EXPLORING THE ROUTE FROM NAIROBI TO BEIJING PLUS TWENTY: FEMINIST ACTIVIST REFLECTIONS ON RIGHTS ADVOCACY

by

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Abstract

This dissertation consists of five written chapters and a film chapter. The thesis explores how a selected sample of feminist activists used certain international human rights mechanisms and processes within the United Nations (UN) over a thirty-year period, from 1985 to 2015, to achieve women’s equality and human rights. The findings document the opinions and perceptions of forty-five feminist activists working in the transnational feminist movement. The written chapters situate the historical context of that thirty-year time frame within UN world conferences, outline the methodology of the research process and the making of the film, and share the research findings. A review of feminist scholarship is provided on feminist movement theory, violence against women, and international human rights law and policy. The research shows that these feminists believe that engaging with the UN system has strengthened some women’s organizations and coalitions through networking and sharing of strategies. They think that their work has resulted in changes to the UN system itself and to international law and policy on issues of women’s rights, especially violence against women. They believe that global and local perspectives work together as part of a dynamic, intersectional paradigm, wherein different actions and objectives call for different strategies, both globally and domestically. The conclusion reviews current debates about whether and how the transnational women’s movement should continue to engage with the UN system.
Lay Summary

The thesis consists of five written chapters and a film chapter. The objective was to seek out the opinions of the selected forty-five women’s rights activists on how they saw working with the UN as a strategy to gain women’s equality. My research shows that the non-representative sample of interviewees believe that activism and advocacy must be done at both the international and local level in order to have the greatest impact on women’s lives. They believe that engaging with the UN system has strengthened women’s organizations and coalitions through the networking and sharing of strategies and ideas. They see changes to the UN system itself and to international law and policy on issues of women’s rights, especially violence against women. They believe that the work of feminist activism and advocacy must be done at both the international and local level, and that different strategies call for different actions, globally and domestically. The thesis concludes with a discussion of specific activities and events planned for 2020.
Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Susan Margaret Bazilli.

The research for this dissertation was conducted in New York, USA; Geneva, Switzerland; Bangkok, Thailand; The Hague, The Netherlands; Vancouver, Canada; Melbourne, Australia; and Kampala, Uganda.

The design and methods of this research were submitted and approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia (Canada). The BREB’s Ethics Certificate is H15-00036.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>APWLD</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Women Law and Development</td>
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<td>AWID</td>
<td>Association of Women’s Rights in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPfA</td>
<td>Beijing Platform for Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>CLADEM</td>
<td>Comité de América Latina y El Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSW</td>
<td>Commission on the Status of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>The Economic and Social Council</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FIAP</td>
<td>Feminist International Assistance Policy</td>
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<td>G2L</td>
<td>Global to Local</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
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<td>GEWE</td>
<td>Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment</td>
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<td>GNWP</td>
<td>Global Network of Women Peace Builders</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICCPR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICESCR</td>
<td>The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>IHRL</td>
<td>International Human Rights Law</td>
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<td>IWRAW</td>
<td>International Women’s Rights Action Watch</td>
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<td>IWRAW-AP</td>
<td>International Women’s Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWRP</td>
<td>International Women’s Rights Project</td>
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List of Supplementary Material

EXPLORING THE ROUTE FROM NAIROBI TO BEIJING PLUS TWENTY: FEMINIST ACTIVIST REFLECTIONS ON RIGHTS ADVOCACY (Film)
Acknowledgements

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I owe deep gratitude to my family who are always there for me. I am enormously grateful for their love and support. Although they had no idea what I was doing all this time that I was sitting at my computer, I know they support me in whatever I do. And to Rosie, Auntie Susan does not have to do any more homework! Never ever again!

There would be no project without the generosity and activism of: Lina Abirafeh, Priscilla Achakpa, Renu Rajbhandari Adikari, Anjlee Agarwal, Doo Aphere, Fatima Atip, Charlotte Bunch, Florence Butegwa, Kunthea Chan, Shanthi Dairiam, Aurora De Dios, Cynthia Enloe, Alda Facio, Lesley Ann Foster, Marsha Freeman, Ruchira Gupta, Ruth Halpern-Kaddiri, Rokiya Kabir, Lizzie Kiame, Thida Kuis, Kate Lappin, Lee Lakeman, Sylvia Tecun Leon, Marilou McPhedran, Joke Muylwijk, Sameena Nazir, Sylvia Ndongomo, Jessica Neuwirth, Sizani Ngubane, Donna Nicolls, Oby Nwankwo, Constance Okellet, Dianne Otto, Kenita Placide, Madeleine Rees, Diana Rivington, Abigail Ruane, Joanne Sandler, Margaret Schuler, Meenu Sikand, Margaret Tuhumwire, Undarya Tumursukh, Gladys Acosta Vargas, Anne Walker, and Cora Weiss. Deep gratitude to Margaret Schuler for many years of femtorship and inspiration, and to Florence Butegwa for believing that this was a project worth doing.

I am indebted to Jesse Joy, my fantastic and visionary film editor; to Tiffanie Green, who helped me with film technical difficulties; and to Sebastian Ennis for his editorial assistance.

I must acknowledge the support of the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship, the BC Law Foundation award, and the Peter A. Allard School of Law Graduate Scholarship, without which I would not have completed my PhD. And finally, without the patience and generosity of Max Read, Associate Director, Student Academic Services, you would not be able to read this thesis.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis with deep love and gratitude to my sister, Dr. Catherine Joyce Bazilli. She has been the inspiration for me to complete this dissertation and this project. No one works harder than she does, and this thesis is a tribute to her. It was the least I could do.

It is also dedicated to the memory of our mother, Virginia Joyce (Richards) Bazilli. My mother passed away before she saw me receiving my LLM at UBC. She would be very proud to have a second ‘Doctor’ in the family now, although I am not the “real” one. Catherine is the beacon and the rock of our family. We are all so incredibly grateful for her and all that she does for all of us.

And to Alison, Rosie, Charlotte and Grace – I hope that our struggle for women’s equality will continue to result in a better world for you. Auntie Susan loves you!

Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi!¹

¹ Let the name of the women be thanked!
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 From the Personal to the Political (to the Transnational)

There is a well-known feminist axiom that predates my own forty years of activism, that “the personal is political.” The dynamic interplay between the political and personal is what lies at the heart of feminist knowledge production. This knowledge, created in the context of a myriad of power relations and interlocking systems of oppression, has a dynamically interdependent relationship with feminist praxis. Indeed, this feminist genealogy of knowledge production abundantly informs and influences both my advocacy and academic work. Even in this project, where the context is extrapolated to that of transnational feminist movements and large international bodies like the United Nations (UN), personal, lived experiences of myself and the other feminists involved constitute a vital part of the produced research and knowledge.

In this light, this dissertation is quite personal. In many ways it is a questioning of my own life’s work in feminist activism at the international level. In particular, asking myself what role have many UN systems, processes, and mechanisms played in the achievements of the women’s rights movements. I ask myself the very same questions that I posed to the feminists I interviewed who have been similarly, albeit more intensely, engaged in activism on women’s rights at a global level. Feminist organizations and women’s movements have created significant changes to the political, economic, and social contexts of the lives of women and girls. Without us, without feminist activists, there would have been no gains made on women’s equality.

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2 This axiom is often attributed to the period of Second Wave Feminism, in a Western context. Carol Hanisch wrote about this phrase in 1969: see Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (February 1969), online: Writings by Carol Hanisch <www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.
Reflections on my personal experience in the international women’s rights movement over the past thirty years led me to the questions that I examined for my research and many of my own deliberations are captured in this thesis. As Johnny Saldana says, “[y]ou can’t learn to tell someone else’s story until you first learn to tell your own.”[^3] I am familiar with telling my own story, and here the narratives become conjoined with the stories of others. As Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross acknowledge, feminist scholars “begin by considering our own intellectual biographies and contexts and our relations with each other.”[^4]

This project could be considered non-traditional. It combines visual film footage in the form of a film with written chapters. In the film chapter, I go on camera to interrogate myself and my interviewees with similar questions. The film chapter is in some ways background material, supplementary to the written chapters. This is not a PhD in film production or film theory.[^5] The film chapter is not a standalone project, and is not to be evaluated on its merits alone. My examining committee reviewed it in the context of my final dissertation. The film provides a richness of visual context and background that augments the chapters by providing a body of literature and theory which is framed by my own experience.

Like the women I interviewed for this project, I have been involved in working with structures of the UN. I attended the 3rd World Conference on Women in 1985. I have served as a representative to the Canadian government’s non-governmental organization (NGO) delegation

[^3]: Johnny Saldana, “Researcher, Analyze Thyself” (2018) 23:9 Qualitative Report 2036 at 2036 [Saldana]. Perhaps this exercise is similar to what therapists have to do – understand oneself before one can analyze anyone else.


[^5]: Although this is a non-traditional dissertation, I was required to write five chapters. When initially accepted into the program, I was planning to only make a film. I am a terrible writer and the task would have been too daunting if I had realized how much writing was required. In the end, I have written the same number of words (75,000) as is required in a dissertation by UBC (60,000 – 80,000). By adding the work on the film project, my dissertation is equivalent to at least three times that number.
to the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and to meetings reviewing UN progress on women’s rights.\(^6\) As the Director of the International Women’s Rights Project (IWRP),\(^7\) I have worked with a range of UN bodies on women’s rights and women, peace, and security, and represented the organization at UN fora. Much of my paid work as a women’s rights consultant has been working for different organs of the UN, or with women’s organizations on how to more effectively use the UN system.

In making the theoretical leap from personal and political experiences to large transnational structures, it is vital to gain an understanding of these structures, their history, and the contexts in which they function (discussed further in Section 1.6). The UN was founded in 1945 after the end of the second World War.\(^8\) Thirty years later, the UN declared the decade from 1975 to 1985 to be the “decade for women.”\(^9\) The “women’s decade” ended with the UN’s Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985. This was the largest gathering of women’s rights activists the world had ever seen – and I had the privilege of being there.

Attending that conference determined the course of my life. I already was a feminist activist in

\(^6\) These meetings reviewed the \textit{Beijing Platform for Action} in 2000.

\(^7\) The IWRP was founded by Marilou McPhedran at York University in 1998 and she was the first Director; we became co-Directors in 2003; and I became the Director in 2007. It is found at \url{www.iwrp.org}.

\(^8\) In order to explain the UN history, I have chosen to use lengthy footnotes rather than attach historical notes as Appendices, or add detailed history to the chapter text. The name “United Nations” was coined by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt and was first used in the Declaration by United Nations of 1 January 1942, during the Second World War, when representatives of 26 nations pledged their Governments to continue fighting together against the Axis Powers, the coalition led by Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II. In 1945 representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco at the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draw up the \textit{Charter of the United Nations}, 26 June 1945, Can TS 1945 No 7 (Charter). The \textit{Charter} was signed on 26 June 1945 by the representatives of the 50 countries and officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when the \textit{Charter} had been ratified. As of this writing, the UN is made up of 193 member states. For more historical details, see “History of the United Nations” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: \textit{United Nations} <\url{www.un.org/en/sections/history/history-united-nations/index.html}>. For a complete history and contemporary view of the UN, see Thomas G Weiss & Sam Daws, \textit{The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations}, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

\(^9\) During that same decade, I was becoming a feminist activist, going to university and law school, completing articling, and moving to South Africa to work for Lawyers for Human Rights.
Canada, but at Nairobi I got hooked on working on women’s rights issues in a global context. It was also my first introduction to Africa, which inspired me to move to South Africa not long after the Nairobi conference. I had been active in the anti-apartheid movement in Canada and moved to South Africa to work on human rights issues. After working for Lawyers for Human Rights in South Africa and publishing my edited book on women’s rights, *Putting Women on the Agenda*, I returned to Canada in 1992.

It was at this time that I became involved in the feminist anti-violence movement, which has remained at the core of my work since then. I was very interested in how we could use international human rights law within Canada on issues of violence against women (VAW). This evolved after Mike Harris became Premier of Ontario in 1995 and women’s shelters and transition houses suffered major cutbacks in funding. I wrote a guide for the anti-violence movement on how we might start to use international human rights law. A coalition of activists in Ontario wrote a submission to the first UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, about the cutbacks to funding for transition houses and women’s

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11 Susan Bazilli, ed, *Putting Women on the Agenda* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991). I organized the first conference in South Africa on women and the constitution, just after the unbanning of the African National Congress and other organizations. It was the first time that women in exile, women who had never left South Africa, and women from the regional SADC states all met inside the country. This book is a compilation of those conference papers. In 2006, sixteen years later, many of the same women reviewed the progress that had been made, and that conference led to my second book: Susan Bazilli, ed, *Putting Feminism on the Agenda* (2008), online (pdf): *International Women’s Rights Project* <www.iwrp.org/pdf/pfota_epub.pdf>.

12 I was the Legal Director for the Metro Action Committee on Violence Against Women (METRAC) in Toronto from 1992 to 1997, when I was hired by the then Board Chair Marilou McPhedran. I went on to be the first Executive Director of the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence (CAADV) from 1997 to 1999. Then I moved to Moscow, Russia, in 2000 where I directed the gender-based violence program for the American Bar Association. Much of my work since 1992 has focused on violence against women.

shelters. From that period until the present, all my work has involved finding ways to use aspects of international human rights law and policies for women’s equality.

My background is that of a feminist activist and advocate, which is why my dissertation had to be a feminist project. I have only interviewed self-identifying feminists who work on women’s equality rights issues, all of whom I would describe as peers, and many of them as friends. Wherever possible, I will refer to the publications of my interviewees – mostly grey literature, some peer reviewed academic scholarship, and some social media posts (blogs, websites, Facebook pages, online articles, discussion pieces, and so on).

1.2 Some Notes on Terminology

It would be helpful to outline some of the terminology that will be used throughout the thesis. There is an array of terms denoting “rights” that are often used interchangeably: gender justice, gender equality, gender equality rights, women’s rights, women’s equality rights, and so on. In UN parlance the current popular term is “gender equality and women’s empowerment,” with its own UN acronym (GEWE). These terms are all somewhat ambiguous. Some scholars clearly set out that they regard women’s rights as a sub-category of gender justice; and they use “gender equality” and “gender justice” as synonyms. The use of “equality” can raise confusion

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14 The submission was compiled by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transitions Houses (OAITH) led by the stalwart Eileen Morrow.

15 When I was the Director of the Women’s Rights Program for the American Bar Association in Moscow, Russia, in 2002, I worked with feminists from all the former Soviet Union states, especially Central Asia, on how to use the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, infra note 38 (CEDAW), in those countries. From 2003 to 2005 I directed a women’s legal rights program in seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, for the Centre for Education and Population Activities for Women (CEDPA) where my key programs focused on the implementation of CEDAW in Swaziland, and the first national plan of action on violence against women in Madagascar. I worked with Women Law and Development International on projects in Russia, Bosnia, Lithuania, Ethiopia, and Kenya from 1998 to 2000. In fact, I have worked in over forty countries on women’s rights issues over the past thirty years. I explain this because it is important to understand that for everything I do, I am a practitioner, and activist; I am not an academic, or a theorist.

about formal equality or substantive equality, meaning equality of outcome.\textsuperscript{17} I acknowledge that the terms are not equivalent, but still I use most of them interchangeably throughout, since for me they all mean women’s equality rights. As an indication perhaps of my age and generation, my greatest comfort is with the term “women’s rights.”

My theoretical and methodological perspectives are strongly rooted in feminism. My description of feminism thirty years ago would have been quite simple: the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality with men and the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. But my thinking about feminism has become more expansive and inclusive over the years. I subscribe to an intersectional understanding that is a more nuanced and complex framing of feminism. When I use the term feminism I use it to mean both an ideology and an analytical framework.\textsuperscript{18} I do not simplify the term to mean parity with men. I use it to describe a “transformation – of all social relations – of power that oppresses, exploits or marginalizes anyone on the basis of their gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, race, religion, nationality, location, caste, class or ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{19}

When using terms like “feminist ethics” or “feminist paradigm,” I refer to a set of common core principles which are participatory, use democratic power and decision-making structures, and have a strong sense of accountability to our movement, our constituency. These terms also describe a feminist way of working around internal and external processes. Feminism as a practice interrogates how our organizations function by reviewing hierarchy and power.

\textsuperscript{17} See \textit{ibid.}.


\textsuperscript{19} See \textit{ibid.}.
Another key characteristic of the feminism that I practice is its emphasis on a constant interrogation of power structures and engagement with activism.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I am reluctant to position myself within the vast terrain of feminist discourse and provide a label of the kind or type of feminism with which I identify. There are many feminisms; even Wikipedia currently identifies nineteen “brands” of feminist identity. These nineteen are called: mainstream, anarchist, Marxist socialist, lesbian separatist, standpoint, third-world, transfeminism, radical, postmodern, postcolonial, liberal, libertarian, difference, cultural, eco-feminist, French, multiracial, black womanist, post-structural – and then there can be a combination of the various labels. However, I welcome the opportunity to examine my own personal politics and consider my place within a broader discipline.

I accept that many feminists would read this thesis and immediately define me as a liberal feminist because I have supported my findings of the usefulness of engagement with the UN system. On the other hand, I understand that because I actually believe in the concept of patriarchy as a system of oppression, that I could be considered a radical feminist. I do not live in the global South, and even if I did, I am still a settler and a colonizer so no matter my political practice there are several labels I could never adopt. Regardless of my politics, I will always be white. But I have seen the destruction in the feminist women’s movement that is caused by identity politics. I have watched institutions that are so-called feminist torn apart by the use of labelling. My reluctance to use a label, as if it were a political party, may be another indication of what many would call my mainstream or liberal feminism. Yet I remain reluctant to pinpoint my feminist “label.”

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The truth is that I do not mind what I am called. I prefer to practice my feminism rather than label it. I believe in a feminism that is diverse, inter-related, interconnected, multi-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary; a feminism that is local, global, and collective, that links theory with practice, and that interrogates the intersection of gender oppression with other systems of oppression like race and class. I believe in a feminism that stands for political transformation and the struggle to change the practices of power. In the current context of neoliberalism and globalization, I want a feminism that stands for economic transformation that creates greater social equity and human development. Its goal is to change the world.

It is also important to note here that I did not ask any of my interviewees to self-identify as feminist, nor did I ask them what label of feminism or feminist theory they might have subscribed to.

1.3 Time Frame

There is a timeliness to this project. It coincides with the benchmarks of several UN conferences to mark women’s rights progress and challenges over the three decades from 1985 to 2015. “Taking stock” or “stock-taking,” a term most often used to describe taking an inventory, has been used in recent feminist literature to describe critical reflections on these benchmarks and anniversaries in order to review our progress.


24 However, the Cambridge Dictionary definition of “take stock (of something)” is “to think carefully about a situation or event and form an opinion about it, so that you can decide what to do”: Cambridge Dictionary, sub verbo “take stock”, online: <dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/take-stock>.

25 See e.g. Charlotte Bunch, “Taking Stock: Women’s Human Rights Five Years after Beijing” in Cynthia Meillon, ed, in collaboration with Charlotte Bunch, Holding on to the Promise: Women’s Human Rights and the Beijing + 5
The time frame from 1995 to 2015 has been the subject of several reflection pieces written by activists and academics who were at various UN Conferences.\textsuperscript{26} I have also written reflections on the use of international human rights mechanisms over an earlier, three-decade period.\textsuperscript{27} (I use the thirty-year period starting from the Nairobi 1985 conference, as this better captures a process framed by three key moments: Nairobi 1985, Beijing 1995, and Beijing review in 2015 (Beijing Plus 20).) In addition, how feminist activists and advocates have used international human rights law over this time period at a local, national, and global level was the subject of two international human rights law intensive courses that I designed and taught at two New York law schools.\textsuperscript{28}

Whether three decades or two, the questions that authors reflecting on this time period are posing in their articles mirror the approach in my inquiry, which looks to see how far we have come and what role the UN system might have played in the process.\textsuperscript{29} An article by law professor Farida Banda in the \textit{Think Piece} series is instructive.\textsuperscript{30} She sets out a number of

\textsuperscript{26} See “Let’s Talk about Women’s Rights: Twenty Years after the Beijing Platform for Action” (2015), online: \textit{United Nations Research Institute for Social Development} <www.unrisd.org/beijing+20-thinkpieces> [\textit{Let’s Talk about Women’s Rights}].


\textsuperscript{28} Intensive seminar: “International human rights law from a feminist advocacy perspective.” I designed and taught this course to Year 2 and Year 3 law students at City University of New York (CUNY) Law School and at Albany Law School, in 2012 and 2013. I was on leave from the PhD program at the time.

\textsuperscript{29} See \textit{Let’s Talk about Women’s Rights}, supra note 26.

achievements in international human rights law for gender equality that she traces directly to the
Beijing conference. Her short article asked the same type of question that motivated my research:
“[a]re UN conferences ‘talking shops that achieve nothing?’”  

That feminists have been using these twenty and thirty-year time frames to reflect on the
work of activism is not new. This thirty-year time frame from 1985 to 2015 has been the subject
of several reflection pieces, as well as in-depth scholarship. The only distinguishing feature is
that I have not yet seen any project that includes detailed interviews with this number of women
who were active over those decades, asking questions that are similar to mine in this study. As
Banda does in her article, my interviewees list the many accomplishments of the Beijing
conference specifically, and the past three decades, while acknowledging the challenges still
ahead. My project is unique in its stitching together of contemporary interviews with the
historical outline, visually contextualizing the stories, and then extrapolating my findings and
situating them in current debates.

Since 1985, thousands of women’s rights activists have participated in UN meetings with
the expectation that their engagement would improve gender equality at home. This belief in the
effects of UN engagement culminated in 1995 with the drafting of the global policy documents,
the *Beijing Declaration* and the *Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)*, when the fourth, and last,
UN World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. The governments of the world signed on
to this commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment in 1995. Reviews of the *BPfA*

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31 Ibid.

32 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, Fourth World Conference on Women, 16th plenary meeting, 1995, online: *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*  
are mandated to occur every five years. In 2015, the UN reviewed the twenty-year period since 1995 to determine global progress towards those commitments.

