom. Contrary to her position as Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), she was able to take a political stand on the abortion issue, an issue she felt strongly about as a self-professed feminist and based on her past professional experience working as a gynecologist in a developing country (Cohen and Richards 1994). The leadership exhibited by the Secretary General and the U.S. delegation on the issue of reproductive rights and health prompted the Vatican to heighten its opposition, meeting with Sadik in private and denunciating Clinton for its “immoral and irresponsible” stance. While aimed at garnering further support from UN governments for its position, the Vatican’s actions had the opposite effect.

With the growing support for the reproductive rights and health frame, ideological differences within the conservative alliance began to reemerge leading to its break-up midway through the conference. Many Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Egypt, and Iran, but even Catholic countries like the Philippines, Mexico, and Peru, had much more liberal views than the Vatican (McIntosh and Finkle 1995). They were in support of international family planning and needed the financial support of Northern countries for its implementation. In addition, governmental delegates grew tired of the delaying tactics and intransigence of the Vatican. For example, in response to a request by the Vatican to continue the discussion on the reproductive rights and health chapter after it had already been negotiated for three days and nights, some governmental delegates shouted "no" and the rest booed, which, according to Cohen and Richards (1994), constitutes "a virtually unknown breach of decorum at UN meetings" (275).

and the lack of time, no action was taken in the final plenary session where the Declaration had been introduced (Report of the International Women's Health Conference 1994: 36).
In light of mounting opposition and finding itself increasingly isolated, the Vatican reconsidered its position. For the first time in the history of UN population conferences, it voted with the consensus, adopting the entire Platform of Action. However, its support was not unconditional. Even after having gained considerable concessions on many issues, the Vatican issued numerous reservations on the chapter on reproductive rights and reproductive health. This move left many governmental delegates skeptical whether its vote had been sincere or merely been an attempt to redeem itself in the face of world opinion (McIntosh and Finkle 1995: 249).

In summary, the radical positions of individual women's health organizations and the Vatican, helped more moderate women's organizations win the support of influential allies and with it the inclusion of reproductive rights and health on the agenda of the ICPD. Apart from legitimizing women’s demands at the national level, the Cairo consensus has triggered institutional changes. Many development agencies and organizations have changed their family planning chapters into ones on reproductive health. Further, it prompted women’s NGOs such as WEDO in New York to establish so-called “Women Watching Cairo” initiatives to track governmental efforts in implementing their international commitments. However, women's success at the ICPD has also given rise to new obstacles. In particular, it has fueled the opposition and determination of conservative forces. This became apparent at the Fifth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, where the Vatican sought to undo and roll-back the achievements women had made in Cairo. In addition, the inclusion of reproductive rights and health has also reopened and severed divisions within the women's health movement. Contrary to pragmatic organizations which celebrate and perceive the ICPD as a success, radical women's organizations feel that their concerns, in particular the linkage of reproductive rights and health to development, have been left of the agenda. According to these organizations, the reproductive rights and health rhetoric has been adopted by the population establishment, but nothing has changed in practice.

Conclusion
How, why, and under what conditions can NGOs influence the interests of states? The cases of reproductive rights and health and violence against women offer illustrative examples in this respect. Both issues were initially perceived as exclusive domestic concerns. The inclusion of these issues front and center on UN mainstream agendas is the product of the international campaigns by international women’s organizations which engaged in strategic
framing processes, seized political opportunities and took advantage of their own mobilizing structures.

With respect to the strategic framing processes, in each of the two cases, women’s organizations defined the problem, offered solutions, and provided motives for actions in a fashion that resonated and “rang true” with their targets, that is their constituency, policymakers, or governmental delegates. In the case of gender violence, women’s organizations identified all man-made oppression as the problem and a crime against women, legitimized the prosecution of the perpetrator through the criminal justice system as solution, and politicized the issue by placing it into the human rights framework. In the case of reproduction, women’s organizations blamed existing population policies for violating women’s reproductive rights and health, they mobilized support for women’s centered population policies such as “quality of care”, and politicized the issue by linking it with population and development. These frames were reflective of changes in the political opportunity structure in which these organizations were active and the mobilizing structures they had at their disposal.