I have spent those same thirty years, from 1985 to 2015, working on women’s human rights issues. Over time, I became concerned about the degree to which our advocacy and policy activism seemed to be increasingly done at an international level. Was this a result of a frustration with an inability to realize change at home? I wondered whether this was in turn resulting in the neglect of activism at the local level within our own countries. I believed that developing national women’s movements and strong independent feminist organizations were more effective ways to guarantee women’s equality rights. I thought that doing so was more important than spending our limited resources of time, energy, and money going to UN conferences. Was I overly concerned? Was this opinion shared by others? What was the relationship between the engagement of national and local feminist organizations with the international, multi-lateral processes of the UN and our work domestically? Was I just disconnected because I myself was working globally and not in my own country of Canada? Was there an active systemic conspiracy? Was I merely ill-informed, or just a cynic?

1.4 Which Side of the Street?

At the heart of my inquiry lies the intersection of power, institutional access, and movement building. My concern was the efficacy of feminist advocacy – particularly when issues related to gender inequality are only explored amongst ourselves in spaces removed from the centers of hegemonic institutional power, which are often the root cause of reproducing social violence and inequality in the first place. In other words, I was concerned that advocating for women’s rights at international conferences and meetings would not get us very far if we do not simultaneously build local grassroots movements that not only interrogate the power
relations responsible for causing inequality, but that also respond through strategic action at the local level.

There is a relevant anecdote that can help illustrate these specific concerns regarding the relationship between the local and the global when it comes to feminist advocacy and achieving changes to public policy. The UN Headquarters is located in New York City on 1st Avenue between East 42nd and East 45th. Directly across the street from the UN at 44th Avenue is a building called the Church Centre. The Church Centre houses many NGOs, ranging from faith-based organizations to women’s rights groups such as the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP). The presence of civil society in the form of a wide range of NGOs is critically important at the UN and throughout UN processes, since the participation of civil society is the only way that member states can be held accountable.

In March of each year, to coincide with International Women’s Day, the CSW meetings are held inside the main UN building at the UN Headquarters. To be able to attend them requires accreditation – UN credentials showing that the permit holder is part of an organization that has been approved by the UN to attend the meetings.33 Many women come to New York at that time to meet with each other and to be part of the large and exciting gathering of women’s rights activists. Not all of them have accreditation and many never actually get inside the UN. Side events, workshops, panel sessions, and speaking events are held in various non-UN buildings ranging from the YWCA at 52nd Street to the Armenian Cultural Centre at 35th Street. Those of

33 Consultative status provides NGOs with access to not only ECOSOC, but also to its many subsidiary bodies, to the various human rights mechanisms of the UN, ad-hoc processes on small arms, as well as special events organized by the President of the General Assembly. Currently, 4,045 NGOs enjoy consultative status with ECOSOC: see “How to Apply for Consultative Status” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: United Nations <www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/civil-society/ecosoc-status.html>. 
us who attend CSW spend a lot of our time running those New York city blocks. Over the years, I have heard women talk about “being at the UN”, but many of them were going to sessions in the Church Centre only. They never had accreditation or permits to enter the UN. They, personally, and their organizations had spent large sums of money, usually received from donors, to fly to New York, stay in a New York hotel, and be “at the UN.”

I vividly remember a specific session on VAW held at the Church Centre in March 2013. One of the speakers was an Irish women diplomat, a very passionate speaker, reminding the women there that the UN was made up of member states, and that to effect change at the UN, and through the UN system, women had to be lobbying and pressuring their own governments. They would achieve very little just talking to each other on “this side of the street.” Her concern echoed my own unease, unarticulated at the time. Was this attendance an effective use of our time, money, and resources? What changes resulted from our annual migration to CSW? Were there more effective ways of organizing and movement building that could better serve women in changing policies and institutions in order to address systemic inequality both at the local and the global level?

1.5 Research Questions

These inchoate questions became the motivation for my PhD research. For over thirty years, women’s rights activists have participated in the UN and in other multilateral processes and mechanisms in order to develop better strategies to promote and defend women’s rights. This project provided the opportunity to step back, pause, and reflect on that time.

34 In 2015 I ran between 52nd and 33rd so often, with my camera equipment, that I got plantar fasciitis.
There is one guiding question for this dissertation: How do a selection of feminist activists of a particular generation, engaged in international feminist activism for decades, view the effectiveness of international multilateral processes in furthering women’s equality rights at the local, national, and global level? That is, my project takes up examination of how a generation of feminist activists, working across sectors, views the attainment of gender equality through the UN system. Thus, the guiding question for this dissertation is both determinative and reflective of my selection of interviewees.

I am interested in not merely what concrete changes in law reform or policy on gender equality and women’s rights these activists were involved with or helped usher in but on their personal assessment of the value, both specific and general, of such international feminist involvement.

I was interested in finding out about the perceptions and experiences of these specific actors in both international and local arenas during the critical twenty-year review process of the BPfA in 2015. This research seeks to find out whether certain global feminist activists, who have engaged in these processes, see their work reflected in policy or legislative changes at global, national, and local levels. If so, how? Were there specific policy outcomes, laws, or political changes that they could attribute to this engagement? What did that engagement look like?

I also wanted to determine whether these specific selected women believed that engaging in advocacy and activist work was more effective at either the international or local level in addressing gender inequality, or whether they believed that both were equally necessary and interdependent in striving towards the common goal of gender equality.

As this project demonstrates, amongst a number of trends that emerged, four key themes were observable across this set of interviews. These are:
1. This particular group of women’s rights advocates strongly believe that engaging with the UN system has strengthened women’s organizations and coalitions through networking and the sharing of strategies and ideas;

2. The activists I interviewed think that their work has resulted in changes to the UN system itself and to international law and policy on issues of women’s rights, especially violence against women;

3. They believe that the work of activism and advocacy must be done at both the international and local level in order to have the greatest impact on women’s lives. Almost all of the women interviewed for this project saw work at the local and the global as integrated, integral, and equally necessary;

4. They argued that global and local perspectives work together as part of a dynamic, intersectional paradigm. Different actions and objectives call for different strategies, both globally and domestically.

The findings of my interviews communicate an assessment of activists’ international work that is encouraging, although not simply so, of continued feminist involvement in the various apparatuses of the UN.

To arrive at these answers, I had to go on a journey. I followed the route from Nairobi to Beijing, metaphorically and academically, taking my baggage along with me. My baggage is defined as who I am and where I come from; it is my identity, with its intersectional nuances, and my constant self-reflection. I recognize that “[a]ll researchers … carry intellectual, emotional

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35 I went to neither of those places for the actual research, but I did go to Bangkok, New York, Geneva, Kampala, Melbourne, and The Hague.

and political baggage with them.” To that extent, I will engage in much more autobiographical detail than would be found in a typical PhD thesis. As a feminist conducting a feminist project, I wanted to be vigilant in my self-reflexivity. My research question started me off on a process of exploration into not only the theory and praxis of the issues at hand, but also into the research process itself and my place in it. How could I undertake academic research into a process that I myself was actively engaged in? Could or would this be a valid endeavor? Was it ethical to interview colleagues and friends for my research? As a practicing feminist, I knew that the personal is political. I concluded that I could carry out this research as long as I was scrupulous in my reflective process and vigilant about my own biases.

I then went around the world to ask a few of the participants in the women’s transnational feminist movement, whom I purposively selected, what they thought about attending those UN “talk shops.” I posed my questions to activists who have been working for the past few decades on women’s rights. I chose to conduct my interviews on video and to present my research findings as a film that would supplement and inform my written findings and conclusions. I felt that the best way to accurately present the voices of the women I was going to interview would be to present them speaking for themselves on camera. I took my little handheld Sony video camera with me to ask some of the women who had been, and still are, involved in the international struggle for women’s equality what their opinions were about my concerns. My choice to present the women on film allows for the “characters” to speak for themselves. A film provides a much more immediate presence of the women than a traditional written thesis alone.

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37 See *ibid.*

38 According to Wikipedia, a “talk shop” is a place where discussion is the main activity, with no decisions or actions necessarily arising from the discussion, and may be considered unproductive, bureaucratic, or self-serving: see “Talk Shop” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: *Wikipedia* <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talking_shop>. This aptly describes what I often felt at UN conferences.
The audience can see and hear them, making their conversation more realistic, and their opinions more articulate, and the experience of them more intimate.

I posed questions that were directed at eliciting opinions about the achievements, challenges, and opportunities in working with the UN system and attending the UN Women’s Conferences. I asked all my interviewees what they thought had been the gains made in achieving women’s equality from the perspective of these international meetings. What UN processes did they participate in? What do they see as the key accomplishments of the transnational feminist movement? How have they used international law and UN mechanisms? What were concrete examples they could point to in their countries where women’s rights were being implemented?39

1.6 United Nations Processes

Many women’s rights activists have work that is deeply embedded in differing aspects of the UN. They may participate in the drafting of specific language, undertake advocacy in order to get countries to ratify mechanisms, attend a wide range of meetings, monitor the obligatory reporting of compliance with various conventions, or lobby member states to endorse resolutions. All of these activities are part of what I refer to in this thesis as UN processes. By this I mean the broad array of UN conferences, conference platforms and frameworks, UN Commissions, UN treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),40 and UN resolutions such as the Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)41 which ensures women’s participation in peacebuilding.

39 The full list of questions is found in the Appendices. It must be noted that these are open ended questions.

40 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979, 1249 UNTS 13 (entered into force 3 September 1981) [CEDAW].

The year 2015 marked a number of significant anniversaries. First, it was the thirtieth anniversary of the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985.42 The 1975 Mexico City Conference announced the declaration of the Decade for Women.43 The mid-decade conference took place in Copenhagen in 1980.44 However, the Nairobi conference was the first time that feminist organizations gathered from all over the world in such large numbers to share experiences and activist strategies, and find points of common cause and areas of disagreement.45 During Nairobi, they were able to begin partnerships with larger NGOs and formed regional and global coalitions that emerged from the women’s forum.46

The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies,47 adopted by the conference, provided a blueprint for action until the end of the century that linked the promotion and maintenance of peace to the eradication of VAW throughout the broad spectrum of society. The document urged member states to take constitutional and legal steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination

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43 The CSW called for the organization of the first world conference on women to coincide with 1975, International Women’s Year. The World Conference was subsequently held in Mexico City where 133 governments participated, while 6,000 NGO representatives attended a parallel forum, the International Women’s Year Tribune. The purpose of the first NGO Forum was to provide a critical alternative to the official conference, to network and educate, and to lobby UN representatives. The first NGO forum established a precedent followed at all the subsequent women’s conferences. The International Women’s Tribune Centre was founded after the Mexico Conference by Anne Walker, one of my interviewees. For her full story, see Anne S Walker, A World of Change: My Life in the Global Women’s Rights Movement (Melbourne: Arcadia, 2018).

44 The mid-decade World Conference of the UN Decade for Women took place in 1980 in Copenhagen with 145 member states. A Program of Action called for stronger national measures to ensure women’s ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in protecting women’s rights to inheritance, child custody, and nationality. This was also the first time that domestic violence was explicitly mentioned in an official document of the UN: See generally “World Conferences on Women” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: UN Women <www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women#sthash.KROeeROE.dpuf>.

45 See interview with Margaret Schuler.

46 See interviews with Margaret Schuler, Florence Butegwa, and Anne Walker.

47 Supra note 42. The report from the conference was endorsed by the UN General Assembly: Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, GA Res 40/108, 40th Sess (1985).
against women, and tailor national strategies to facilitate the participation of women in efforts to promote peace and development. The data presented by the UN to the delegations of member states revealed that the observed improvements had benefited only a limited number of women. The Nairobi Conference was mandated to seek new ways of overcoming obstacles for achieving the three objectives of the decade: equality, development, and peace.

Transnational feminist movements have emerged globally since those watershed days of Nairobi in 1985. Grassroots women’s organizations partnered with larger NGOs and formed transnational networks as well as regional and global coalitions. Some examples are the Asia Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD), the Women, Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), and the Comité de América Latina y El Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (CLADEM), which were formed after the Women Law and Development forum in Nairobi. The strategic activism of these movements has made transformational contributions to global knowledge, power, and social change in historical, political, economic, and social contexts for the lives of women and girls, increasing gender equality and women’s empowerment, and contributing to the development of women’s human rights.

The year 2015 was a significant end to my time frame for this thesis because it was the twentieth anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which has


49 See interviews with Margaret Schuler, Florence Butegwa, and Alda Facio.

50 By transformational I mean change which aims to address systemic inequalities and shift the power relations that maintain the status quo.

also been the last world conference on women. The NGO Forum of the Beijing conference was the largest gathering of women from around the world. The NGO forum is held at UN conferences at an adjacent venue where the majority of the NGOs participate. Far fewer of them have accreditation to attend the official UN conference. Never before, or since, have 47,000 women gathered together from across the world to debate and discuss issues of women’s rights. The twelve critical areas of the BPFa reflect language around most areas of women’s human rights: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, the media, the environment, and the girl-child.

Having signed on to the BPFa, most countries in the world have institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks that set out laws, policies, and programs aiming to advance women’s equal status and protect women’s rights. Canada joined the consensus in adopting the Beijing Declaration and the BPFa and its commitment was outlined in the Federal Plan for Gender Equality. Status of Women Canada attributes the antecedents of its policy on Gender Based Analysis to the BPFa. Despite the enormous resistance to enshrining some critical feminist

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53 The NGO Forum was held at the same time as the official conference, with 30,000 participants. It was held in Huairou, miles outside of Beijing, in the mud and rain, as the Chinese government wanted it to be as inaccessible as possible.

54 See Report of the Beijing Conference, supra note 52.

55 There were 17,000 participants at the official conference and 30,000 at the NGO Forum.

56 On January 21, 2017, an estimated 5 million people, mostly women, marched around the world to mobilize and to protest the misogyny, hatred, racism, and patriarchal fascism of the Presidency of Donald Trump. Of course, this was neither a conference nor a UN event. But it was great fun!

57 For the full text of the Platform for Action, see Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, supra note 32.


59 See ibid.
principles in the BPfA, it remains the most comprehensive global standard of women’s equality because of the number of countries that signed on to the Platform.\textsuperscript{60} There are of course glaring omissions and gaps, the primary one being that sexual orientation was never included in the Platform, despite intense organizing and lobbying.\textsuperscript{61}

While the enormous change promised in the framework never materialized, the intent of the drafters of the BPfA was to shape the programs of governments and those of the international and national agencies who are mandated with the advancement and empowerment of women. However, my project is not an exercise in evaluation and I am not making a comparative study. Nor am I developing case studies on the implementation of national legislation. I merely sought the opinions of certain women regarding what they themselves believed to be the most effective strategies for creating change. Their opinions and experiences informed my findings and my conclusion and were presented in summary in the film.

Attending the CSW in 2015 was a critical aspect of my project.\textsuperscript{62} The CSW is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is a functional commission of the UN Economic and

\textsuperscript{60} Charlotte Bunch, Mallika Dutt & Susana Fried, “Beijing ‘95: Global Referendum on Human Rights of Women” (1996) 16:3 Canadian Woman’s Studies 7 [Bunch, Dutt & Fried]. See also interview with Charlotte Bunch.


\textsuperscript{62} The entity UN Women was formed in 2010 by the merger of four women’s agencies at the UN (Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)). Its main roles are to support the inter-governmental bodies, such as the CSW, in their formulation of policies, global standards, and norms; to help member states to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it; and to forge effective partnerships with civil society. It serves as the Secretariat for the CSW where it organizes special preparatory events and briefing sessions for member states and is responsible for organizing substantive papers, such as the Review and Appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, based on government reports: See “Ten Year Review and Appraisal” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: UN Women <www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/49sess.htm>. On the history of UN Women, see generally “A Brief History of the Commission of the Status of Women”, online: UN Women <www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>.
Social Council (ECOSOC), and it was established by a Council resolution in 1946. The CSW is instrumental to the UN system in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. One of its most significant achievements was the drafting of CEDAW in 1979.

The call for a Treaty for the Rights of Women emerged from the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. On December 18, 1979, the UN adopted CEDAW which established a critical reference point underscoring the importance of gender equality as substantive equality, with an explicit focus on reducing discrimination against women.


64 The UN definition of “gender equality” refers to

the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys ... Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a ‘women’s issue’ but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development


65 Formal and substantive equality have different implications for women’s rights and neither, on its own, is adequate to overcome historical disadvantages. Substantive equality goes beyond formal equality, taking differences into account, and focuses on results. For Canadian feminists the language of equality evokes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, and specifically section 15 with its references to substantive equality. Canadian feminist health activists Lorraine Greaves and Nancy Poole have written a practitioners text on gender, where their definition of equity goes beyond equality saying, “equity is a more elusive goal. Equity means opportunities are even and may mean special treatment, rules, laws, or programs for some. Equity is a more complex goal”: Lorraine Greaves & Nancy Poole, Gender Unchained: Notes from the Equity Frontier (Victoria, BC: FriesenPress, 2017) at 4. I do not go into this debate in the thesis.

CEDAW outlined a specific definition of discrimination against women\(^67\) and called for states to protect against gender discrimination and rights violations.

The promulgation of CEDAW, which essentially “codified international legal standards exclusively for women”, was the culmination of the global women’s human rights movement up to that point.\(^68\) CEDAW takes a holistic approach to women’s equality by integrating political and civil rights with economic, social, and cultural rights. In so doing, CEDAW expressly recognizes that abuses unique to women, such as discrimination against – or termination of – employed women simply because they become pregnant, constitute human rights violations.

CEDAW provided the blueprint for the drafting of the \(BPfA\).

I attended a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) meeting in Geneva in 2015. I had been invited to attend the Global to Local (G2L) training session conducted by the International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), an organization I have worked with over the years.\(^69\) The G2L program trains NGOs on how to develop shadow, or alternative, reports and how to present them before the CEDAW Committee.\(^70\) Many of the interviewees in this project work extensively with CEDAW

\(^{67}\) CEDAW, \(supra\) note 40, art. 1, defines discrimination of women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”


\(^{69}\) My interviewee Shanthi Dairiam founded IWRAW-AP, based on the original IWRAW founded by my interviewee Marsha Freeman. Interviewee Lesley Ann Foster is the current chair of the board of IWRAW-AP. See generally “International Women’s Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <www.iwraw-ap.org/>.

\(^{70}\) Shadow or alternative reports are usually written by NGO coalitions and presented to the monitoring bodies on international human rights treaties. I have been involved in this process over the years, and I coordinated the first shadow report to CEDAW with a coalition I organized when at METRAC through the urging and support of Professor Rebecca Cook. Thankfully FAFIA and the BC CEDAW coalition more than ably continued this work.
or were formerly or are presently on the CEDAW Committee. Notably interviewee Alda Facio describes her “love affair” with CEDAW, calling herself a “CEDAWista”.\(^71\)

In 1996, ECOSOC expanded the mandate of the CSW, deciding that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing the progress and challenges in the implementation of the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities. In order to review the progress that governments had made in the twenty years since the adoption of the *BPfA*, the 2015 CSW was held in New York. This gathering became the de facto largest women’s gathering at the UN since 1995.\(^72\) The progress, achievements, barriers, and gaps of the implementation of the *BPfA* were the focus of the Beijing Plus 20 review in 2015 (known as Beijing +20 or B+20). There was a review meeting in Bangkok in December 2014, where the Asia Pacific region prepared their input for the New York CSW in March 2015. I attended both of those meetings. Many of the participants in the Beijing +20 review had attended both the Nairobi and the Beijing conferences. They were my target interviewees, since I was most interested in talking to women who had been involved during that same thirty-year period of 1985 to 2015. The Nairobi and Beijing conferences and their declarations and plans of action have been so fundamental in putting gender on the agenda within the UN that it is critical to take stock of both the achievements and challenges of these conferences during their anniversaries.

Women’s rights activists have also been very active in “putting gender on the agenda” at a number of other UN World Conferences on issues such as the environment,\(^73\) sustainable

\(^{71}\) See interview with Alda Facio.

\(^{72}\) UN Women has described the events of Beijing +20: “The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: *UN Women* <beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>.

\(^{73}\) The Earth Summit took place in Rio in 1992. Recognizing the need to move women’s rights into more mainstream development and human rights conferences, the World’s Women Congress for a Healthy Planet was convened in Miami in 1991, organized by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), to
development, \textsuperscript{74} human rights, \textsuperscript{75} anti-racism, \textsuperscript{76} climate change, \textsuperscript{77} reproduction, \textsuperscript{78} and other issues.

In addition, women’s rights activists have worked on drafting language for General Assembly resolutions, \textsuperscript{79} Security Council resolutions, \textsuperscript{80} numerous International Conventions, \textsuperscript{81} and Treaty

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prepare for Rio. The result of this meeting of 1,200 women was the Women’s Action Agenda 21 that greatly influenced the final version of Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Summit. I attended the Miami meeting on behalf of Women for a Just and Healthy Planet, the Toronto forum founded by Angela Miles at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). I did not attend Rio in 1992, but I did attend Rio+20 in 2012 with a small grassroots women’s climate change organization.

\textsuperscript{74} During the negotiations for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), women were very active in ensuring that there was a stand-alone goal on gender equality. SDG 5 says: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. “Sustainable Development Goals” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform <sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

\textsuperscript{75} The UN World Conference on Human Rights took place in Vienna in June 1993. An important rallying cry by the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights mobilized grassroots groups to put pressure on their respective governments and on the United Nations to recognize that “women’s rights are human rights.” These 90 some NGOs drew on relationships developed in the two previous decades of organizing around many issues. Part of the campaign was a worldwide petition demanding that women’s human rights were adequately addressed at all levels of the proceedings and that immediate action was necessary in recognizing gender-based violence as a human rights issue. The final document of the Vienna conference addressed gender-specific human rights violations throughout the entire document rather than assuming “sameness.” See Charlotte Bunch, “Women’s Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Revision of Human Rights” (1990) 12:4 Hum Rts Q 486 [Bunch, “Women’s Rights as Human Rights”]. This slogan is most often attributed to Charlotte Bunch who certainly used it long before Hillary Clinton (who made the famous speech at the Beijing conference). See also Laura Parisi, “Feminist Praxis and Women’s Human Rights” (2002) 1:4 J Hum Rts 571 [Parisi, “Feminist Praxis and Women’s Human Rights”].

\textsuperscript{76} For example, the conference on the review of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in South Africa in 2001.

\textsuperscript{77} The UN COP, or Conference of the Parties, has annual meetings on climate change.

\textsuperscript{78} In 1994 the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo. Delegates affirmed that women’s equality and empowerment was a global priority and critical to eradicating poverty and curbing population growth. Importantly, women’s reproductive rights and health were seen as a key component of women’s empowerment. One of my interviewees, Lee Lakeman, who works at Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter and Canadian Sexual Assault Centres, attended as an adviser to The Hon Allan Rock, Minister of Justice and later the Canadian Ambassador to the UN.

\textsuperscript{79} The full General Assembly of the UN is where all the member states meet. For example, since 2000 the General Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions and requested the preparation of reports on various forms of violence against women. In 2006, following the launch of the Secretary-General’s in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women, GA Res 61/143, UNGAOR, 61st Sess, UN Doc A/RES/61/143 (2007).

\textsuperscript{80} See e.g. UNSCR 1325 on women, peace, and security. There is a suite of UNSCRs on women, peace, and security. More details will be provided in the next chapter, but a quick review of UNSCR 1325 can be found at the PeaceWomen website: “Security Council Resolution 1325: Introduction” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom <www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1325>.

\textsuperscript{81} See e.g. CEDAW, supra note 40.
International Conventions, Treaty Bodies, World Conferences, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and their mechanisms “have all modified international relations in the midst of which the condition of women has gained importance.”

Since women’s rights activists have been involved at every level of these international processes, it was necessary for me to expand my focus beyond the Nairobi and Beijing conferences and the CSW meeting in 2015. These processes all have various mechanisms of implementation, as well as different reporting procedures. Some conventions, such as CEDAW, have Optional Protocols\textsuperscript{84} that create individual complaint mechanisms. There are also Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council; these refer to independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The system of Special Procedures is a central element of the UN human rights machinery and covers all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social.\textsuperscript{85} An example of a Special Procedure would be the UN Special Rapporteurs, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, or the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} For information on the CEDAW Committee, see “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: \textit{United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights} \hspace{1mm} <www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/CEDAWIndex.aspx>.

\textsuperscript{83} See Gladys Acosta Vargas, “The CEDAW Committee 20 Years after Beijing: Progress in the Defence of Women’s Rights and Pending Challenges” (3 July 2015), online: \textit{United Nations Research Institute for Social Development} \hspace{1mm} <www.unrisd.org/beijing+20-acosta> [Vargas].

\textsuperscript{84} Optional Protocols to human rights treaties are treaties in their own right, and are open to signature, accession, or ratification by countries who are party to the main treaty.

\textsuperscript{85} As of August 1, 2017, there are 44 thematic and 12 country mandates: see “Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: \textit{United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights} \hspace{1mm} <www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/sp/pages/welcomepage.aspx>.

\textsuperscript{86} I refer to the “herstory” of the Special Rapporteur later in the thesis. The Working Group is currently chaired by one of my interviewees, Alda Facio.
Feminist activists all over the world have been very involved in what is known as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) movement. War, conflict, terrorism, and violent extremism have different consequences for women and girls. In the face of these devastating events, women all over the world are leading movements for peace and to rebuild communities. There is strong evidence that women’s participation in peace processes contributes to a longer and more resilient peace after conflict. Despite this, women have remained largely invisible, and most often are excluded from the peace processes and negotiations. Several UN resolutions have been adopted addressing women, peace, and security and these will be discussed later in Chapter Two. Women’s peace activists believe that this women, peace, and security agenda has transformative potential to help societies escape cycles of conflict in order to create inclusive and more democratic peacemaking.\(^{87}\) Women’s agency, voice, and capacities are critical to local dialogues, better policies, and more equitable peace deals. Women’s peace activists see this process as fundamental to turn gender inequality into gender justice.

I attended the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)\(^{88}\) as a member of WILPF’s International Section and in my capacity as Director of the IWRP.\(^{89}\) WILPF is the oldest women’s peace organization in the world and its work focuses on the WPS agenda. Much of the focus at the WILPF congress was on Security Council resolutions such as UNSCR 1325 on women, peace, and security. The resolution affirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction and


\(^{88}\) See generally “Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <wilpf.org>.

\(^{89}\) See generally “International Women’s Rights Project” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <www.iwrp.org>.
stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.\textsuperscript{90} It also calls on all parties in conflicts to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. UNSCR 1325 provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for member states and the entities of the UN system.\textsuperscript{91}

In response to unrelenting and persistent pressure from feminist NGOs working on women, peace, and security, the Security Council has adopted eight further resolutions which make up what is called the “suite” of the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions.\textsuperscript{92} They guide work to promote gender equality and strengthen women’s participation, protection, and rights in conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction contexts.\textsuperscript{93} These resolutions are relevant to my interviews because a significant number of my interviewees are engaged in work on women, peace, and security.

1.7 Challenges

There were several distinctive challenges that arose while carrying out my project. They could be described as logistical, technical, and budgetary. Recording my interviewees on camera was a significant challenge. Finding venues with enough light and not too much noise conducive


\textsuperscript{91} See ibid.


to videotaping is hard to do at the UN. I do not possess the skills that are necessary for professional camera work and sound production. However, I was able to overcome these limitations with the realization that I was not producing a professional documentary film and that the quality I was able to achieve would be sufficient for the purposes of this dissertation. I did not have the personal budget to purchase professional equipment or hire professional crew.

Budgetary considerations also limited the travel I was able to do. Nevertheless, I was able to attend some UN meetings in my capacity as a UN consultant, giving me access to the UN premises as well as to the meetings. This access allowed me to arrange to interview women in Geneva and New York at UN meetings. I was able to attend one of the preparatory meetings in Bangkok before the CSW B+20 meeting. I had been working in Bangladesh for the UN on a women and climate change project so I took a return flight through Thailand with a stopover. The Director of UN Women in Bangkok arranged for my permit to attend the meeting. After my work for Climate Wise Women and the Environmental Women in Action for Development in Uganda, I was able to conduct two interviews there. Due to a one-month fellowship at the Faculty of Law at University of Wollongong in Australia, I was able to conduct two interviews in Melbourne.

This project does not delve into issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, which is abbreviated as SOGI in UN vernacular. There is no consideration of gender as a non-binary spectrum. I interviewed women whom I personally know to be lesbian, but I did not directly ask any of my interviewees their sexual or gender identity. Some interviewees raised the rights of lesbians and transgender people, as recent and important gains, but this was not a focus of my

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94 Roberta Clarke, former Director of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research (CAFRA), had become the head of UN Women for Asia Pacific. Roberta and I first met at a Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) conference in Ottawa in 1992, when she was part of the first international delegation to attend a LEAF conference, along with five of my South African colleagues.
Furthermore, a very serious limitation is that this project does not address specific issues facing Indigenous women. This point reflects the larger injustice of the exclusion of Indigenous women from UN processes for a variety of reasons. It is perhaps not surprising that my project replicates this exclusion. While this is a serious problem, it was unfortunately not one that I was able to rectify in my interviews.

1.8 Significance of the Research

This unique project encompasses two interlocking forms. The thesis integrates the written text of a traditional dissertation with videotaped interviews presented in a documentary film that is almost two hours in length. The video is a narrative that ensures that the authentic voices of the women were both seen and heard. I felt very strongly that presenting my interviews this way would allow for more authentic voices and thus allow for less mediation of the content. I hoped that my contribution could build on the success of my LLM thesis, the documentary film *Constitute!*, and serve as an educational resource.\(^95\) I understand this part of my research to be a contribution to ongoing feminist activism. In particular, the collection of these women’s narratives presented several key themes and insights into a generation of feminist activists’ engagement with the UN and other international processes.

Dissemination of the knowledge and data will eventually be made available on the IWRP website in an open source format. Links to the film, once it has been cut and re-edited, as well as to other websites, the bibliography, and literature review resources will be added to the website in March 2020 on the occasion of Beijing +25.\(^96\) Each interviewee will be given a copy of her

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\(^95\) The film, extra footage, study guide, and resources can be found at www.constitute.ca.

\(^96\) However, in order for the film to be useful it will undergo another major edit after the completion of the PhD. The version of the film *Constitute!* is also much shorter than the version accepted for my LLM thesis.
interview, in the event that she could find it useful for her own oral history. This aspect in particular is part of my participatory process. Like me, many of the interviewees are in the last phase of their lives and careers and are also reflecting on their work on women’s rights over the decades. A few of them are currently writing their biographies or books about the history of their organizations and they expressed an interest in receiving the interview footage to assist with their own memory projects.97

1.9 Organization of Chapters

This first chapter is the Introduction to my dissertation. I have introduced the readers to my personal motivation for conducting this research and provided a brief overview of the pertinent aspects of the UN system, including background and processes. I concluded by identifying some of the challenges and limitations as well as the contribution that I am making.

Chapter Two of this thesis is the Literature Review. My theoretical approach helped to determine my research methodology. I identify with the characterization that Ronit Lentin describes, wherein my “data, theory and methodology” were “shaped by and, in turn, constructed not only an epistemology, a feminist way of knowing, but an ontology, a feminist way of being in the world.”98 This chapter reviews the three areas of literature that helped me in that shaping. I first review feminist theory on social movements, transnational feminist movements, and what role autonomy plays in such movements. The second “tangible” component reviews some of the literature on the few actual documents, resolutions, and platforms – what I refer to as the supplementary characters, or supporting actors, in the film. Third, I review what I refer to as the

97 Shanthi Dairiam, Margaret Schuler, and Florence Butegwa, to name a few.

“intangible” aspect of UN processes – the international law on women’s human rights – both soft and hard law. I review how “women’s rights” became “human rights.” Throughout this chapter, I refer to interviews with some of my interviewees as well as references to their own work as authors and scholars. It is not usual to include results or findings within a literature review, and I try to clarify why I have included results from the interviews in this chapter.

Chapter Three is the Methodology Chapter. This chapter reviews the methodology that was carried out for the interviews in this project. Like Ronit Lentin, “I decided that my methodological path would be qualitative, feminist and reflexive.”\(^9^9\) First, I address the research and the thinking that led to the development of the questions posed to the interview subjects. Second, I review the selection of interviewees, who they represent, and who is excluded from my sample. I also review the methods used to locate the interview subjects, including why the decisions were made to attend the international meetings where the subjects were interviewed. Third, I go into detail about why and how the medium of videography was used to carry out the interviews. This explains how the final editing decisions were made regarding the interview footage and “B-roll”.\(^1^0^0\) I also discuss how the footage was coded and analyzed. I situate all of this within feminist research theory.

Chapter Four is the Film itself. This film was made to present the findings of the film in a more engaging way than just the writing up of the transcripts.

Chapter Five is the written Findings section. This chapter combines the findings as portrayed in the film with the findings of my research from the interviews, as well as my own supplemental research.

\(^9^9\) See \textit{ibid} at 1.
\(^1^0^0\) “B-roll” constitutes photographs, other film footage, and anything other than the actual interviews themselves.
Chapter Six is the Conclusion. This concluding chapter comments on the significance and contribution of the research reported, the strengths and limitations of the research, and any potential applications of the research findings. This chapter provides a reflective analysis of the research and its conclusions in light of the current knowledge in the field. Drawing on the findings, I present some possible future projects. I indicate how the research might have some implications for women’s movement events planned for 2020, specifically the Beijing Plus 25 review and the next planned World Conference on Women, or Women’s Forum.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Review

2.1.1 The Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with an overview of the literature that I reviewed for my dissertation. This literature helped to frame the questions I asked the participants, provided a theoretical framework for my thinking, and placed thirty years of the women’s international human rights movement in context. Most of the literature reviewed here was authored during that same thirty-year time period. Initially I was not going to include literature written after the end of 2015, the time that my interviews were completed. However, the world has changed a great deal since then, and given how delayed this dissertation was in coming to fruition, I have chosen to review literature written, published or unpublished, until the end of my writing – December 2018. I trust that this will assist my project to be as current and relevant as possible.  

For my research, three foci stand out: feminist movement building; the use of UN documents, processes, and spaces; and international human rights law. This chapter is organized into a number of sections and sub-sections to reflect this focus. This Section 2.1 introduces some of the issues that are examined in this chapter. Section 2.2 introduces social movement literature and explores how the rise of autonomous women’s organizations led to the transnational feminist movement. One of the most significant outcomes of this movement was the prioritization of activism against VAW on the global level and, more specifically, on the agenda of the UN. Indeed, the issue of VAW can be seen as a significant catalyst that strengthened and reinforced

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101 I took several leaves of absence from the PhD program due to my teaching obligations as well as a number of UN missions.
the international feminist movement. Activism around this issue was central to organizing and networking at the UN level. As seen from my findings, this activism was singled out by my participants as the most important and key achievement of the movement of the last thirty years.

Section 2.3 then looks at how transnational feminist movements have historically used the mechanisms and processes of the UN, including specific UN documents, within contemporary scholarship in the field of international human rights law. I refer to these as the “tangible” aspects of those processes. I also look at the UN as a number of physical sites of activism, a space of both exclusion and inclusion. My participants describe UN meetings as a necessary space that not only serves as their meeting ground, but that also facilitates the exchange of strategies, experiences, and resources. The actual UN documents, treaties, conventions, and platforms themselves are also “actors” in my project, since they energize transnational feminist movements by addressing key initiatives and issues on structural and legal levels. These documents and conventions play minor, but important, roles as the “supporting actors” in my story.

I review literature on international human rights law in Section 2.4, with a focus on the development of the doctrine of “women’s rights are human rights.” I refer to the acquisition of “rights” as an “intangible” aspect of UN processes. Some of the scholars I review acknowledge that seeing women’s rights as human rights is one outcome of working with the UN system, while others disagree with the location of women’s rights in a human rights-based framework. I discuss this tension in the literature in this section.

Prior to the actual review of the literature, I introduce the two preliminary, parenthetic patterns dispersed throughout the chapter. The first explains why the reader will find representations and quotes from the interviewees in the film and from the data set, which is not
typically included in a literature review. The second contextualizes the era of the thesis research within the parameters of neoliberalism.

2.1.2 A Caveat: The Voices in this Chapter

Like my whole project, my literature review is somewhat untraditional. According to the University of British Columbia:

A literature review is an evaluative report of information found in the literature related to your selected area of study. The review should describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify this literature. It should give a theoretical base for the research and help you (the author) determine the nature of your research.102

Rather than simply follow this guideline, my literature review also includes insights from the participants themselves, the interviewees. I have blended a traditional understanding of a literature review with the unique nature and structure of this non-traditional dissertation. While there is a written chapter on the findings or results, I include references to the interviews in this chapter. I know this is not a traditional way to write a literature review, but neither is the use of a film to supplement – and in some ways present – the analysis chapter typical.

Feminist movement theory and women’s human rights scholarship not only shaped the questions in my thesis, but also guided my approach to how I analyzed the interview data. The literature I look to is rich, complex, and dense. And it is also living. So much of what happens in feminist activism is urgent. While theory is critical to our approaches to tactics and strategies, more often than not this finds its way into academic literature long after our actions have been carried out. We write about what happened, in the past; we do not write about the process while

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102 See “Introduction to Literature Reviews” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: University of British Columbia <guides.library.ubc.ca/litreviews>. See also Jill Jesson, Lydia Matheson & Fiona M Lacey, Doing Your Literature Review: Traditional and Systematic Techniques (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011).
we are protesting, protecting, acting. I want the written literature to meld with the voices of the
women who are speaking living “herstory.”

2.1.3 The Labyrinth of Neoliberalism

Before proceeding with the Literature Review, I want to situate this chapter within a
contextualization of neoliberalism in order to convey the socio-economic and political
ideological background for the time frame of this thesis. Neoliberalism was not a consistent
theme culled from my interviews, but it was a topic that came up in discussion with several of
the activists I spoke with and its significance must be acknowledged as a frame of the
dissertation.

The thirty-year time frame of my project saw two parallel political processes take place.
While obviously there were more than two, the ones I single out here are the rise of transnational
feminist activism and the rise of neoliberalism. I see neoliberalism as a labyrinth, a quagmire that
entraps us all and a maze that we cannot find our way out of. I struggled to develop a working
definition of neoliberalism that would be adequate for this exercise in contextualization, but I
have not engaged thoroughly with the literature per se so it is not a topic of my review chapter.

I begin with a working definition by Wendy Brown, who takes her starting point from
Michel Foucault’s Birth of Biopolitics. Foucault analyzes the extension of market principles into
the state and beyond into civil society and everything social. Brown’s point is that
neoliberalism uses a rational notion of the market to dominate all domains and activities. Even

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103 Throughout my process there is an ironic tension between the necessity of writing a traditional dissertation to complete my PhD with the necessity of having to distinguish my work as innovative and non-traditional, and the line between them is often blurred.


where money is not an issue, which is even more evil, neoliberal ideology configures human beings as market actors who are always and everywhere “homo economicus”.

Neoliberalism, then, is not simply about markets, money, or social class. It is a condition under which a raw economic rationality is applied to all forms of human activity and becomes the basis of a certain style of political governance – and even a certain style of governance project.

In their work on transnational feminism, Linda Carty and Chandra Mohanty characterize neoliberalism not only as an ideology, but also as a political and economic practice. Carty and Mohanty describe how the so-called liberation of capital markets turns over every aspect of the economy to free market operations. As a result of neoliberalism, governments typically tighten the reins on social programs, which in turn most often results in increased poverty for the most marginalized, especially women. Carty and Mohanty observed that the environment in which feminists in both the North and the South have been functioning over the last thirty years is one where market principles govern women’s lives. The feminist movement is no stranger to adverse economic, social, and political environments. Many of the current generation of feminists came of age in the ‘80s and ‘90s when neoliberal policies were gaining ground.

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106 See ibid at 31.


108 See ibid.

109 One of the most noted scholars writing on this issue is Nancy Fraser: see Nancy Fraser, Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis (London, UK: Verso, 2013). For a most contemporary extension of Fraser, see Naomi Klein, No is Not Enough (Toronto: Vintage, 2018).

For activists who engage with the systemic structures of the powers-that-be, there are ever-present dangers of cooptation and direct, constant attack. They must navigate a current that would rather see them conforming, making concessions, and espousing a liberal hegemonic stance than strategizing for direct action according to a radical set of political ideals that seeks to undermine oppressive power relations at the structural level.

Without delving into this critique, it is important to introduce the side road of feminism that is neoliberal. “Neoliberal feminism” is simplified, reinterpreted in market terms, and validates hierarchies. It is only a coating of shellac on corporatism. Neoliberal feminists espouse the language of empowerment, but of individual empowerment, about women rising to the top.111 Women’s equality therefore is promoted for its instrumental value because it is necessary to achieve global goals rather than as an end in itself.112 Nancy Fraser articulates this nicely by saying that “[a] movement that started out as a critique of capitalist exploitation ended up contributing key ideas to its latest neoliberal phase [and] turned a sow’s ear into a silk purse by elaborating a narrative of female empowerment.”113 Perhaps that purse was Gucci.

Transnational feminist movements have been resisting the neoliberal agenda throughout the three decades that span my project’s timeline.114 The first section below reviews these movements.

111 See Catherine Rottenberg, “How Neoliberalism Colonized Feminism — And What You Can Do about It”, The Conversation (23 May 2018), online: <theconversation.com/how-neoliberalism-colonised-feminism-and-what-you-can-do-about-it-94856>. Some might argue that UN Women embodies this idea that there can be such a thing as neoliberal feminism. I would be one of them.

112 Examples abound: UN Women’s Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP) with its long list of corporate sponsors; studies by McKinsey and the World Economic Forum; books by corporate “leaders” like Cheryl Sandberg, and so on.


114 As noted in the Introduction, there is a caveat to my project – I speculate that my findings as I write this in 2018 would be demonstrably different given the election of Trump, the rise of right wing populism, and the increasing
2.2 Feminist Movement Building

2.2.1 Introduction

There is a vast body of literature on social movements, social movement theory, and social impact theory that constitutes an important starting point for conducting a deeper inquiry into transnational women’s movements and feminist movement building. Social movement theory engages with the questions of why social mobilization occurs, the forms under which it manifests, and the potential social, cultural, and political consequences.\textsuperscript{115} Renowned democratic theorist Iris Marion Young argues that social movements are critical for advancing inclusion and democracy.\textsuperscript{116} Although Lauren Edelman cautions us that all kinds of activities related to specific issues can be described as “movements,” they do not have to be what we would term progressive.\textsuperscript{117} For this I will employ the definition used by Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, that progressive policies and actions aim to improve the status and opportunities of a historically disadvantaged group (in this case, women).\textsuperscript{118}

In the following section of my literature review, I focus on a number of subtopics. I first review the literature on “women’s movements” and “feminist movements,” differentiating them and explaining why I choose the term “feminist.” I then extend this choice into my justification for the preference for the term “transnational feminist movements.” Throughout these subtopics I


\textsuperscript{116} See Iris Marion Young, \textit{Inclusion and Democracy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).


review feminist praxis through the work of Srilatha Batliwala and a major global feminist organization, the Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID).\textsuperscript{119} In order to develop some of the characteristics of the transnational feminist movement I turn to the critical role that VAW has played as outlined in the path-blazing work of Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon.\textsuperscript{120} Two important foundational concepts of autonomy and intersectionality are extracted from feminist theory. I then raise two more peripheral issues pertinent to my analysis: the role of the NGO as the institutionalization of movements, and the role of local movements as part of the transnational one.

\subsection*{2.2.2 Feminist Social Movements}

In order to find a framework to examine social movement theory, I turn to the praxis of feminist activism. I apply the idea of praxis as characterized by Paolo Friere where reflection and action are to be directed at the very structures that need to be transformed.\textsuperscript{121} Feminism serves as both a theoretical and practical strategy for combining activist engagement with democratic concerns for social justice and equality. For me, this means grounded feminist activist theory, or the theory of feminist activism; as opposed to feminist theory alone. This also refers specifically to activist-based theory, developed by feminists who are actually doing movement building.