Beginning with the problem definition, lacking access to and being skeptical of UN institutions a small group of mostly Northern women entrepreneurs organized in both cases extra-institutional events in the form of international tribunals. Although these entrepreneurs had little experience in organizing, enjoyed almost no support from governments, foundations, or the media, and encountered criticism and opposition within their own ranks, the tribunals contributed to the mobilization of international constituencies and consensual issue frames. In both cases I found the testimonies told by women whose lives have been affected and symbolic events such as the First UN Women’s Conference in Mexico City in 1975 in the case of gender violence or the dumping of unsafe contraceptives and the U.S. terminating funding for international family planning organizations in the case of reproductive rights and health to be catalysts for action.

In the solution phase, policy-makers began to pay attention to both women’s issues. The UN Branch for the Advancement of Women organized an expert-group meeting on domestic violence and family planning organizations engaged in a dialogue with reproductive health activists. The support from these institutional allies, however, was not without costs: Women’s organizations in both issue areas lost control over the definition of their issues: The initial focus on all forms of gender violence was narrowed to domestic violence and that of reproductive rights and health was changed from all women to just married ones. In this
phase, I found both scientific expertise in contrast to testimonial knowledge as well as changes in political alignments contributing to the emergence of acceptable solution frames—the intervention of criminal justice system in the case of domestic violence and quality of care in the case of reproductive rights and health. While the former provided systematic and “legitimate” information in form of statistics and studies, the latter brought into power groups whose views were more in alignment with the solution frame.

In the politicization phase, the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and the ICPD in Cairo in 1994 provided opportunities for women’s organizations to mobilize governmental support and to reassert control over their issues. What is a striking and crucial factor in this phase, is the procedural expertise that women’s organizations had gained since the problem definition phase of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Instead of loosely organized networks, professional organizations such as the Center for Women’s Global Leaderhip and the IWHC spearheaded the campaigns in the 1990s and pursued a two-pronged strategy: They used testimonial knowledge to dramatize and scientific expertise to persuade. Moreover, with the support of an international constituency, women’s organizations exerted pressure on governments both inside and outside established institutions. Their activities garnered the support from influential allies, such as the United States, UN officers, like-minded groups such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, and the international media. Further, the acceptance of gender violence as a human rights issue and reproductive rights and health as a population and development issue was facilitated by divisions among governments. In the case of gender violence Northern and Southern governments could not agree on a common definition of rights and in the case of reproductive rights the unholy alliance between the Vatican and Islamic countries faltered because of their different positions on family planning. Women’s organizations were able to seize the opportunity in both cases because they had organized across these divisions and were able to offer a more consensual issue.

I argued in the beginning of this paper that a theoretical framework drawing on key elements of the social movement literature can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ability of NGOs to influence states’ interests than conventional approaches because it takes account of intersubjective processes and the dynamic interaction of both structures and agents as well as material and immaterial factors. The two cases studied here seem to support that. First, the concept of framing draws attention to the fact that power, contrary to the assumptions of Realists, results not only from military and economic resources, but also, as
constructivist approaches suggest, from the power to (re-)define and (de-)legitimize. Women’s organizations succeeded in legitimizing initially contested issues by redefining and broadening existing institutional frameworks. Second, the concept of the political opportunity structure broadens liberal understandings of institutions by including norms and practices and by breaking the artificial distinction between international and domestic. It highlights the way in which (1) the historical, cultural and political context matters in the definition of ideas and interests; (2) institutions do not only constrain social actors but are also empowering by providing a “toolchest” for action; and (3) the way in which institutions are “selective” by privileging certain actors and issues while marginalizing others. Third, mobilizing structures take account of the fact that the manner in which the structural forces matter depends on the meaning and interpretation that social actors assign to them. Contrary to constructivist approaches, it captures the agency of NGOs and that they are actors within their own right. The networks of entrepreneurs, constituents and experts enable NGOs to be strategic, that is to manipulate information to their advantage, to reflect on situations, and to bring about normative and discursive change. Obviously, the evidence gleaned from this comparative case study is limited. The explanatory power of the framework developed here will have to be investigated further in other issue areas, other organizations and other aspects of the decision-making process.
Literature


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**UN Documents**


**Documents of International NGOs**


**Interviews**


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