Intrinsic to the feminist paradigm as outlined in the Introduction is a rejection of a false dichotomy between university-based, peer-reviewed academics and activists working within feminist movements. I am therefore broadening my literature review because, while a traditional literature review is supposed to examine current debates within academic literature, doing so

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] See Batliwala, \textit{supra} note 18.
\item[121] See Paulo Friere, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (New York: Continuum, 2000). My interviewee Margaret Schuler worked with Friere when she lived in Chile during the 1970s, and his work was the foundation for her approach when she founded Women, Law & Development International.
\end{footnotes}
would exclude critical perspectives from the “field” that enrich the debate. Thus, the feminist epistemology that informs this dissertation wholly encompasses both theory and practice as it merges the academy with the front lines. My doing so is guided by my understanding and carrying out of feminist praxis.

Srilatha Batliwala is an India-based social activist, women’s rights advocate, feminist scholar, and author of many books on the empowerment of women who has been engaged in linking grassroots activism to scholarship, advocacy, teaching, research, and training. She is the Scholar Associate for AWID. This thirty-year old organization is the largest global feminist membership organization and grounds its advocacy in feminist theory. As a movement building organization, its theoretical approach is vital because Srilatha Batliwala’s research has been extremely formative in how many contemporary feminists, including myself, look at social movement theory.

One of AWID’s programs, the “Building Feminist Movements and Organizations Initiative,” carried out grassroots research to develop case studies intended to advance the understanding of feminist movements in the current global context. The purpose of this program was to apply that analysis to strengthen the capacity of women’s organizations to better

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122 Srilatha Batliwala is also a Fellow of Women’s Policy, Research, and Advocacy at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, India.

123 See generally “Association for Women’s Rights in Development” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <www.awid.org>.

124 In addition to AWID, Just Associates (JASS) works globally to help build and strengthen women’s movements: see generally “Just Associates” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <justassociates.org/>. As an illustration of the networks, or some might say cliques, Cindy Clark, current Co-Director of AWID, used to work with JASS. The founder of JASS, Lisa Veneklausen, used to work for Marge Schuler at Women, Law & Development International, as did Cindy, and as did I. Alda Facio works with the JASS program in MesoAmerica. One of my interviewees, Kunthea Chan, is the JASS Director in Cambodia. Charlotte Bunch is on the Board of AWID. I make these references to illustrate the small network.

125 See Batliwala, supra note 18.
carry out AWID’s mandate to catalyze, support, and sustain feminist movement building.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, their definition of social movements is expressed as “an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action.”\textsuperscript{127} Batliwala further delineates certain characteristics of social movements as having a visible constituency base or membership where the members are organized in either formal or informal organizations and engage in collective actions and activities using a variety of actions.\textsuperscript{128} In a previous iteration of her work, she defines a constituency as “a specific group that explicitly or implicitly benefits from social, economic or political change, and has a clear political or change agenda.”\textsuperscript{129} Most often, this constituency has defined strategies and actions to bring about the change they seek.\textsuperscript{130} While my project is not primarily concerned with analyzing movement building, AWID’s discussion is instructive because my participants discuss the creation and expansion of a transnational feminist movement as a key outcome of their work with UN processes.

Amrita Basu defines women’s movements as those that call attention to “the far-reaching expressions of women’s agency and activism.”\textsuperscript{131} In order to develop more “analytic precision,” she refers to Maxine Molyneux’s “distinction between women’s practical and strategic interests.”\textsuperscript{132} Practical needs generally involve issues of condition or access. Strategic gender

\textsuperscript{126} See \textit{ibid} at iv.
\textsuperscript{127} See \textit{ibid} at 3.
\textsuperscript{128} See \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{130} See \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{132} See \textit{ibid}.
interests concern the position of women and men in relation to each other in a given society. Strategic interests may involve decision-making power or control over resources.133 Molyneux says that women’s strategic interests emerge from gender subordination, or gender inequality, and these notions stem from a feminist analysis.134

What then is a “feminist movement” and how can it be distinguished from other social movements, including “women’s movements?”135 Simply, a feminist movement is based on feminist principles, such as those outlined in Chapter One, while a women’s movement per se need not be. Amrita Basu’s distinction is germane. She defines women’s movements expansively, “defined by their constituencies, namely women, but [they] can address a variety of goals.”136 Building on this, Myra Max Ferree and Aili Tripp suggest that women’s movements comprise of women organizing to achieve social change.137 However, this should be expanded even further in order to answer the following questions: Social change for whom? And about what? How is this feminist? Identifying the answers to these questions is of fundamental concern because they engage with the foundational nature of movements, who they serve, and what they wish to accomplish.

Feminist movements share a gendered power analysis of women’s subordination and contest political, social, and other power arrangements of domination and subordination on the

133 See ibid.
135 It is important to note that there are many women’s movements, not just one. For a more nuanced discussion see Batliwala, supra note 18.
136 See Basu, Women’s Movements in the Global Era, supra note 131 at 4.
basis of gender. Srilatha Batliwala presents a more nuanced description that feminist movements are where women mobilize around struggles where the goals are specific to gender equality outcomes – for instance, eradicating VAW, ending female genital mutilation (cutting), or expanding equality of access to citizenship, land, or inheritance rights.\(^\text{138}\)

Again according to Batliwala, feminist movements would have all the features of the movements mentioned earlier, but in addition they would have certain particularly feminist characteristics. These would be features such as having an agenda and political goals based on a gendered analysis, such that the focus is on women’s rights, women’s equality, and women-specific issues; women are the majority of the movement’s membership; feminist values are core; and women’s leadership is central.\(^\text{139}\) I would also add that the protection of women-only spaces is crucial. Batliwala does not claim that all existing feminist movements would have all of these characteristics, but she attempts to frame an ideal prototype.\(^\text{140}\) Feminism occurs in a variety of forms. Despite the differences and variation between feminist movements, there are certain core ideas that make movements feminist. Feminism as activism challenges systems, seeks to change women’s gender subordination, and aims to subvert hegemonic power relations by agitating for change on multiple levels – including the structural.\(^\text{141}\)

### 2.2.3 Transnational Feminist Movements

My research time period was a time of exponential growth for transnational feminist activism. As I will explore throughout the thesis, the thirty-year period from the Nairobi conference in 1985 to the process known as Beijing +20 saw feminists rise up to address

\(^{138}\) See Batliwala, *supra* note 18 at 6.

\(^{139}\) See *ibid*.

\(^{140}\) See *ibid*.

\(^{141}\) See Ferree & Tripp, *supra* note 137 at 9.
inequality and discrimination in every corner of the globe.

Transnational feminist movements operated on many levels throughout those decades. One is the intergovernmental policy level that is linked to the UN world conferences on women (1975–1995) and the global conferences of the 1990s and their follow-up processes. Another is the networking within and across national, regional, and international borders in support of specific grassroots struggles to achieve feminist goals. Others used networking and movement building with other global movements in an intersectional approach that is organized for human rights and political and economic transformation.

A few studies focused first on networks rather than movements. For example, well known “network scholars” Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink define transnational advocacy networks as those including governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as other regional and international bodies.142 Valentine Moghadam’s Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks is an important study of women’s transnational advocacy networks.143 In it, Moghadam refers to transnational feminist networks as “the organizational expression of the transnational women’s movement guided by a set of emerging ideas and goals … referred to as global feminism”.144 But while networks are not movements, she also characterized transnational feminist networks as “mobilizations that advocate for women’s participation and rights while also engaging critically with policy and legal issues and with states, international organizations, and institutions of global governance.”145


144 Ibid at ix.

145 Ibid at 5.
My participants tended to use the term “transnational feminist movement” when describing women coming together at UN conferences from around the world. These are women who identify as feminists and work – at least the overwhelming majority of them do – within women’s organizations that boast the characteristics that Batliwala outlined. My participants would all agree that women’s rights and gender equality are the core concerns of transnational feminist movements. They are linked in complex ways to wider global, regional, national, and local struggles for social transformation by challenging systems that have oppressed people for discriminatory reasons.

I adopt Jan Jindy Pettman’s sensible reason for using transnational instead of international, reserving the term “international” for state-to-state or interstate relations. Transnational better captures the way national women’s movements work in coalition with international women’s organizations, coalescing in a transnational movement focused on women’s equality and human rights.

What then are these movements? Recent scholarship has helped to reveal the importance of transnational feminist movements and to define their characteristics. In 2015, Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt published an extremely comprehensive text, weighty at almost one thousand pages, *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*. The volume highlights the contributions transnational feminist movements have made and are making in a multiplicity of spaces: intergovernmental and governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, communities, and academia, and in change processes in such areas as human

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rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, citizenship struggles, social justice, religious fundamentalisms, gender-based violence, land and environmental struggles, peace and antimilitarism, and feminist economics.

Their introduction describes a transnational feminist movement as:

the fluid coalescence of organizations, networks, coalitions, campaigns, analysis, advocacy and actions that politicize women’s rights and gender equality issues beyond the nation-state, particularly from the 1990s, when deepening globalization and new communications and information technologies (ICTs) enabled feminists to connect readily with and interrogate their localities and cross-border relations.148

The chapters in that text examine transnational feminist movements’ challenge to hegemonic discourses and systems that have oppressed huge numbers of women and men because of their gender, geographic location, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, class, caste, religion, age, ability, and sexuality, among other reasons.

There is, of course, other transnational feminist literature that is not referenced in this dissertation, including chapters from The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements; however, a more comprehensive review is not necessary for the purpose of situating my interviewees within transnational feminist movements or to reflect on their particular opinions.149

148 Ibid., at 4.
2.2.4 Violence Against Women

As noted throughout my interviews, violence against women (VAW) was a key organizing focus for the transnational feminist movements that emerged at UN conferences.\(^{150}\) Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon conducted a groundbreaking study of policy change on VAW in 70 countries over 40 years.\(^{151}\) Their study tracked policies on men’s VAW as well as feminist mobilization around the issue from 1975 to 2005, a time frame which overlaps with most of my project’s thirty years.\(^{152}\) This global comparative study of unprecedented scope conceptualized the definition of a progressive social policy as government action on VAW.\(^{153}\) Their definition of a progressive social policy is one that is distinguished by the specific intention of empowering or improving the status of groups that have been historically marginalized, excluded, and stigmatized.\(^{154}\) They concluded that it was “the autonomous mobilization of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts, not leftist parties, women in government, or national wealth,” that was the critical factor accounting for policy change.\(^{155}\) Their 2012 study focused specifically on VAW. They have now expanded their framework and data set into a

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\(^{150}\) See interviews with Florence Butegwa, Margaret Schuler, Charlotte Bunch, Joanne Sandler, and Gladys Acosta Varga.


\(^{152}\) See ibid.

\(^{153}\) See ibid at 552. In a previous work, Weldon stressed that it is not just the existence but the autonomy of women’s groups (independent of political parties) that is important for influencing policy. She argued that descriptive representation of women in political processes does not significantly improve substantive representativeness. Rather, “where women’s movements interact with effective policy machineries, I should see greater responsiveness to violence against women”: see S Laurel Weldon, Protest, Policy and the Problem of Violence Against Women: A Cross-National Comparison (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002) at 1167 [Weldon].


\(^{155}\) See ibid.
An earlier study by Jacqui True and Michael Mintrom examined one hundred and fifty-seven country case studies and found that transnational networks at the UN global women’s conferences, who had local linkages to international women’s NGOs, showed a strong association with the adoption of national institutional mechanisms designed to promote gender equality. While this study focused on the political momentum and societal pressure to get UN institutions to adopt “gender mainstreaming,” it points to the same findings as Htun and Weldon expressed – that these mechanisms and policies are only adopted through the activism of the transnational feminist movements. I did not include in this review the extensive literature on “gender mainstreaming,” but in brief it was a global strategy for achieving gender equality by “mainstreaming” gender into institutions, programs, and policies that was developed in the mid-1990s and included in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The definition and naming of VAW came out of ongoing political struggles from women’s movements, which over the past 40 years have redefined VAW as a serious problem affecting all women: “To create a social movement, it is essential to develop a name for the problem.” Naming this specific problem was the single most important achievement of the

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156 See Htun & Weldon, The Logics of Gender Justice, supra note 16.


158 See True & Mintrom, ibid.

159 For an explanation, some history, and a critique, see Caroline Moser & Annalise Moser, “Gender Mainstreaming since Beijing: A Review of Success and Limitations in International Institutions” (2005) 13:2 Gender & Development 11.

transnational feminist movement, according to my interviewees. Feminists have been organizing movements and resistance around this issue all over the world in their own countries at least since the 1960s. Emerging around the same time in many places all over the world, national feminist movements began to influence each other in addressing forms of VAW through the creation of anti-violence services and demands for law reform.161

Despite this, however, activism focused on VAW was invisible in the international arena until the 1980s.162 Weldon noted in 2002 that “violence against women is rarely raised as an issue, much less as a priority, without pressure from feminists.”163 As my interviewees confirmed, when women come together to discuss their priorities as women, the problem of violence comes to the fore.164 This is why the issue of VAW was first articulated by and diffused from women’s autonomous organizing. This is true even among progressive social justice organizations and human rights groups.165

Batliwala, in answering her own question – “Why Do Movements Matter?” – concedes that it is possible that changes in, for example, sexual and reproductive rights, may have occurred without movements, by using advocacy, research, activism, and so on.166 We cannot do a

161 The feminist anti-violence movement first began in the 1960s and 1970s in North America and the UN with the opening of women’s shelters; local organizations and coalitions were formed at the same time in the global South – GABRIELA in the Philippines, Mujeres para la Vida in Chile, organizations in India and Bangladesh focused on dowry killings, women’s groups in South East Asia working with comfort women in Korea, and so on. The first international tribunal on crimes against women was held in 1976 in Brussels with 2,000 women from 40 countries, talking about all forms of violence: family violence, wife beating, rape, prostitution, female genital mutilation, murder of women, persecution of lesbians. See Keck & Sikkink, supra note 142 at 175–76.


163 Weldon, supra note 153 at 27.

164 See Keck & Sikkink, supra note 142; Weldon, supra note 153.


166 See Batliwala, supra note 18 at 7 [emphasis mine].
controlled study to verify this, but her concession really only confirms what feminists believe: that it is the transnational feminist movements that have put this issue on the global agenda. She articulates a fundamental tenet essential to my project, that UN policies “such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action, or the recognition of women’s rights as human rights, or policy changes at the national level recognizing women’s equal right to education, health care, employment, and access to credit” all resulted from organized lobbying by women’s organizations, feminist activists, and participants involved in collective action. She has defined this effectiveness as the result of organizing and mobilizing by feminist organizations that comprise the movement, not necessarily the organizing of and by the women most affected or marginalized. In other words, it is the advocacy carried out by the representatives of the feminist movements at the UN level, she argues, that has resulted in these noticeable changes.

2.2.5 Autonomy

The concepts of autonomy and bodily integrity are fundamental to feminist analysis and women’s rights. Bodily integrity is the inviolability of the physical body and emphasizes the importance of personal autonomy and the self-determination of human beings over their own bodies. Perhaps there was nothing more central to the early notions of women’s liberation than having power and control over our own bodies. Protecting our bodies from violence and ensuring a modicum of control over our health and reproductive rights have been described as a pivot for the larger women’s movement.

167 See ibid.
168 Although it could be argued that the most marginalized are too preoccupied with trying to survive to be politically active.
170 See Greaves, supra note 21.
Therefore it is not surprising that a key component of influential feminist movements is that they must be autonomous. By defining an autonomous feminist movement as a form of women’s mobilization that is devoted to promoting women’s status and well-being independently of political parties and other associations that do not have the status of women as their main concern, Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon found that “the presence of a strong, autonomous feminist movement is a statistically significant predictor of governmental action to address violence against women”. Other contemporary feminist scholars such as Shireen Hassim have argued that these movements are one of the most important determinations of achieving women’s equality, describing them as independent, as well as autonomous. Autonomous feminist movements are uniquely able to drive change because they “articulate social group perspectives, disseminate new ideas and frames to the broader public, and demand institutional changes that recognize these meanings”. Amrita Basu argued that women’s movements have been the most successful when they engage the state without abdicating their own identities. They are powerful, according to Catherine McKinnon, because they challenge male privilege and male domination. They can decide their own forms of organization and struggle and influence policy and legislative change from the perspective of substantive equality.

172 See Shireen Hassim, Women’s Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) at 98.
174 See Basu, Women’s Movements in the Global Era, supra note 131 at 4.
2.2.6 Unlocking Intersectionality

The recognition of intersectionality implies that women do not inherently share common interests or perspectives. Richa Nagar and Amanda Swarr define transnational feminisms (plural) as an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can attend to intersectional approaches, interweave critiques and self-reflexivity, and grapple with complex and contradictory processes.177 The term “intersectionality” has been broadly taken up in many locations by scholars, advocates, and activists and use of this term “has become voluminous and multidisciplinary.”178 Feminist critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited with being the first to use this term in 1989, and since then it has become an enormously important contribution to feminist theory.179 Some scholars see intersectionality as the most important theoretical contribution to date of feminism.180 Intersectionality holds that categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality are independent and interrelated. It is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity of experiences in the world which are shaped by many factors and are mutually influencing.

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180 See McCall, ibid.
A recent engaging and creative look at intersectionality is a book authored by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, entitled simply *Intersectionality*. They begin their volume discussing intersectionality as an analytic tool to solve problems by giving people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. They note that despite the heterogeneity of the term, “it is the one that is increasingly used by stakeholders who put their understanding of intersectionality to a variety of uses.” It is interesting to note that in 2016 Hill Collins fully adopts the term “intersectionality.” However in 1990 she was employing the term “interlocking” in her influential book on black feminist thought. This terminology was used by Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack in 1998 where they pointed out that systems of oppression such as capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy all rely on one another in complex ways: “This ‘interlocking’ effect means that the systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on.”

The operational definition of “intersectionality” I use is culled from Johanna Bond’s article “International Intersectionality” where she carries out an extensive review of how the international human rights community is beginning to explore ways to analyze women’s human rights that do not represent “women” as a monolithic category, within which, inter alia, race,

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182 See *ibid* at 11.
183 See *ibid*.
class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation tended to be absent or irrelevant. Bond illustrates how Western/Northern activists have begun to consider the ways that sexism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression intersect in people’s lives. This “intersectionality” requires “reconceptualizing women’s rights at the theoretical level and restructuring organizations and institutions at the practical level.”

But we must be continually vigilant and self-critical. Another roadblock that women activists face is with each other, in our own movements. While Johanna Bond wrote her tour de force “International Intersectionality” some fifteen years ago, her caution about our inability to “accommodate a complex, nuanced understanding of human rights violations” is still germane today. It is still true that the narrow notion of women’s human rights “does not adequately reflect the experience of women within minority racial or ethnic communities, lesbians, women with disabilities, or other women who may experience discrimination or human rights violations as a result of both gender and another ground.” This is particularly true for women with disabilities. Under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there is a section specific to women. The ten-year review of the Convention was held in 2016 with a focus on

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186 Bond, supra note 68 at 74.
187 See ibid at 75.
188 See ibid at 76.
189 See ibid at 73.

**Women with disabilities**

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.
women, coordinated by UN Women. Some lip service has been paid to the issue since 1995 and Beijing. However, one disability rights advocate, Meenu Sikand, sees very little change since 1995 and no demonstrable intersectional approach when it comes to disability.

I will use two anecdotes to illustrate this. The IWRP organized a panel session for the CSW on women with disabilities. Three of my colleagues were panelists. Two of them are wheelchair users. There was a huge snowstorm in New York. Our panel was scheduled at a remote location, the Armenian Cultural Centre on 35th Street, at six pm on a Friday evening. One panellist had to take a bus from Washington DC with her chair as all flights were cancelled. The battery on the power chair died due to the cold. We could not push the wheelchairs on the snowy sidewalks. We had to wait three hours for transit that could accommodate the chairs. When we got to the venue, late, we found that they had scheduled our session in the ONLY non-wheelchair accessible room in the centre. All of this occurred despite our multiple requests to have the panel in an accessible location close to the UN. Had anyone actually attended our session other than our own group, we would have had ample discussion about the lack of access for women with disabilities at the UN. My film interviewee Meenu Sikand, founder of Accessibility for All in Canada and the disability advisor to the IWRP, was one of those panelists, and her interview documents the fact that less than 200 women with disabilities (that is, visible, self-defined, and


192 For Meenu Sikand being interviewed in Beijing in 1995 with other women with disabilities at the conference, see “Disabled Women: Visions and Voices” (last visited 30 December 2018), online (video): Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities <mn.gov/mnddc/parallels2/one/video08/women.html>.

193 They are Charlotte McClain Nhlapo, former member of the South African Human Rights Commission and current Senior Advisor to the World Bank on Disability, and Meenu Sikand, long-time Canadian disability activist, founder of Accessibility for All, and former Treasurer for NAC, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women Canada.
disclosed) attended the Beijing conference. She was one of them. This experience was more than a metaphor about the ongoing lack of intersectionality within the multilateral system. I raise these lengthy examples to illustrate how important it is to stay vigilant about our own privilege, ignorance, and arrogance.

In 2017 I lobbied to have Meenu attend the Canadian Women Peace and Security Network (WPSN) consultation hosted by Global Affairs Canada, because they had not invited any disability advocates. This consultation was to examine the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 submitted by the Canadian government, as part of Canada’s pride of place for their (our) Feminist International Foreign Policy (FIAP). Clearly, without the perspective of women with disabilities, their issues would be left out of the NAP equation. They did not even think about that. The consultation dinner for 100 participants was held in a venue in Ottawa that was not wheelchair accessible. Meenu and I dined alone. Since then, the WPSN makes sure that women with disabilities have a voice at their consultations.

A 1996 issue of the *Australian Feminist Law Journal* reported on women’s impressions of the Beijing conference. One woman with disabilities made this comment:

We have strong state, national and international Women with Disabilities movements and the time has come for us to step loudly, clearly into the general national and international women’s movements. Issues of oppression of women with disabilities need to be taken up by all women, in the same way that we all take up issues such as racism, classism, and homophobia. We too represent that diversity. The hardest question for me to ask other feminists is how can our issues become something other women are interested in and feel responsible to take up.

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194 See interview with Meenu Sikand, and see Meenu in the film chapter.
195 And VIA Rail, Canada’s only rail line, only has one spot per train for electric wheelchairs, which means that no other companion, colleague, spouse, child, or partner who also uses such a chair could travel at the same time. This is now the subject of an Ontario Human Rights Tribunal case.
Meenu is asking that same question more than two decades later.

I focused this example on women with disabilities because it was a critical issue of exclusion that one of my interviewees raised in her interview, that also linked back to original film footage of her at the Beijing conference in 1995. This does not by any means indicate that I am not aware of other issues of oppression and exclusion such as intersectional issues of class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race, indigeneity, and so on, but this example was the most comprehensive personal experience shared by an interviewee.

2.2.7 Solidarity and Sisterhood, or Not?

There are also critiques of the concept of transnational feminist movements.¹⁹⁷ Some feminists writing from the perspective of the global South, such as Chandra Mohanty, Zehra Arat, and Amal Jamal, have rejected the term “global feminism” as they determine that this term might imply non-existent solidarities.¹⁹⁸ They are skeptical that such solidarity even exists. North-South divides were central in the early international women’s conferences, including Nairobi in 1985.¹⁹⁹ I would argue that it is not the terminology of “transnational” or “global” that

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¹⁹⁹ I remember that there were huge arguments between the women from Africa and American women, particularly African American women as I recall, on the issue of female genital mutilation (which we now refer to as “cutting”). African women were rightfully incensed that women from outside of their continent and culture could tell them what should be done in their own movements. I do not remember whether and how this spilled over into the broader violence against women issues and it is not in my notes or collection of literature from Nairobi.
such feminists see as implying those solidarities, but rather it is the singular form of the word feminism. Perhaps for them the more correct term would be “feminisms.”

The literature I have reviewed in this chapter does not present the evocative critiques of solidarity in feminism that run parallel to the scholarship presented here. Beverly Guy-Sheftall speaks of some of the challenges posed to the transnational feminist movement (the deepening North-South divide, fundamentalisms, materialism, and so on), but she identifies issues that provide common ground for solidarity, especially VAW, poverty, and hegemonic masculinities.200

Johanna Bond also points out that the concept of “international sisterhood” refers to the tendency within the early women’s human rights movement to essentialize and universalize the experience of all women.201 M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have observed that the idea of international feminism embraces an approach where the articulation of many voices to specify an inclusive feminism should call for “global sisterhood.”202 But such calls are often premised on a “centre/periphery model where women of colour or Third World women constitute the periphery.”203 Bina Agarwal uses the argument that there was a growing recognition that women’s groups needed to forge strategic links, using the term “strategic sisterhood.”204 According to Nira Yuval-Davis, transversal politics recognizes the differential power positions among participants in the dialogue, but it nevertheless encompasses these

200 See Carty & Mohanty, supra note 107 at 100-01.
201 See Bond, supra note 68 at 102, n 128.
203 See ibid.
differences with equal respect and recognition of each participant. My interviews suggest that after Nairobi, the various UN NGO forums in Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing have seen many examples of transversal dialogue and cooperation.

However, not everyone sees such cooperation. Chandra Mohanty best illustrates these contradictions. In her earlier work, she refused to elevate gender as the primary axis of power, insisting on the salience of race, class, sexuality, and nationality along with gender. Later, in *Feminism without Borders*, she seeks to create feminist solidarity based not on similarities but on shared political interests in opposing global hegemonic capitalism.

Reflecting on the successful campaigning of different women in the 1990s, Nandini Deo comments that this unification has come at the cost of overlooking the differences between women’s understandings of the causes and solutions of VAW: “The dominance of violence against women as a global feminist agenda framed by and promoted by northern feminists in a non-democratic fashion, and its hegemony over the women’s movement allowed, or forced, feminists to downplay poverty as a feminist issue”.

The focus from the early days of the UN itself by Western feminists was on civil and political rights, not socioeconomic rights. According to Laura Parisi, the liberal feminist ideology prevailed during the UN Decade on Women from 1976 to 1985. She notes that there

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207 See Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, supra note 198.

208 See Nandini Deo, “Indian Women Activists and Transnational Feminism over the Twentieth Century” (2012) 24:4 J of Women’s History 149 at 167 [Deo].

was a developing feminist critique of neoliberalism as early as 1980, but even so there was the slow realization that economic development was equally as important as civil and political rights.\textsuperscript{210} The logic behind the flurry of both feminist theorizing and activism from 1970 to 1985 was that women who lack education, food, property, income, health services, etc. could not fully enjoy/exercise the first-generation rights of civil liberties.\textsuperscript{211} There is a body of literature on the right to development and rights-based development that is relevant to women’s rights but which is outside the scope of this study.\textsuperscript{212}

Feminists in the North were not focusing on neoliberalism and the concomitant increase in poverty for women in the global South. Earlier, Caribbean feminist Peggy Antrobus was more forgiving, describing the global women’s movement generally as a political movement and a process grounded in an understanding of social conditions and an awareness of a rejection of patriarchy.\textsuperscript{213} However, a decade later she stated that “[a] transnational feminist movement needs to be led by women from the South, and to be aware of and concerned about the negative impacts of neo-liberalism.”\textsuperscript{214} My strong belief is that this has been going on for some time and

\textsuperscript{210} See \textit{ibid} at 211.

\textsuperscript{211} See \textit{ibid}.


\textsuperscript{213} See Peggy Antrobus, \textit{The Global Women’s Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies} (London: Zed Books, 2004) at 14 [Antrobus]. Peggy was one of the founders of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and one of the key organizations that put macro-economic issues on the agenda in Nairobi. While I did not interview her in 2015, she was a panellist on the “Feminist Journeys” CSW panel along with Roxana Carillo and Charlotte Bunch that I recorded. The footage of the B roll of Charlotte is from that panel.

\textsuperscript{214} See Carty & Mohanty, supra note 107 at 82.
that transnational feminist activism has been given impetus by the continuing concern over the harsh social impacts of neoliberal policies by the leadership of Southern women’s organizations. For example, their work on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence and human rights has consistently been linked to a strong economic justice platform and these links between global economic justice and women’s rights have been made central to women’s global campaigns.\(^{215}\) Not only do I understand the critique that elite, white, and Northern women are the predominant participants in the UN system, and especially in New York at the CSW meetings, I acknowledge myself as one of those privileged women, and have explained their over-representation in my data set.

Very few authors engage with concerns about Indigenous women or Indigenous women’s relationship to non-Indigenous feminists and feminisms. Most of them omit or marginalize the struggles of Indigenous women for self-determination in their Nations, countries, and the feminist movement itself. Laura Parisi addresses this and she concludes her chapter “Reclaiming Spaces of Resistance: Women’s Rights and Global Restructuring” by reviewing the *Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women*, suggesting that Indigenous women are calling for “transversal politics.”\(^{216}\) Yuval-Davis describes “transversal politics” as having three characteristics. The first is standpoint epistemology, which recognizes that from each positioning the world is seen differently, and “the only way to approach ‘the truth’ is by a dialogue between people of differential positionings.”\(^{217}\) The second is the encompassment of difference by equality.\(^{218}\) And the third is the notion that transversal politics is based on a conceptual – and


\(^{216}\) Parisi, “Reclaiming Spaces of Resistance,” supra note 209.

\(^{217}\) See Yuval-Davis, supra note 205 at 94.

\(^{218}\) See *ibid*. 
political – differentiation between positioning, identity, and values. Feminists who identify as belonging to the same collectivity or category can be positioned very differently in relation to a whole range of social divisions such as class, gender, ability, sexuality, age, and so on. And yet feminists with similar positioning and/or identity can have very different social and political values.  

In 2015, many of my interviewees referenced that attacks on Indigenous women have been increasing exponentially. For example, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement for justice in Canada is one such instance, as are the attacks on the women who are in the leadership in the fight against the extractive industries in Latin America. Such instances highlight the stark differences between feminist activists of different backgrounds and the material realities they face. Exploring how colonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and heteropatriarchy intersect in different and dynamic ways will ultimately help in the creation of effective political strategies that mobilize, agitate, and affect change. Parisi sees Indigenous women pursuing equality across difference by breaking down perceived homogeneity.  

2.2.8 Do Movements Need NGOs?  
I knew that in order to achieve the goals of women’s equality at the global level, the transnational feminist movement had to create NGOs. But this phenomena demanded interrogation. I absolutely agree with the importance of autonomously resourced feminist organizations. My caution initially stemmed from my participation in the Canadian feminist anti-violence movement during the 1990s when I worked for a national organization. The mid-
1990s, which coincided with Beijing, saw the beginning of the “professionalization” of anti-violence organizations. This meant that they no longer operated on a radical agenda of the women’s liberation movement. Furthermore, in order to receive funding and participate in the state’s agenda on VAW, most often a law and order agenda, organizations had to incorporate into the existing hegemonic socio-economic structure and register through the bureaucratic process. This resulted in a form of credentializing, when the state and its agencies determine who was to speak on behalf of whom. This also determined who would be funded. And who would not.

The parallel to this in the global South has been analyzed by Meshina Desai and Nancy Naples. Their concern is that not only was the movement deradicalized by a focus on law reform, but that an important aftermath of the globalization of this discourse was the increased “NGOization” of Southern women’s groups addressing the issue. I also agree with Desai and Naples when they stress that NGOization, and the concomitant funding issues, have contributed to a decline in radical critique. I experienced this firsthand in Russia in 2002, when I was the Gender Legal Issues Specialist for the American Bar Association’s Central Europe and Eurasia Legal Initiatives (ABACEELI) program in Moscow. The rape crisis centres and women’s shelters were forced by the donors to expand their mandates to work on issues of trafficking because the Russian government was required by the US State Department to increase their border control in the name of protecting women in order to continue receiving massive amounts

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223 See ibid.

224 See ibid. Funding of activist work is an extremely important topic, which I make mention of briefly above, and more in the Conclusion, but space and time prohibit a review of that literature here.
of US international aid money. Most egregiously, I have contributed to this decline by continually accepting paid work from UN agencies to work on issues of gender mainstreaming, a process which has been fundamental to the neoliberal agenda of de-radicalizing feminist organizations.\textsuperscript{225}

In her work with AWID, Srilatha Batliwala also addresses this trend, citing the NGOization of feminist movements as a critical factor that weakens feminist movement building. She observes this trend of feminists founding organizations within the NGO paradigm that is demanded by donors; hence her questioning whether this status can be really autonomous.\textsuperscript{226} Chandra Mohanty and Linda Carty see this as cooptation of grassroots social movements by the donor-driven agenda of the funders.\textsuperscript{227} I think it is much more nuanced and complicated than these positions. I addressed the issue of funding and donors with my participants, but it is not a question on which this literature review focuses. I acknowledge that this is an important related issue, worthy of its own study.

Civil society plays a critical role at the UN when autonomous and independent NGOs are allowed to speak on the floor of the UN or appear before committees, such as the CEDAW Committee. Many of the larger, international NGOs have “consultative status” at the UN. They are more privileged and elite, they know the UN language, have lobbying expertise, and have the funds from international donors. Sally Engle Merry’s study notes the sharp disparity in resources

\textsuperscript{225} As noted, feminist scholars from India have often been at the forefront of these critiques. In addition to the ones cited here, for a detailed analysis of the neoliberal agenda of gender mainstreaming in development, see Kalpana Wilson, “Towards a Radical Re-appropriation: Gender, Development and Neoliberal Feminism” (2015) 46:4 Development and Change 803.

\textsuperscript{226} See Batliwala, \textit{supra} note 18 at 12. My research and interviews for this project included an extensive section on the role of donors and funding throughout this 30-year period. While this is a critical part of the overall picture, it was too much to include in the limited framework of my thesis.

\textsuperscript{227} See Carty & Mohanty, \textit{supra} note 107 at 94.
between the North and South NGOs, particularly because those from the South tend to have their ability to participate in the process radically limited.\textsuperscript{228}

Given these realities, it is vital to (re)consider the role of NGOs in transnational feminist movements and how NGOs fit into a radical feminist agenda of ending VAW as the number one priority. Given the risk of some form of professionalization, cooptation, and/or NGOization of feminist movements worldwide, it appears that some NGOs incorporate feminist agendas into the folds of state’s hegemonic powers. In this process of indoctrination, radical demands of liberation are compromised and replaced with cries for liberal reform. If the goal is an end to VAW and the realization of women’s equality, then it is crucial to analyze the role that NGOs play not only in perpetuating oppressive systems like patriarchy and capitalism, but also in reproducing the unbalanced colonial and imperial wealth disparities between the North and South. On the other hand, is not some change better than nothing? Can compromise produce at least some progressive policies, save the lives of a few more women and children, create a space to build on the incremental gains? There are no simple answers to these questions, but they represent the interplay of the ongoing debate amongst and between feminists around the world.

\textbf{2.2.9 What About the Local?}

In this section, I examine the link between the global and the local\textsuperscript{229} and how this relationship impacts local, activist-represented movements and global coalitions in the contemporary discourse on transnational feminist movements.\textsuperscript{230} How do my participants and the


\textsuperscript{229} The expression “think global, act local,” was first used in 1915 in Scottish town planning, and then became a common expression in the environmental movement of the 1970s: see “Think globally, act locally” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: \textit{Wikipedia}: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_globally_act_locally>. Now there is an amalgam of this called “glocal.”

\textsuperscript{230} See e.g. Mohanty, \textit{Feminism without Borders, supra} note 198.
literature acknowledge this link? In many interviews, local feminist organizations working at the national and grassroots levels seemed to be more likely to be able to effect changes in law and policy at home through their activism at the national level rather than continually going to the UN.

Amrita Basu has been an important commentator on women’s movements for over two decades. Her 1995 book *The Challenge of Local Feminisms* analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of women’s movements in advance of the Beijing conference. Reviewing the fifteen years after Beijing, her 2010 book *Women’s Movements in the Global Era* examined the significance of national and international (or global) influences on local women’s movements. Focusing on the power of local feminisms, she argued that feminist movements faced many challenges, including balancing autonomy and alignment in strong national grounding with international linkages. She concluded from her case study of sixteen countries that women’s movements have been most successful when they engaged the state at the national level. The women’s movements that she studied attributed this success to the forging of strong links with other social movements within civil society while maintaining autonomy and their own identities. She also concluded that despite widely different conditions, women’s movements have been most successful in addressing VAW and least successful in challenging class inequities. Although neither have really succeeded in reality. This echoes the convergence of feminist transnational activism and neoliberalism, as Laura Parisi “sights the sites” of

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232 See *ibid* at 3.
233 See *ibid*.
234 See *ibid*.
235 See *ibid* at 2.
neoliberalism in human rights discourse and raises feminist concerns regarding development, violence, and gender. Like Basu, many of the groups that Tripp examined were feminist movements at the national level working to address VAW. Tripp et al’s study focused on African feminist movements in 2009, and their conclusions echoed Htun and Weldon, that only strong, independent, autonomous movements were able to keep national machineries accountable. In both studies, the advocacy and activism of women’s movements were directed at the state, both cross-nationally and historically.

Both Basu’s and Tripp’s conclusions reinforce the Htun and Weldon analysis suggesting that “the impact of global norms on domestic policy making is conditional on the presence of feminist movements in domestic contexts”. The core of these findings has been asserted by UN Women:

Women’s organizing and the strength of their autonomous movements are the strongest predictors of gender equality laws and policies across a range of areas from family law to violence against women and from non-discrimination in employment to childcare services.

As is evident in my film, many interviewees described how working at the UN level allowed them to be more effective advocates at the local level. While Lina Abirafeh is skeptical

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236 See Parisi, “Reclaiming Spaces of Resistance,” supra note 209.
237 See also Kalpana Kannabiran & Ritu Menon, From Mathura to Manorama: Resisting Violence Against Women in India (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007).
239 See Basu, Women’s Movements in the Global Era, supra note 131 at 14.
about the impact of the use of UNSCR 1325 and the suite of the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions\textsuperscript{242} by local women’s groups, she does not deny their importance.\textsuperscript{243} As a fierce supporter of local women’s activism and grassroots organizations, her PhD thesis critiqued how aid intervention for gender equality was done in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{244} Dianne Otto discussed how this suite of resolutions is an instructive example of how the formal institutional affirmation of women’s participation can be a powerful organizing tool for local women’s movements.\textsuperscript{245} For example, under UNSCR 1325, national governments are supposed to develop National Action Plans (NAPs). The process of local organizations developing input for the NAP can itself be a galvanizing and mobilizing tool. At an international level, feminists also create constituencies outside to act as pressure on the UN system to “influence its policies and practices and hold its organs and committees to account.”\textsuperscript{246}

Shanthi Dairiam is a leading expert on CEDAW. She is not only a former CEDAW Committee member but is also the founder of the International Women’s Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP). She references IWRAW-AP’s far-reaching \textit{Global to Local Program} in the film, providing examples of how women’s NGOs have been using CEDAW at the local level.\textsuperscript{247} Jacqui True reviews two case studies in India and the USA on the

\textsuperscript{242} In response to persistent pressure from civil society, the UN Security Council has adopted eight resolutions on “Women, Peace and Security”: see \textit{supra} note 92. The eight resolutions make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. They guide work to promote gender equality and strengthen women’s participation, protection, and rights across the conflict cycle, from conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction. See WILPF, “The Resolutions,” \textit{supra} note 93.

\textsuperscript{243} See interview with Lina Abirafeh.


\textsuperscript{245} See Otto, “Power and Danger,” \textit{supra} note 157 at 104.

\textsuperscript{246} See \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{247} IWRAW-AP has trained women’s groups from over 150 countries.
“localization” of CEDAW and how it can be used in the absence of national laws or policies. In the USA, which is one of only two member states in the world that has not ratified CEDAW, the Cities for CEDAW campaign currently reflects over thirty cities. The aim of the Cities for CEDAW campaign is to “make the global local” and protect the rights of women and girls by passing legislation establishing the principles of CEDAW in cities and towns across the United States.

Prolific scholar Dianne Otto reflects on the use of international law. She sees that ideas that emerge from the work of the transnational feminist movement at the UN can open up new possibilities for local women’s organizing; she even sees these local women developing their own specific gender discourse. But there are enormous challenges. The UN committees are dominated by a few core countries, many of whom will not challenge inequality on issues of development, finance, and trade, all deep systemic causes of women’s poverty and oppression. For example, Russia and China have permanent seats on the Security Council, the UN’s most powerful body. The UN Human Rights Council has member countries such as Saudi Arabia; in 2017 it was shown that nine of the twenty-nine countries in the world accused of gross human

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249 See “About Us” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Cities for CEDAW <citiesforcedaw.org/about-us/>. Cities for CEDAW began in San Francisco as the first city in the campaign, founded by activist Krishanti Dhamaraj, who is now the Director of the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University (taking over from Charlotte Bunch), and the Women’s Institute for Leadership Development (WILD). I had the privilege of working with Krishanti when I was Director of the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence in California.


251 For current membership of the Security Council, see “Current Members” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: United Nation Security Council <www.un.org/securitycouncil/>. I see Justin Trudeau’s “Canada is back” rhetoric as part of their campaign to gain a seat on the Security Council.
rights violations were members of the Human Rights Council itself.\textsuperscript{252} How then do women hope to create any change at all when having to work through or with these countries?

For activists in some countries, regional instruments may be more persuasive a route to pursue. The ability to draw on international or regional standards to support domestic campaigns for women’s rights has always been important. There is a significant body of evidence that once there is a question of ratification of an international treaty, the national agenda becomes focused on compliance of domestic laws with the new international standards.\textsuperscript{253} Kate Lappin is the Regional Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD) coalition; for her, the regional advocacy in Asia that they engaged in was seen to be much more vital for Asian Pacific women. In her interview she noted that women from Cambodia, who could not engage with their repressive government at home, were able to make use of the space that the UN system provided at the preparatory commission (“PrepCom”) in Bangkok and in New York, to lobby, discuss, and advocate.\textsuperscript{254}

\subsection*{2.3 The Tangible — Documents, Processes, and Space}

\subsubsection*{2.3.1 Mapping Continued}

This section explores how activists have used concrete UN documents, conferences, and meetings, as well as the actual physical space of the UN buildings. Hence my description of this section as the “tangible.” My focus is not on debates among feminists about the shortcomings or strengths of the various conferences or documents themselves, but rather how activists have used

\textsuperscript{252} Those countries were Burundi, Egypt, Rwanda, Cuba, Venezuela, China, India, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; see Mythili Sampathkumar, “Nine Members of the UN Human Rights Council Accused of Violating Human Rights”, \textit{The Independent} (21 September 2017), online: <www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/un-human-rights-council-members-saudi-arabia-china-venezuela-abusers-violators-a7958271.html>.


\textsuperscript{254} See interview with Kate Lappin.
them. One of the main themes that emerged from my data collection, the analysis of the interviews, and the literature was the various ways that activists used UN documents (treaties, conventions, platforms, resolutions, and declarations) in their advocacy at both the global and local levels. Therefore, I reviewed the types of international law the women used to achieve what I would characterize as interpreting “women’s rights as human rights.” Their views and writing contribute to understanding the various reasons that women gave for their engagement with UN processes: using documents, declarations, Security Council resolutions, attending UN conferences, and being included in (or excluded from) spaces.

My discussion of the use of the “tangible” then proceeds to the next main section of the chapter on the use of the “intangible,” which is my characterization of the more ephemeral international law.

First, I need to contextualize my use of the word “space.” Doris Buss raises interesting issues about the spatial metaphors that feminists use to discuss international law, and she reviews some of the “literature [that] explicitly recognizes and calls our attention to the constitution of spaces – international, national, local, global, public and private – as a political process.” However, I was struck by how many of my interviewees, when using the term “space,” would gesture to the room, or to the building. They would comment on who was physically permitted to be present in this “space,” hence I include it here.

Several feminist commentators have documented how the history of the UN, its institutions and laws, has been one of exclusion. “From the people who work there, the systems

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255 See Doris Buss, “Austerlitz and International Law: A Feminist Reading at the Boundaries” in Doris Buss & Ambreena Manji, eds, International Law: Modern Feminist Approaches (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2005) 87 at 96. But it is also a system that has excluded the non-elite, particularly the poor and for the purposes of this research, women from the Global South.
it operates, the programs it supports, to the laws it upholds – it is a male system.”²⁵⁶ It is obvious. The UN focus is on security between nation states and humanitarian crises in the aftermath of conflict – clearly not on the rights of women. Despite this, and as noted in the previous section, feminists generally agree that international law is needed as a tool in the toolbox against systemic oppression.

Radhika Coomaraswamy has traced the significant ways women’s rights have altered the substance and the procedure of international law, including “piercing the veil of state sovereignty, rethinking how to deal with non-state actors within the framework of international law and the role of NGOs representing women’s issues playing a key role in recognitions of civil society at international negotiations.”²⁵⁷ Some sounded a note of alarm however, that if women were going to use international and regional human rights machinery, then they would have to enhance their knowledge of law and international law, thus privileging lawyers.²⁵⁸ Understandably, this privileging of the elite would disempower women who were already marginalized.²⁵⁹

Many activists believed that the debates at world conferences and the final documents produced were useful for raising the awareness of governments and for holding governments accountable for their practices.²⁶⁰ Women continued to mobilize in part through being

²⁵⁶ See Manjoo & Jones, supra note 253 at 12. And look at the images in my film!
²⁵⁸ See Keck & Sikkink, supra note 142 at 198.
²⁵⁹ As an example in Canada: when Kim Campbell was Minister of Justice during the Supreme Court of Canada’s striking down the rape law, the drafting of the new sexual assault law, Bill C-49, was organized by Lee Lakeman as a consultative coalition. Of the 60 frontline women who participated, only 10 were allowed to be lawyers.
²⁶⁰ See Keck & Sikkink, supra note 142 at 188.
emboldened by the gains that they were making in women’s equality. This mobilization happened in the lead-up to the conferences in the PrepComs, at the regional meetings, in the local meetings where NGOs prepared their positions, in the coalitions and members’ debates, in the work with their governments to prepare the inputs to the documents, and so on. This happened after the conferences, bringing the Agreed Conclusions and position papers and lessons learned back home, reporting back to constituencies and working with governments to ensure the adoption of new policies and norms. Women were able to focus global attention on issues such as VAW. Often the pressure on governments at the meeting was built into momentum that the women used when they returned home.

This constellation of factors, with the global community ratifying international and regional conventions, created a tipping point where the presence of an international norm may have made governments more likely to adopt policies and laws addressing equality issues such as gender-based violence. Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon comment on this tipping point, that “in such a context it is hardly surprising that so many national governments changed their laws between 1995 and 2005.”

Further complementing Htun and Weldon’s study, AWID conducted an aggregate analysis of a broad range of multi-sectoral strategies utilized by organizations worldwide to address gender-based violence. This analysis found that the most common trend among organizations was to use diverse and multiple strategies, demonstrating an understanding of how


VAW was linked to internalized beliefs and attitudes, public policies and services, women’s disempowerment in the private domain, economic marginalization, and the importance of their presence, voice, and participation in the public sphere.\footnote{See \textit{ibid}.} Most importantly, AWID found that the primary focus of these multi-sectoral strategies was on mobilization and collective activism. Building the feminist movement was a goal in itself, not just focusing on demanding more legal reforms or amendments.\footnote{See \textit{ibid}.} This reinforces the point that Carmen Ortiz-Barreda and Gaby Vives-Cases make in their research, that while achieving gender equality would require the implementation of all the laws and policies that the transnational feminist movement gained through activism and advocacy, these laws in themselves are insufficient to address VAW.\footnote{See Gaby Ortiz-Barreda & Carmen Vives-Cases, “Legislation on Violence Against Women: Overview of Key Components” (2013) 33:1 Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública [Pan American Journal of Public Health] 61 at 72.}

After examining anti-violence legislation worldwide, the authors noted that “most violence against women related laws do not incorporate desirable elements and are significantly limited in terms of their content and application as well as their ability to provide women with integrated treatment for and protection from violence”.\footnote{See \textit{ibid}.} However, the fact that there is such legislation at all is attributed to feminist mobilization. As limited as they are, the reforms resulting from engagement with the international processes that are described in this thesis can be attributed to these thirty years of feminist activism.

\footnote{They found that more than 60\% of the countries formulated violence against women legislation as “domestic violence” rather than focusing on the violence. The authors suggest that this type of “gender-neutral legislation” tends to prioritize stability of family over the rights of women, and can be easily manipulated against women. Only 28 countries included a definition of the four forms of abuse in legislation – economic, physical, psychological, and sexual.}
2.3.2 The Main Acronyms: CEDAW, BPfA, and CSW

Shanthi Dairiam has always seen the work of the CEDAW Committee as encouraging and linking global networks of women’s NGOs that work within the UN.268 Sally Engle Merry refers to the importance of advocacy and organizing in her ethnography on CEDAW where she studied how NGOs created and then used shadow reports. Shadow reports are a way of supplementing or providing alternative information to government reports that are required to be submitted to treaty bodies. The use of shadow reports for organizing and mobilizing at home, rather than in actual legislation or policy lobbying, was a key finding of the initial IWRP publication *The First CEDAW Impact Study*, which reviewed how CEDAW was used in ten countries.269

CEDAW has been used to achieve legal reform in national constitutions, court decisions, and government policy. A few substantive examples are provided here. Johanna Bond’s study outlines countries where constitutional reforms mirror CEDAW provisions.270 In a study for UNIFEM (the UN women’s agency before UN Women), Ilana Landsberg-Lewis illustrates how national laws on sex discrimination, political representation, and citizenship were all based on CEDAW language, and how CEDAW has been used to challenge local customary laws in Africa and Asia.271 A forthcoming book by Lisa Sundstrom, Valerie Spearling, and Melike Sayoglu

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269 Marilou McPhedran et al, “The First CEDAW Impact Study: Final Report” (2000), online: *International Women’s Rights Project* <http://iwrp.org/projects/cedaw/>. I am one of the four co-authors of this study. This project was the beginning of my work with IWRP, for which I am eternally grateful to Marilou McPhedran. My role in this project was foundational for all my subsequent work on CEDAW.

270 See Bond, *supra* note 68 at 77–78, n 22.

reviews multiple decisions on discrimination by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),
the European Court of Justice (ECJ), and the Istanbul Convention (the short form for the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence). They provide robust examples of how CEDAW has been used in the formulation of these decisions.

Sundstrom, Spearling, and Sayoglu also review use of CEDAW by Russian feminists. In their book they quote a Russian feminist lawyer, Valentina Frolova, who notes that not only are the CEDAW decisions more expansive (than those other mechanisms), but that the decisions are “written in lay-persons language … and therefore everything is very well adapted and written to explain why this is discrimination, and it’s clear to everyone.” But aside from the usefulness of CEDAW, the authors caution that “[e]ven victory at the ECHR may seems pointless from the perspective of achieving social change.” This issue of implementation, or rather the lack of implementation, holds true for most victories that the transnational feminist movement has ever made. Jacqui True found that there was a strong association between the presence of transnational feminist networks through their member NGOs, and in particular their presence at UN global women’s conferences, with the adoption of national institutional mechanisms for developing greater gender equality. However, this does not necessarily translate into an increase in equality for women or even more progressive laws.


273 See ibid. The quotation is from Chapter 5: “International Obstacles to Russian Gender Discrimination Cases at the European Court of Human Rights” at 82. Page numbers are from a personal copy of the chapter.

274 See ibid at 50.

275 See True, supra note 248 at 374.
Sally Engle Merry also wondered whether documents such as the BPfA mattered, and how they mattered, concluding that the platforms, declarations, and resolutions do matter. She points out that international documents exert moral pressure and have the legitimacy of international procedures as they define problems and frame social issues in the language of human rights and gender equality. Further, they “provide a language of argument.” Dianne Otto points out another example, describing how the resolutions on women, peace, and security can be a powerful organizing tool for informal local and international women’s networks, creating constituencies that act as a pressure on the UN system to influence its policies and hold its organs and committees accountable.

The global movement gathered steam and resulted in stronger language and clearer recognition of the issue of women’s rights at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. More than one hundred and eighty governments affirmed the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which named VAW as a critical area of concern. The Beijing and Vienna meetings signaled the development of new international norms that have since been widely cited by activists and governments proposing legislation or other action to redress violence. By adopting the Vienna Declaration, governments agreed that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women … and it is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position.”

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276 See Merry, supra note 228.
277 See ibid at 968.
278 See ibid.
279 See Otto, “Power and Danger,” supra note 157 at 104.
280 See Weldon, supra note 153.
281 See Htun & Weldon, The Logics of Gender Justice, supra note 16 at 32.
These influences, however, were mainly felt after the Beijing meeting when the issue of violence was incorporated more fully into the CEDAW process. As noted earlier, the original text of CEDAW did not explicitly mention VAW. Scholars of international norms do not expect norms to have uniform effects across governments. International treaties like CEDAW are unlikely to have many visible effects in those countries that already comply with the directives. 282 Countries that already have policies that conform to treaty requirements are most likely to ratify the treaties. At the other end of the spectrum, countries that seek wider international legitimacy, but that expect difficulties in complying with aspects of these international treaties, will ratify with reservations. 283 Htun and Weldon’s 2012 study found that the mere fact of signing these treaties raised expectations and mobilized citizens. Governments are held to account in public forums such as the CEDAW Committee for failing to adequately honour their commitments. 284

These issues have also been addressed in the field of international relations in examining how institutions are created. Robert Keohane has argued that if states’ self-interests are reflected in institutions (such as the UN) then how those institutions regulate state behaviour requires the question “under what conditions.” 285 This scholarship also acknowledges that nothing is either/or; that activists and movements must engage in the specificity of differing strategies and

282 See generally Beth A Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009) [Simmons].


284 See *ibid* at 557.

tactics, demanding constant flexibility and awareness of the current conditions. This is precisely what feminists have been doing.

I have referred throughout this chapter to ways in which feminists have used international law, particularly when domestic law fails women. Perhaps there are no more poignant, and powerful, examples of this than the routes that Canadian Indigenous women have had to take because of the racist and colonial policies of the Canadian government. The first is the case of Sandra Lovelace, the Canadian Maliseet woman who was stripped of her Indigenous status in Canada because of her marriage to a non-Indigenous man. Her path to justice led her to the UN, thus far one of two Canadian cases under the UN’s Optional Protocol286 to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights287 (ICCPR) that is relevant to women’s equality.288 She was joined by Mary Two-Axe Earley, Jeannette Lavell, and Yvonne Bedard, who all argued under Article 27 of the ICCPR that the Indian Act289 in Canada stripped them of their status. The resulting victory demanded amendments to the Indian Act.290 The story of Sandra Lovelace, who became Canada’s first Indigenous Senator, shows us how international human rights law “has helped to show where Canadian law fails our most vulnerable – Indigenous women and girls.”291

In 2010, the fight for change continued when Sharon McIver and her son, Jacob Grismer, brought a complaint to the UN over the continued discrimination caused by the Indian Act. The


289 RSC 1985, c I-15.

290 The Government responded by amending the Indian Act through Bill C-31. But the fact remains that the Indian Act is still an instrument of racism and colonialism, and attempts to rid Indigenous peoples of this legislation is a fight that continues in 2019.

291 See Fitzgerald, supra note 288.
UN Human Rights Committee subsequently adopted Views in November 2018, released January 2019, which held that, despite amendments to the Indian Act in 2011 and 2017, the Act still creates a distinction based on sex that constitutes discrimination, in violation of the ICCPR.292 Thus, there is still a pressing need for law reform to the Indian Act as well as its eradication.

Another strategic use of CEDAW by Canadian Indigenous women was the Inquiry in 2013 that was initiated under Article 8 of the CEDAW Optional Protocol.293 Under Article 8, upon receipt of reliable information on serious, grave, or systematic violations by a State party of rights set forth in the conventions they monitor (in this case CEDAW), the Committee may institute an inquiry.294 The CEDAW Committee came to Canada to investigate the ongoing crisis and femicide of missing and murdered Indigenous women, where over 1,200 women had gone missing or had been murdered over two decades, with almost no response from the Government of Canada.295 The CEDAW Committee detailed their findings in a report to the Canadian government, which women have been using in strategic advocacy.296


[e]stablishes an inquiry procedure that allows the Committee to initiate a confidential investigation by one or more of its members where it has received reliable information of grave or systematic violations by a State Party of rights established in the Convention. Where warranted and with the consent of the State Party, the Committee may visit the territory of the State Party. Any findings, comments or recommendations will be transmitted to the State Party concerned, to which it may respond within six months.


295 For more information, see “National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: <www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>.

296 For all the details of the reports and submissions, see “The CEDAW Inquiry” (last visited 30 December 2018), Feminist Alliance for International Action <fafia-afai.org/en/solidarity-campaign/the-cedaw-inquiry/>. 
2.3.3 Moving Forward Post Beijing

As I show in my film, not everyone was positive about the outcomes of the Beijing conference. A very thoughtful critique of the Beijing formal outcomes document has been raised by one of my interviewees, Dianne Otto, in her post-Beijing article “Holding up half the sky, but for whose benefit?: A critical analysis of the fourth world conference on women.”297 She gives voice to a critical feminist response to the formal outcomes which will “add to the arsenal of analyses and critiques which emerged from the NGO Forum”.298 Otto argues that the language associated with the theme of equality dominated the Beijing process and that this operated to prevent transformative outcomes, while also resisting fundamentalist forces.299 Her definition of transformative resonates with me: “By transformation I mean change radical enough to so dramatically restructure any system – political, legal or social – that the ‘identity’ of the system is itself altered.”300 She notes that “[a]t most, the equality paradigm offers attainment of the same opportunities and outcomes for women as similarly situated men currently enjoy.”301

Otto concludes her critique by highlighting the “barriers to transformative change erected by the paradigm of equality and how this enables European masculinist and capitalist assumptions to retain a tight grip on women’s lives and identities”.302 Her final lesson from Beijing is that “there is still much to learn about how to challenge masculinist forms of power in

297 Dianne Otto, “Holding Up Half the Sky, but for Whose Benefit?: A Critical Analysis of the Fourth World Conference on Women” (1996) 6:1 Australian Feminist LJ 7 at 8. This is the same issue that the woman with disabilities was commenting on about her experience in Beijing.

298 See ibid.

299 See ibid.


301 See ibid at 8.

302 See ibid at 9.
ways that have not always already capitulated to this hegemony.”

There is not one of my interview subjects who would disagree with her 20 years later. It is possible that many of them would not have agreed with her initial criticism immediately after Beijing, and this speaks to the importance of reflection and analysis over time. As Gladys Acosta Vargas noted in the film, Beijing was “the most important conference for women of the century.” No one spoke of transforming the UN system, and I do not believe anyone believes that we will be able to transform the model of neoliberal capitalism within which we currently live.

Another major concern with the process is the weakness of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW has fewer resources than most of the other human rights committees and lacks both a direct pipeline to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and any enforcement capacity. Contrasting the Beijing conference and the BPfA with the Beijing review processes that took place at the CSW, scholars and activists alike point to the fact that much of the time is spent preventing backsliding by governments.

Ten years after Beijing, in March 2005, the UN’s CSW presided over an intergovernmental meeting in New York to review the progress achieved on the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Its aim was not agenda setting but agenda confirming; not policy formulation but policy affirmation. Whether it proves to be part of an ongoing worldwide movement in support of gender equality, or whether it marks the decline

303 See ibid.
304 See interviews.
305 See interview with Gladys Acosta Vargas.
307 See ibid.
of that process, is a question that many in international women’s movements are asking. Maxine Molyneux and Sharah Razavi reflect on the ambivalent record of progress achieved by women over the last decades and examine how the changing international policy and political climate over this period has given rise to new issues and challenges. While they used the more benign language of ambivalence, some defiant reports deplored government indifference and inaction, and some spoke of betrayal, as in the “Beijing Betrayed” report produced by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO).

Aurora de Dios, another one of my interviewees who is a former CEDAW Committee member, acknowledged in Bangkok at the regional Beijing Plus 20 meeting that the BPfA is still the most progressive international policy document and it was important to fight against any watering down during the review process. She felt that while women face acute backlash, they were able to push back against the dilution of the BPfA.

In the same Think Piece series, interviewee and current CEDAW Committee member Gladys Acosta Vargas notes that the UN can be a determining factor at the national, regional, and international levels, but “only if all of its parts are engaged in common dialogue with each other, with State Parties, and together with social movements and civil society.”

When I conducted my interviews in 2015 at the CSW, my interviewees noted that the processes are currently seen to be lacking in institutional force and their influence has declined.


310 See interview with Aurora de Dios.

311 See Vargas, supra note 83.
over time. Gladys Acosta Vargas has been critical of the CSW processes both in her interview with me and in her article in the *Think Piece* series. She singles out the main UN meeting of my project, the 2015 CSW that was also the Beijing +20 review conference. She noted that the 2015 CSW Declaration lacked the ability to promote an agenda for the next decade and that “[i]t failed to inspire enthusiasm in women’s organizations nor did it sufficiently enable them to participate in preparing the Declaration itself, nor prove to be innovation in the face of the current pressing challenges to women’s human rights.”312

Beth Simmons persuasively argues that human rights instruments such as CEDAW do make a positive difference to the lives of women.313 Despite my initial cynicism and the disillusionment of using the UN system, like Murphy, I no longer see the decisions we make to engage with the UN processes as either/or.314 Oona Hathaway asked the question as to whether human rights treaties make a difference – her answer was equivocal, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse.315 This is precisely the reason why feminist strategies are so crucial: to know when to use the UN system and when to choose other methods of resistance.

Sally Engle Merry sees the sites at the UN conferences as sites for cultural production.316 The generation of the documents that are produced – also known as the tangible outcomes – are made through a process that confers international legitimacy on the documents themselves. They name problems, specify solutions, articulate global consensus, “in law-like documents that are

312 See *ibid*.
313 See Simmons, *supra* note 282.
316 See Merry, *supra* note 228.
produced through a quasi-legislative process.”317 What then happens with those documents, those quasi-“laws,” are now up to the transnational feminist movements to use at the global and local levels.

My interview findings and literature review show that resolutions, declarations, General Recommendations, and Concluding Comments and Observations all reflect evolving norm developments and standard setting when it comes to women’s rights. While such instruments are generally not legally binding, except those which are binding through multilateral agreement, they can be of persuasive value in influencing international norms, particularly regarding elimination of VAW, and providing normative standards for states to follow at the national level.318 When it comes to achievements made at the UN conferences, all of my interviewees acknowledge the critical importance of the Nairobi, Beijing, and Vienna conferences.

2.4 The Intangible: Women’s Rights are Human Rights

2.4.1 A Sectoral Road Map

In this section, I turn to the engagement of transnational feminist movements with international human rights law. I term this law the “intangible.”319 In keeping with the theme of exploring the route from Nairobi to Beijing +20 – how did women’s rights become human rights, or rather how did the vernacular begin to include us – I explore who travelled that route, what was their mode of transportation, and what were the stops along the way? Was there a final destination? Did neoliberalism cause fatalities? And (with apologies to Tina Turner) what does

317 See ibid at 974.
319 I came to this term after I read Sapiens by Yuval Harari. He describes the development of language and how humans became able to think about abstract matters and cooperate in ever larger numbers, as the incipient foundation of law as a concept. See Galen Strawson, “Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari – review”, The Guardian (11 September 2014), online: <www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/11/sapiens-brief-history-humankind-yuval-noah-harari-review>.
law have to do with it?\textsuperscript{320} For that destination, I review some of the extensive literature on placing women within international human rights law. This section reviews some of the literature on feminist scholarship on international human rights law under the rubric of “women’s rights are human rights.”

Out of necessity I return to the overarching framework of VAW to see how advocacy around this issue was encapsulated within that law. Human rights mechanisms are interrogated. Using the metaphor of a party, I question whose party is it, who is invited, and what kind of food is served.

2.4.2 What Does Law, or Love, Have to Do With It?

The text \textit{International Law: Modern Feminist Approaches}, edited by Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji, is an important volume on feminist interpretations of international human rights law.\textsuperscript{321} This collection of essays illustrates how far the scholarship has come since the foundational\textsuperscript{322} publication by Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin, and Shelley Wright called “Feminist Approaches to International Law”.\textsuperscript{323} Buss and Manji believe that this feminist approach has now been accepted in the academy, but they note that “feminist engagement with

\textsuperscript{320} I make this cultural reference intentionally for many reasons. First, Tina Turner recorded “What’s Love Got to Do With It” in 1984. Second, it was also the title of a film starring Angela Bassett about Tina Turner’s violence and abuse at the hands of Ike Turner, her husband. It raises multiple issues about abuse, racism, and the music industry half a century before the “Me Too” movement. I have used the film in teaching about gender-based violence. Third, when I was articling in that same year for Ian Scott at Gowling and Henderson, the students put on a musical for the holiday season entitled “What’s Law Got to Do With It.” Finally, I think that love as a revolutionary and radical act, as espoused by Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, and other important political movements, is likely the only thing that has any hope at all of creating sustainable social and planetary change.


\textsuperscript{322} I make a conscious effort never to use the word “seeminal,” and “vaginal” does not make sense. Feminists have explored this language, see Jenny Davis, “Don’t Say Seminal, It’s Sexist” (21 April 2014), online (blog): \textit{The Society Pages: Cyborgology} <thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2014/04/21/dont-say-seminal-its-sexist/>.

\textsuperscript{323} Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin & Shelley Wright, “Feminist Approaches to International Law” (1991) 85:4 AJIL 613.
international law has never been confined to the academy.”\textsuperscript{324} They outline how “some of feminism’s more high profile ‘successes’ have occurred at the conferences, meetings, institutions and courts that develop and implement international law and policy.”\textsuperscript{325} In their edited volume, the authors review a number of feminist campaigns and actions in the international realm from the vantage point of 2004. My review therefore expands this discussion for another fourteen years – although my interviews were completed in 2015, this chapter reviews literature up to the end of 2018.

Feminists were fighting the UN system on several fronts, both inside and outside the institution. One main road was trying to make space within international human rights law for women, and the UN itself, while butting up against the “malestream” of human rights standards.\textsuperscript{326} For example, Johanna Bond recalls that women’s rights activists battled to assert women’s rights within the UN human rights framework since the drafting of the \textit{Universal Declaration of Human Rights} (UDHR).\textsuperscript{327} Feminists were fighting for the inclusion of gender specific language on women’s rights. Some were by necessity taking the road of most resistance, taking on the battle against the structure of the UN as a patriarchal system. Often this resulted in a dead end or a cul de sac.


\textsuperscript{325} See \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{326} Mary O’Brien coined the term “malestream” to describe the maps that we used to navigate patriarchy before we created our own: see Mary O’Brien, \textit{The Politics of Reproduction} (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). For discussion of Mary’s term, see Jill McCalla Vickers, “Memoirs of an Ontological Exile: The Methodological Rebellions of Feminist Research” in Angela Miles, ed, \textit{Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions, 1970s-1990s} (New York: Routledge, 1996) 37 at 38. On another autobiographical note, I studied with Mary O’Brien at OISE along with Dorothy Smith and Margrit Eichler for my MA. Unfortunately, I did not complete my MA. Mary was on my committee (my supervisor was Margrit Eichler) and she had developed Alzheimer’s. I worked with Angela Miles at Resources for Feminist Research at OISE in the late 1970s and in the early days of the Women’s Human Rights Institute (WHRI) which she co-founded with Alda Facio, and which is now directed by Angela Lytle. I have had the privilege of teaching about CEDAW at the WHRI in Nepal and Toronto with Alda and Angela.

\textsuperscript{327} See Bond, \textit{supra} note 68 at 82.
Law is an important tool used to enable individuals to enforce their rights, and for nation states to be held accountable for their actions and inactions. International law is the means by which nation states are held to account by other nation states and individuals. These obligations are binding through their adoption and ratification by the community of nations in the multilateral system. International law can and does play an important role in creating transformative positive changes for women and girls across the globe. Aisha Gill finds that international law is a worthwhile project for feminists, which, despite its shortcomings, provides a very useful alternative narrative for civil society to engage with. Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji reinforce this view, clarifying that the progress on women’s equality that I outlined in my Introduction in part has resulted from the expansion of international law beyond the narrow range of matters related to affairs between states.

Dianne Otto is eloquent in the film and her writing. Her descriptions of the paradoxes of feminist engagement with international law argue that the productive tensions of critique and reform are essential in order to avoid feminist politics being colonized by international law. She identifies the conundrums at the heart of feminist engagement with international law (or what I would call the heart and the head), that is, “how to engage critically with the law’s gendered languages and practices, while simultaneously seeking to use it to advance women’s rights.” I see our present crossroads at the nexus of hope and despair, neither of which will

329 See ibid at 5.
332 See ibid at 3.
help. We must be cognizant of the implications of our theoretical positions and our actions, but act we must. Chandra Mohanty reminds us that our “minds must be as ready to move … and to imagine alternative destinations.” In other words, we must pick our battles, be strategic, and recognize the urgency that our responses demand; and we must be careful, and cautious, and think before we leap.

2.4.3 Violence Against Women, Again!

For most of my interviewees, it was axiomatic that women’s rights are human rights. This fact, in and of itself, was articulated as a positive outcome of the advocacy of the transnational feminist movement. As I have described, VAW was the most central issue addressed by women around the world during the early UN world conferences. I am not going to get into originary debates about who or what came first. While it is the movements that matter, often individuals are highlighted in our “heroine” or celebrity culture. Charlotte Bunch was one of the more visible initiators of the incorporation of a feminist view of human rights into the UN system, noting that “the notion of human rights is one of the few oral visions ascribed to internationally and is one of the few concepts that speaks to the need for transnational activism and concern for the lives of people globally.” As early as the Copenhagen conference in 1980, she realized the potential of focusing on VAW to bring women together strategically. In 1983, Charlotte Bunch and Kathleen Barry organized a global feminist workshop on trafficking, involving women from both the North and South, situating the subject of sexual slavery in a broader debate about women’s

333 See Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” supra note 198 at 504.
335 See Keck & Sikkink, supra note 142 at 177.
human rights. Two years later, VAW was squarely on the agenda in Nairobi. This set the stage for the next phase of the work, leading up to the Vienna conference in 1993, and Beijing in 1995, where the idea took hold that “women’s rights were human rights” and that VAW in all its forms was a violation of international human rights law. The call for transformation of international human rights law to respond to women’s specific experience of violence and violation “was seen as the touchstone illuminating the failure of universal human rights to problematize the structural relations of male domination.”

According to Charlotte Bunch, Susana Fried, and Malika Dutt, the incorporation of human rights language into their work by governments and women’s organizations from all regions ... signal[ed] a shift in analysis that moved beyond single-issue politics and identity-based organizing and enhanced our capacity to build global alliances based on collective political goals and a common agenda.

However, these women all worked for the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership in the USA, founded by Charlotte Bunch, and they represented a very elite US-centric class of feminists. What did women who were neither United Statesian nor based in the North have to say?

Apparently a great deal.

This call for re-visioning women’s rights as human rights seemed to have had widespread resonance. Thousands of women from over 100 countries mobilized in the lead-up to the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. Some feminists from Latin America did re-

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336 See ibid at 178.
337 See ibid at 179.
340 See Bunch, Dutt & Fried, supra note 60 at 10.
342 See Friedman, supra note 165.
orient their struggle towards the “women’s rights are human rights” framework.\textsuperscript{343} Susana Chiarotti, from the Argentinian NGO Indeso-Mujer,\textsuperscript{344} describes the moment when the issue of VAW crystallized for her as a human rights issue. “The violence theme is very evocative. It crosses all our lives.”\textsuperscript{345} When Chiarotti first read Charlotte Bunch’s article on “women’s rights as human rights,” she said, “[t]his began a new conceptualization of the violence theme, and we started to bother people from human rights organizations to broaden their vision … I think that for us it is a strategic lesson, in the sense that it tells us, ‘let’s look for more allies. And to find them, let’s look for languages that cannot be rejected.’”\textsuperscript{346} This illustrates that rather than narrowing the feminist agenda to one of only human rights, strategies were designed to broaden the base of allies by using the human rights language. The goal was to have gender-specific forms of rights violations recognized as violations of universal human rights. Dianne Otto noted that the “extraordinary success on violence against women” spilled over into other areas of international law: humanitarian, refugee, and criminal.\textsuperscript{347} Richa Nager would describe this as “travelling theories of foundational feminist concepts.”\textsuperscript{348}


\textsuperscript{344} See generally “Indeso Mujer” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Indeso-Mujer-115194268544114/>.


\textsuperscript{346} Quotation cited in Keck & Sikkink, \textit{supra} note 142 at 166.

\textsuperscript{347} See Otto, “Disconcerting ‘Masculinities,’” \textit{supra} note 343 at 121.

2.4.4 Interrogate the Instruments

As I outlined in the introductory chapter, feminist movements around the world lobbied extensively to ensure global recognition and prioritization of women’s rights by integrating the “women’s rights as human rights” framework into the BPfA. The framework became a major discursive tool for feminist and women’s rights activists arguing for radical changes to policies and practices across the globe. I revisit Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji who ask a critically important question: “Have women’s rights instruments become such an accepted part of institution building that we assume rather than interrogate their necessity?” Interrogation is necessary. How did women’s rights instruments evolve? How are they being implemented, or not? Do they result in the betterment of women’s lives, or are they just rhetoric that makes us feel like we are doing something by invoking their acronyms? The Church of CEDAW? The Basilica of the BPfA?

Since the Beijing Platform for Action was produced, women’s movements have focused their attention on some of the developments in policy and in international law that have accompanied the neoliberal adjustment agenda such as social policy and anti-poverty programs; the good governance agenda; decentralization; identity politics and diversity; conflict; and economic justice. However, the enshrinement of “women’s rights are human rights” did not happen until Vienna in 1993, which then enabled feminists to ground their work at the UN conferences that followed such as Cairo and Beijing in a shared human rights framework. For many involved in the processes around Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing, these successful

351 See Molyneux & Shahra, supra note 308 at 995.
352 See interview with Charlotte Bunch.
transnational collaborations to influence the global agendas of the UN also brought their own challenges.

One of these challenges was that once the “women’s rights are human rights” framework was adopted, women’s rights activists seemed to be compelled to support it. Charlotte Bunch remembers that the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership had not intended to frame their work around the UN, but felt compelled to defend and advance the gains made there over the next decade.353 She noted, “[t]his brought us into collaboration with human rights and feminist organizations with a greater focus on UN bodies.”354 The members of Equality Now, founded by my interviewee Jessica Neuwirth,355 expressed a deeper concern – they felt propelled into a direction they had not wanted to go.356 While still focused on US movement priorities like the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Equality Now began working much more within the UN system.357

Charlotte Bunch reflected that the UN conferences and other events brought forth unprecedented work as feminist organizations expanded the human rights of women in relation to a very wide range of issues from health and housing to issues of sexual violence and gender persecution in war and conflict.358 Elisabeth Friedman has pointed out that women have not only focused on their own constituency by being incredibly organized, but they have been able to

353 See ibid. Interviewee Jessica Neuwirth, founder of Equality Now, echoed the same position. Equality Now felt compelled to engage at the UN, but that was never their intention. Jessica has since founded Donor Direct Action along with Gloria Steinem and Navi Pillay: see generally “About” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Donor Direct Action <donordirectaction.org/about/>.
354 See interview with Charlotte Bunch.
355 For more on Jessica, see generally “Jessica Neuwirth” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Equal Means Equal <equalmeanequal.com/jessica-neuwirth/>.
356 See interview with Jessica Neuwirth, founder of Equality Now.
358 See interview with Charlotte Bunch.
mainstream gender issues into the overall framing of other conferences, such as Rio 1992 on environment and Copenhagen on social development in 1994.\textsuperscript{359}

As seen in my film, Florence Butegwa, along with Charlotte Bunch, presented the demands of women and the signature campaign document to the Chair of the Vienna Conference. Florence, a Ugandan lawyer, participated as the Director of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), a pan-African network of organizations and individuals working to promote women’s rights.\textsuperscript{360} She saw the Vienna conference as an opportunity to claim the universality of human rights and push back on positions entrenched in law that were discriminatory in their cultural norms and practices.\textsuperscript{361} She also saw an opportunity to strengthen the solidarity and strategic approach adopted by women from all regions of the world and their organizations who were part of a global movement.\textsuperscript{362} As Florence noted:

> From Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa, women came to Vienna, bringing with us the demands of millions of women who for years had been organizing at local, national, regional, and global levels for a human rights system that better reflected and addressed the violations of human rights that women face simply because they are women. We coalesced around this simple but political notion – “women’s rights are human rights.”\textsuperscript{363}

The self-proclaimed CEDAWista Alda Facio had already been using the human rights language in Latin America for a decade before Vienna.\textsuperscript{364} But for her, Vienna represented a paradigm shift that expanded the concept of the universality of human rights and the transformation of the legal concept of “human being” which would impact legal doctrines and

\textsuperscript{359} See Friedman, \textit{supra} note 165. This holds true for what I have seen of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but not for the climate change conferences.

\textsuperscript{360} The origin of WILDAF arising from Nairobi was explained in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{361} See interview with Florence Butegwa.

\textsuperscript{362} See \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{363} See \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{364} See interview with Alda Facio. Alda uses this term to describe herself as “a lover of CEDAW”. 
legislation.\textsuperscript{365} She noted that “it changed how women understood ourselves. I have always contended that if before that date the rights of women were not human rights, we cannot help but infer that women were not ‘human’ in international human rights law.”\textsuperscript{366} This is reminiscent of the Persons Case in Canada, where women were not considered “Persons” until 1929 (although Aboriginal women did not get the vote until 1960).\textsuperscript{367}

At the conclusion of the Beijing conference, Alda delivered this impassioned plea:

In fact, this entire conference is a conference about the human rights of women. Whether addressing poverty, sexist educational systems, inadequate health care, gender-based violence, or male bias in the definition of what constitutes peace, all the issues of the platform are about the inequality of human rights in the economic, political, and cultural spheres and women's lack of equal access to the fundamental conditions that make the exercise of political and civil rights viable. The issue of insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women is a question of justice, and justice is at the heart of human rights.\textsuperscript{368}

Remember, Beijing was two years after Vienna so gender justice and human rights language were already feminized. Shanthi Dairiam saw that one of the lessons from Vienna was to “develop theories of human rights that show how every aspect of human rights has both the same and a differential impact on women as compared to men.”\textsuperscript{369} She also affirmed what so many of my interviewees acknowledged, that women’s rights activists have to interact with mainstream human rights organizations and other human rights mechanisms such as treaty bodies in order to ensure the development of a theoretical framework of traditional human rights law that reflects the violations suffered exclusively by women.\textsuperscript{370} Dairiam had hoped, as did we

\textsuperscript{365} See \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{366} See \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{369} See interview with Shanthi Dairiam.
\textsuperscript{370} See \textit{ibid}. 
all, that this would eliminate the organizational and conceptual separation of women’s human rights issues from the mainstream human rights agenda. The outcome document of the Vienna conference does clearly affirm the universality of human rights and states that the human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights.\footnote{See Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, UNGAOR, 1993, UN Doc A/CONF.157/23.}

Dairiam was very hopeful about engagement with the treaty bodies.\footnote{See interview with Shanthi Dairiam.} Stalwart human rights feminist advocate Shelagh Day has spent much of her life engaged in finding strategies more effective than going to UN conferences. Her work has focused necessarily on Canada. Her priority has been to focus on the treaty bodies rather than, for example, CSW. She has written about what happens when the UN expresses concern about the deficiencies in Canada’s compliance with its international human rights obligations. In Canada, Shelagh Day, Margot Young, and a coalition of grassroots organizations have been extremely active and effective in working with the CEDAW process and other treaty bodies through the BC CEDAW group and the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA).\footnote{FAFIA and the BC CEDAW group have presented a number of alternative reports to the CEDAW Committee and other treaty bodies. As the BC CEDAW group is only comprised of front-line organizations, I am not able to participate.} Margot Young and others edited a very important volume in 2007 entitled Poverty: Rights, Social Citizenship, and Legal Activism. In Shelagh Day’s chapter in that text, “Minding the Gap: Human Rights Commitments and Compliance”, she reviews the treaty body process and notes the gap between Canada’s commitments and its practices.\footnote{See Shelagh Day, “Minding the Gap: Human Rights Commitments and Compliance” in Margot Young et al, eds, Poverty: Rights, Social Citizenship, and Legal Activism (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007) 201 at 202.} Since that chapter was authored in 2007, I wanted to know what her position might be today, over a decade later. In a recent email, Shelagh told me her position:
By going to the treaty bodies, we get specific articulations or confirmations from them about what universal human rights norms mean in the Canadian context. At the CSW, we are not talking about obligations, but about policy improvement, best practices. As a priority I chose the treaty bodies and a rights-and-obligations based dialogue, rather than the political how-to-do better one.375

The value of Shelagh’s approach can be seen in cases like Sharon McIver’s (discussed above), in which her complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee resulted in an opinion from an international body on Canada’s rights violations under the ICCPR, despite Canada’s repeated attempts at reform to the Indian Act. McIvor’s case(s) illustrate Indigenous women’s strategic use of UN processes outside of the more general and less specific determinations by the CSW or women’s “conferences.”

Despite the seeming agreement by the four activists in my film whom I quoted above, from four regions, North America (Charlotte), Latin America (Alda), Africa (Florence), and Asia Pacific (Shanthi), or perhaps in spite of it, we need to interrogate critical questions about the impact of the “women’s rights are human rights” campaign. I need to reiterate here that I am inserting commentary from my interviews, my findings, into this chapter. While the result may be clumsy, I am trying to illustrate a vibrant conversation between the lived reality through the voices of the women in the film with the writing and scholarship by women in their published work.

Christine Chinkin, Shelley Wright, and Hilary Charlesworth initially observed that on the whole it seemed obvious that women should embrace human rights and their benefits as “they have arguably been successful in ensuring that gender is included within the human rights legal

375 Email from Shelagh Day (12 January 2019).
framework.”376 Clarifying their point they caution us about the appropriateness of the framework itself and about the place of human rights law: “We must be cautious about overstating the advances that have been achieved.”377 When reviewing what might be regarded as successes “of varying significance”, Chinkin, Wright, and Charlesworth highlight the deeply worrying instrumental connection between human rights discourses and the form of neoliberalism that I have been describing in this chapter.378 They raise the concern that “globalization has affected gender relations in complex and contradictory ways”.379 On the one hand, the demise of the nation state opens up spaces for women that did not previously exist, making challenging patriarchal norms more possible; on the other hand, policy making by the same state is weakened, resulting in the undermining of rights’ protections. Any and all adverse effects impact disproportionately on women’s empowerment.380

This has a far greater disproportionate impact on women in the global South. Western feminists’ focus from the early days of the UN itself was on civil and political rights, not socioeconomic rights.381 At the turn of this century, some feminists such as Molyneux questioned the emancipatory potential of liberal rights-based strategies that prioritized the freedom of choice of egalitarianism. She saw the impact of neoliberal economic globalization on effective human rights frameworks as having dire consequences for women’s equality rights.382

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377 See ibid.


379 See Chinkin, Wright & Charlesworth, supra note 376 at 26.

380 See Chinkin, Wright & Charlesworth, supra note 376 at 29.


382 See Molyneux, Women’s Movements in International Perspective, supra note 134; Molyneux, “Analysing Women’s Movements,” supra note 134.
It is precisely because of this that many feminist scholars expressed concern that the notion of universalism involved in human rights discourse leads to a reliance on a Western liberal framework.\textsuperscript{383} This is a return to the stream of neoliberalism. There is a concern that this would then lead to accepting an identification of women as homogenous, which subsumes important historical differences and the critical inequalities of race and class.\textsuperscript{384} Laura Parisi is an articulate critic of the phenomenon of human rights with markets, as the convergence of two main roads, or what she terms a “merger, as a strategy where the global governance apparatus reduces human rights violations and social inequality to the management of neoliberal economies.”\textsuperscript{385} She also observed the “blunting” and “channeling” of more radical claims by feminist movements and the cooptation that happens when they are integrated into policies and practices.\textsuperscript{386}

\textbf{2.4.5 Whose Party? Catered or Potluck?}

Another concern of the outcome of this cooptation is the instrumental use of the human rights discourse when it is hijacked by neoliberalism. Women have finally become “insiders” in the human rights framework, but now human rights is heading towards an “outsider” discourse as the increasing concerns of “security” and the “war on terror” reign supreme within global governance parlance.\textsuperscript{387} Responding to this caution, Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji pose another important question: “have feminists been invited to the party only to find out that everyone has left?”\textsuperscript{388} We finally made it to the human rights venue, but the room is empty. This

\textsuperscript{383} See Patil, \textit{supra} note 179.


\textsuperscript{385} See Parisi, “Reclaiming Spaces of Resistance,” \textit{supra} note 209 at 210.

\textsuperscript{386} See \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{387} See \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{388} See Chinkin, Wright & Charlesworth, \textit{supra} note 376 at 32.

\textsuperscript{388} See Buss & Manji, “Introduction,” \textit{supra} note 324 at 8.
is the conspiracy that Lee Lakeman characterizes as the period leading up to the Beijing conference where, for her, “it was already all over.” Regardless of how much I may agree or disagree, in my role as an activist I feel the need to be at the party with the feminists so we can determine collectively if indeed everyone has left, or maybe moved left. Do we follow them to the next party? To paraphrase Lesley Gore, “it’s our party and we will cry [and rage and scream and strategize and plot and organize and mobilize] if we want to.” How is this relevant to “women’s rights are human rights”?

If the answer to Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji is that human rights are limited in their impact, then with Dianne Otto’s analysis in mind, what “other less desirable discursive roles might such instruments play?” Do human rights instruments have a negative impact, or cause unintended consequences? Will the human rights discourse keep us in that empty party room or help us create one full of promise?

Otto raises another important point to consider: that as long as the masculine is the universal subject in contrast with feminized particularities, it means that women’s full inclusion is an impossibility. Johanna Bond outlines how commentators have criticized the Western emphasis on individualism within the human rights discourse as an exclusion of group or collective consciousness. Some feminist scholars from the global South have used communitarian values to frame their rights-based struggles. Although some of these critiques

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389 See interview with Lee Lakeman.
390 Lesley Gore, “It’s My Party”, released 1963. Interestingly, it was apparently the first hit ever produced by Quincy Jones.
393 See Bond, supra note 68 at 102. See also Penelope Andrews, From Cape Town to Kabul: Rethinking Strategies for Pursuing Women’s Human Rights (London, UK: Routledge, 2016) [Andrews].
394 See Bond, ibid.
maintain an essentialist framework, many have assumed an anti-essentialist and intersectional approach that emphasizes multiple systems of oppression operating along the axes of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Ratna Kapur might claim that the women who inhabit that intersection would be “peripheral subjects,” who would not even be invited to the party.

Scholars such as Amrita Basu, Ali Tripp, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Sheila Rowbotham have all described how national, regional, and global issue-based organizations and networks have, in large part, couched their political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural demands in terms of women’s human rights and have increasingly used international human rights instruments in their struggles. Activist scholars writing articles on grassroots women’s organizing began to reflect the increasing framing of struggles in women’s rights terms at the local level. Publications soon followed discussing legal aspects of feminist engagement with women’s human rights. These feminist scholars and activists raised important theoretical and

395 Essentialism is the notion that there is a single woman’s, or any other group’s, experience that can be described independently from other aspects of the person – that there is an “essence” to that experience. An essentialist outlook assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts. The perceived need to define what “women’s” experience is and what oppression “as women” means has prompted some feminists to analyze the situation of woman by stripping away race and class. See Trina Grillot, “Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master’s House,” (1995) 10 Berkeley Women’s LJ, 16 at 19.


strategic issues about the potentials, and pitfalls, of rights-based framing.\textsuperscript{400} Echoing Carol Smart, Dianne Otto sees that the exercise of international law to empower women may actually entrench women’s marginality.\textsuperscript{401}

The use of international human rights law and mechanisms within feminist activism has to be analyzed as part of feminism’s self-reflective process.\textsuperscript{402} The relationship between critique and political activism has never been easy. Some academics and activists are skeptical of “women’s human rights.” Inderpal Grewal prefers to consider them “an object for analysis rather than a goal to endorse.”\textsuperscript{403} Grewal raised the concern that activism is in danger of losing its critical edge.\textsuperscript{404}

The edited volume by Doris Buss and Ambreena Manji that I have relied on extensively was designed as stock-taking, beginning with the question of whether there is such a thing as a coherent feminist scholarship on international law.\textsuperscript{405} I would argue, as evidenced by the examples illustrated in this chapter, there is no coherency, no “one size fits all” version. The


\textsuperscript{401} See Otto, “Disconcerting ‘Masculinities,’” \textit{supra} note 343 at 107. See also Carol Smart, \textit{Feminism and Power of Law} (London: Routledge, 1989) at 161.


\textsuperscript{404} See \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{405} See Buss & Manji, “Introduction,” \textit{supra} note 324 at 11.
tension of difference forces us to be continually self-reflective and select strategies that fit the political moment.

Thérèse Murphy urges that we need to be more attentive to the choices we make. She queries whether some Western feminists (she calls them British and “United Statesian”) might be attracted to the international realm because it seems easier than the project of feminism that remains at the domestic level. Murphy labels this attraction “the allure of the international” that is at once both compelling and problematic, and she poses a question that I take to heart – is it the case that in pursuing feminist work there, internationally, rather than here, domestically, (she means in the West) feminists might be trying to “recreate the glory days of feminism?”

What are the glory days if not that heady period of time between 1985 and 1995 when we thought we were making progress in achieving women’s rights, and the “women’s rights are human rights” discourse seemed to be one of the main victories we celebrated?

I do not think this concern is limited to women from the West (or the North). Politics based on nostalgia will not further an emancipatory agenda. Joanne Sandler is clear that she is “not nostalgic for the 90s.” But clearly the stock-taking that Buss and Manji carry out is necessary before new strategies can be crafted. There is “[n]o one time only choice between

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406 See Murphy, supra note 314 at 70.
408 See Murphy, supra note 314 at 70.
409 For me, the personal glory days of feminism were the mid 1990s in Canada when the feminist anti-violence movement felt like we were making progress on the sexual assault law, the Bill C49 consultations, the defence of drunkenness, and the disclosure of records in rape cases. Allan Rock was Minister of Justice at the time and there was never more feminist engagement with the government, or at least the Department of Justice. Allan says it was the height of his career as well.
410 See interview with Joanne Sandler.
So where does that take us then? There is hope from feminists who are still optimistic. Dianne Otto says women’s local resistances to forms of power, largely undocumented, are of critical importance to the project of reinventing strategies to achieve women’s full humanity through the discourse of universal human rights. Women’s resistance may provide the basis for new strategies that will produce empowered subjects to take the place of marginalized subjectivities which serve to reproduce masculine, racial, and other forms of privilege in the guise of universality. These strategies evaded or manipulated the law rather than engaging the law. Equally important, women shared strategies at meetings and conferences by meeting in person. These may or may not have included law and legal strategies. This reminds us to be wary of the rights that formal law offers and engage more with resistive strategies, especially for non-elite women, as imagined by Ambreena Manji.

I understand why some feminist scholars initially warned against using human rights because they are framed within a male standard. Laura Parisi notes that many human rights indicators use male experience as the norm and the achievement of women’s human rights is seen as relative to the rights that men have already achieved. These critiques were very important in the period leading up to Vienna. Florence Butegwa, seen in my film as the co-

411 See Murphy, supra note 314 at 86.
413 See interview with Dianne Otto.
presenter at the Vienna conference, stated that “for women to show violations of their rights as
women, they had to show that they were discriminated against in that the law or practices of the
states failed to provide women the same protection as men.”\textsuperscript{417}

Decades later, I suggest that feminist activists have been “indigenizing,” the notion of
rights, as Brooke Ackerly termed it.\textsuperscript{418} Peggy Levitt and Sally Engle Merry called it
“vernacularizing” rights, where rights have to be fundamentally revised to encompasses the
experience of women.\textsuperscript{419} At the heart of this revisioning is a process characterized by local
engagement in a context of transnational organizing, dialogue, and strategizing which enables
women’s lives and interests to constantly interrogate and inform each other.\textsuperscript{420} According to my
interviews, this is one of the processes that occurs in the spaces of the UN meetings and which
affords the opportunity to learn from each other and share strategies and praxis. For example,
Lesley Ann Foster describes how women have learned different understandings of “state
capture” beyond a South African context, and Oby Nwankwo discusses how taking examples of
good practices she learned in Beijing back to Nigeria had profound impact.\textsuperscript{421}

Brooke Ackerly found that “women’s human rights activists collectively occupy the
seemingly incoherent theoretical position that human rights are local, universal and contested” at

\textsuperscript{417} See Florence Butege, “International Human Rights Law and Practice: Implications for Women” in Margaret

\textsuperscript{418} See Brooke Ackerly & Rose McDermott, “Introduction” (2012) 8:3 Politics and Gender 367.

\textsuperscript{419} See Peggy Levitt & Sally Eagle Merry, “Making Women’s Human Rights in the Vernacular: Navigating the
Culture/Rights Divide” in Dorothy L Hodgson, ed, \textit{Gender and Culture at the Limit of Rights} (Philadelphia:

\textsuperscript{420} See Sally Engle Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle.” (2006) 108:1
American Anthropologist 38.

\textsuperscript{421} See interviews with Lesley Ann Foster and Oby Nwankwo.
The challenges of changing the local contexts is as great as the challenges of promoting transnational norms of human rights. For Ackerly, activism for social change is ultimately about local needs and ways to achieve them – the “practical application of international human rights law is necessary when advocating for local change because it functions as a contingent universal.”

The sub-heading “catered or potluck” is a metaphor for the kind of party attended and the range of attendees and issues welcomed. Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin, and Shelley Wright noted in 2005 that “considerable rhetorical progress has been made in recognizing women’s rights.” What I have seen are self-congratulatory celebrations of women’s apparent progress that take place at UN fora such as CSW which are always catered by corporate sponsors. They continue, “[b]eneath this apparent progress lie a number of different trends that pull in opposite directions and which make uncertain the direction for future strategic action”. Frontline activist parties are potluck, where everyone brings something to the table. The space between the uncertainty and the strategic action is filled with a reflection on the many different dishes shared at the table. This intersectional approach to a dinner party is not uncritical; it still can mean that some women do not get enough to eat. But sharing food around a table is a very important metaphor in feminist literature, from the kitchen tables of consciousness raising to the art of Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party.

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423 See ibid.

424 See Chinkin, Wright & Charlesworth, supra note 376 at 25.

425 See ibid.

426 See generally “The Dinner Party (1974-79)” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Judy Chicago: <http://www.judychicago.com/gallery/the-dinner-party/dp-artwork/>. However, Chicago’s art piece does not show women in dialogue; and neither does my film. This was a point of discussion at my oral defence.
2.5 Conclusion

Of course there have been enormously significant and positive changes in the social and economic status of some women since the Decade for Women. Annual studies use several key indicators to document progress, albeit a process that is at times glacial, towards greater gender equality.427 For example, girls’ enrolment in primary and secondary education has increased the world over, reducing or in some cases even closing the gender gap in school attendance.428 Overall, female illiteracy has also declined.429 More women are gaining access to higher levels of education.430 Women’s longevity has increased in most countries and their health indicators continue to improve.431 The decline in fertility and increased use of contraception in many developing countries have both reduced the risk of maternal mortality and eased the burden of unpaid care work.432 Despite sometimes overwhelming challenges, the presence of women in public life has grown in many countries, whether in politics or the workforce.433 These changes have only occurred because of the tireless work of transnational feminist movements.

Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon’s new book supports the “sophisticated, pragmatic view that many activists take toward the state.”434 They describe how it is not possible to always pursue comprehensive strategies. As I state in the opening of my film, and these academics

427 See e.g. UN Women, “Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016, supra note 241, as well as others by UN agencies such as the UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, etc.
428 See “Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World” (February 2005), online: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/1FF4AC64C1894EAAC1256FA3005E7201>.
429 See UN Women, “Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016, supra note 241. However, this does not refer to rates of functional illiteracy.
430 See ibid.
431 See ibid.
432 See Molyneux & Shahra, supra note 308 at 985.
433 See ibid.
434 See Htun & Weldon, The Logics of Gender Justice, supra note 16 at 256.
concur, sometimes incremental changes are all that is possible. Htun and Weldon note that “[g]ender equality is not a oneshot deal. It is a long game.” At least they are not as pessimistic as to say it is a “long shot.” As does their analysis, I hope that my overall project will also help to highlight the obstacles, and the opportunities, for strategies that advocates can use in their tactical approach to the use of law, domestic and international.

435 See ibid.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This project explores how a small, elite group of feminists, from a similar generation, working within a number of UN processes and mechanisms, perceive the importance of using their engagement with the UN to realize women’s equality. I interviewed a sample of women’s rights activists on film about their activism over a three-decade period, from 1985 to 2015. The sample was not representative, generally, but, rather, has a selective logic. This third chapter explains the methodology that I used in the collection of my data (reflecting in particular on the inclusion of certain voices, and exclusion of others), the actual coding of my data, and the editing and making of the film.

The film was intended to operate at the intersection between activism and filmmaking, that is, as a form of documentary activism. Ezra Winton and Svetla Turnin describe documentary activism as a form of political and artistic expression that responds to larger societal currents: “Documentary activism brings together [the] worlds that we love, labour in and call home: the dynamic, diverse and devotional spheres of art and activism." However, I did not just want to tell the story of what the interviewees did in the context of the global women’s human rights movement. I wanted to contribute to an ongoing discussion regarding the development of strategies for transnational feminist movements to use at both global and national levels through the presentation of the interviews in film.

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436 Ezra Winton & Svetla Turnin, eds, Screening Truth to Power: A Reader on Documentary Activism, (Montreal: Cinema Politica, 2014) at 20 [Winton & Turnin].
In order to conduct this research, I went to several key international meetings at the United Nations: the Beijing +20 regional meeting in Bangkok in December 2014; the Beijing +20 session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2015; the CEDAW Committee meeting in Geneva in July 2015; and a global women’s movement meeting, the 100th anniversary of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in The Hague in April 2015. Attendance and participation in these major gatherings of global women’s rights activists provided the opportunity for me to conduct most of the field research of contacting and interviewing feminist activists. These interviews were recorded via video camera.

In 2010, the University of British Columbia accepted my documentary film, Constitute!, as my LLM thesis.437 That thesis was about Canadian women’s constitutional activism as part of the largest social mobilization of women in Canadian history. Their activism led to Sections 15 and 28 in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.438 The film was subsequently converted into an educational resource for schools and universities. To continue with this approach, I chose also to record my PhD dissertation interviews on video in order to make another documentary film, this time as part of my PhD dissertation.

Because I had not carried out the actual camera work for my LLM, I had to make some investments.439 I had a small video camera but I had to invest in other equipment (tripod, memory cards, portable hard drives, and microphones). I read a couple of documentary

437 While I am not a filmmaker, I have been involved in forms of documentary filming and imaging for many years. In South Africa I worked as a news photographer as well as a human rights lawyer, because as a lawyer I often had access to places that the journalists did not and I felt it was important to bear witness. I helped to produce a documentary on Alexandra township in Johannesburg with the accused I represented in a treason trial. I directed an educational video on transboundary artisanal fishers in Costa Rica and Panama and one on international transboundary water law for my work with the Global Environment Facility and the UN. I was also the South African producer of the Great Granny Revolution, a film about grandmothers’ networks in Canada and South Africa. I have always carried a camera with me.


439 My LLM thesis film was post-production, meaning that I made the film from footage that already existed.
filmmaking texts and I also sought instruction in documentary filmmaking skills by hiring a local Vancouver professional director, Moira (Mo) Simpson,\textsuperscript{440} for a day of coaching in techniques on using microphone(s), framing the shots, and so on. Not only did Mo’s training session teach me about the importance of sound to the video recording, but it also taught me that good sound quality can compensate for sub-par video quality. Mo also informed me that the film is mostly made in the editing process, and that many of the mistakes I was likely to make could be rectified. I was able to proceed with her reassurance. My methodological approach was to conduct my interviews in person while I was recording them on film. I was both a self-conscious PhD student researcher conducting interviews, and, simultaneously, an amateur Director of Photography doing the camera and sound work.

In the introductory chapter, I noted that I took my baggage with me as I travelled around the world on my journey to conduct my interviews.\textsuperscript{441} Here, I return to the concept of baggage, by borrowing the term “conceptual baggage” from Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna to emphasize the interconnections between myself as the researcher with my own intellectual assumptions, and my interviewees’ location(s) in relation to class, race, sexuality, and gender – all of which combine to impact the nature and outcome of the qualitative interview.\textsuperscript{442} This chapter will explain the intersectional methodologies of those connections.

This project curates the data collected (sixty hours of video interviews) into a film. In my view, presenting the interviews by video helps to ensure that the authentic voices of the women


\textsuperscript{441} I would say that a conservative estimate would be that I spent $10,000 on the travel to conduct the interviews, as well as the equipment and other expenses like paying my editor; and I am sure I have invested more than 10,000 hours in the film project.

\textsuperscript{442} See Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, \textit{Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins} (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989).
are both seen and heard. It feels to me that there is less mediation than in a written piece of work. The choice to interview on video provided a way for the women to speak in their own voices as feminists who were active participants during a particular period of international activism on women’s rights. While this project also extrapolates from and responds to this data in the form of a more traditional written thesis, the film, and the process of making it, nonetheless grounds the entire work.

The following sections will review the methodology of the subject selection and how I chose my interviewees. I will examine the film production and editing procedures, while also exploring their implications for the research findings. I place myself as the researcher squarely within all aspects of the process.

3.2 The Interviews – Selection, Sampling and Saturation

The primary data gathered for my findings come from forty-five video-recorded interviews. The full list of interviewees is found in the Appendices. These interviews each ranged from forty-five to ninety minutes. My subject selection was purposive. I set out criteria for my subject selection. To be eligible as a participant, the interviewee must have attended at least one significant UN world conference in association with an organization focused on women’s rights. My intention was to interview, wherever possible, women who had attended both the Nairobi conference in 1985 as well as the Beijing conference in 1995. The interviewee must have worked on women’s rights issues at the international level. Some of my participants worked primarily at a global level, working within international membership organizations or the UN itself. Most of them were active both locally and globally, based in organizations that worked at a national level but also participated in UN processes. Another criterion was that I
would only interview women. These criteria meant that my data set comes from a fairly narrow group of women, but, nonetheless, a group essential to my research question.

This research had its genesis in my personal participation in international activism on women’s rights. This affected how I conducted my research and chose my subjects. I knew many of the women personally, some by their work and their reputations. Others I met while attending conferences in 2015. I learned about some of the women while conducting the literature review for this dissertation, which augmented my knowledge of the key roles that several interviewees played in historical events and conferences. I relied heavily on the use of my personal networks to identify and contact participants, and to arrange interviews. Twelve of the forty-five women were contacted by email in advance of the gatherings that we were both going to attend, in order to arrange a time to meet at the conference. I met twenty-four of the women at the conferences, and appointments were made to interview them there. Four of them I saw at one conference and plans were made to sit down together for interviews at the next one that we would coincide at. Five of the women I visited in their homes, during my travels around the world during 2015. In sum, my interview selection was shaped by my personal relationships, my own activism at the same meetings, and my attendance at these key gatherings. Or, as Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross extrapolate, my interviews were encounters between women with common interests who can share knowledge.

Scholars agree that sampling procedures and decisions must be fully described, explained, and justified; this information creates an appropriate context for judging the

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443 In the Conclusion I briefly discuss that I did interview one man but could not use his interview in my data set. I wanted to only focus on women.

444 See DeVault & Gross, supra note 4 at 178.
The current sampling procedure may be characterized as both purposive and non-probability. These two methods can be used together when the research subjects are chosen by the researcher for specific reasons. The present interviewees were not randomly selected, but were selected in a manner appropriate for purposive sampling in the context of my research question.

Purposive sampling is a selective or subjective sampling technique used when the research subjects are chosen by the researcher for specific reasons. My interviewees were selected because of their engagement with women’s rights movements through their attendance at UN conferences and their engagement with UN processes. In addition, most of them had to be attending the same conferences as I was in order for me to be able to interview them in person.

Non-probability sampling represents a group of sampling techniques that help researchers select the interviewees from a population that they are interested in studying. These interviewees then form the sample that the researcher studies. A core characteristic of non-probability sampling techniques is that the samples are selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher, rather than random selection. My subjective standards governed the selection of my interviewees based on a set of criteria. Some of these criteria were substantive, and involved looking at those who had participated in UN processes and who had the requisite years of experience as a feminist activist within organizations. Some criteria were

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446 See *ibid*.

447 See *ibid*.


449 See Given, *supra* note 445 at 697–98.
logistical, such as choosing among those present at the same conferences I was attending. The third set of criteria was regional representation, which ensured that my interviewees were not all from the same region of the world.

Language was another criterion. All but two of the interviewees were English-speaking. For many, English was not their first or even second language. I interviewed two non-English speaking participants, one in French and one in Spanish, using some of my friends informally as interpreters. However, the logistics were problematic. I am not fluent enough in either language to engage in a meaningful interview, so while the women could answer my questions through interpretation, I did not feel in control of the process. I was asking my questions and hearing the answers through translation, without being able to carry on a conversation. While the use of subtitles in the film might not present a problem with the delivery of the content, it was very frustrating conducting interviews with amateur translation. I felt I was not really communicating with my subject. English was the language used at all the UN meetings and conferences that I attended, although the main UN General Assembly meetings had simultaneous translation for all UN languages. While I realized that my interviews and film would exclude non-English speakers, I did not believe that it would undermine my project’s credibility. I could not do a comparative analysis between English speakers and non-English speakers. However, it has always been obvious to me that non-English speaking civil society participants at UN meetings, of any kind, are disadvantaged. No doubt I would have received a less privileged view of international fora if I had interviewed women who did not speak English; women who were not a part of the “global elite”. There are six official languages of the UN (Arabic, Chinese, English,
French, Russian, and Spanish). While simultaneous translation may take place in the General Assembly and other official UN meeting rooms on UN premises, there is no translation equipment provided for civil society meetings at NGO venues. I have only rarely attended sessions with translation through equipment and translators in the main plenary rooms, for example at the WILPF congress in The Hague, when an NGO had a significant conference budget. There was no equipment in the smaller rooms and side events. The seminar and panel rooms in the NGO venues in New York do not have translation equipment, so only where there may be women who volunteer to translate for non-English speakers, for example to translate the words spoken by an Indigenous Guatemalan activist, will we, the audience, be able to hear and understand her talking about critical issues.

Similar to the issue of language and privilege is the question of the digital divide. Arguably, access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), what we used to call the information highway, is less an issue now than it was even five years ago. But there are very important access issues that remain. So much of the organizing of UN meetings and input into documents and review processes takes place online. The Canadian organization Taking IT Global refers to the new digital divide as not only stemming from technological literacy but also

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451 To understand the digital divide in the first decade of widespread internet use, see Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Feminists have long been engaged in this issue. The Association for Progressive Communication (APC) has a women’s rights program, formerly called Women’s Net, and their feminist tech exchanges have an active presence at all large women’s conferences, including UN ones: See “Feminist Tech Exchange” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Association for Progressive Communication <www.apc.org/en/project/feminist-tech-exchange>. I worked for many years on this issue, and facilitated an online network on the digital divide and women for the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) of the UN.
the cost of computer equipment. However, some aspects of this gap are arguably being reduced as cellphone technology is leapfrogging the need for such equipment. Many women, especially from Africa, use cellphone technology for Whatsapp messaging and texting.

Constance Okellet, one of my three interviewees from Uganda, has to travel 15 kilometres to a cyber café to access her email from a computer, but she can get instant messages on her phone. What is still insurmountable is that she needs a computer to write funding proposals. While donors pay for her to speak about climate change at UN meetings around the world, she still has no computer and cannot afford to have internet access in her home.

It is very important to point out this privilege bias within the UN system. It means that my findings are not representative of a broader group of activists participating in transnational feminist movements, but nor would such a sample necessarily be appropriate given my focus on UN engagement by a specific group of women. I was not aiming for a sample that was representative of women’s views in a “statistically significant” way; rather, I was looking to engage with women who shared particular experiences with the UN.

The selection of interviewees was highly dependent on who I knew personally. I have determined that sixty percent of my forty-five interviews were granted because of my personal connections either to the interviewees themselves, their colleagues, and/or their organizations.

DeVault and Gross posit that feminist researchers do not want to “limit their research to ‘cozy’ interviews with participants who are comfortably similar.” For my purposes, the intimacy and

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452 See “Digital Divide” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Taking IT Global <issues.tigweb.org/digitaldivide>. IWRP has worked with Taking IT Global, and they were an important youth component of our 2006 conference, in collaboration with Girl’s Net from South Africa. This was the conference that led to the making of the film Constitute!. I still work with Lerato Legoa, the former director of Girl’s Net, who says that coming to Canada and speaking in Parliament in 2006 was one of the highlights of her activist life.

453 See DeVault & Gross, supra note 4 at 180.
comfortable similarity provided a richness to my data set that I would not have had otherwise, as my relationship with my interviewees comes across in the film rather than mere transcripts.

I used the format of semi-structured interviews for all my data collection. Rather than a rigid set of questions, a semi-structured interview allows for the emergence of new questions during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. However, the interviewer in a semi-structured interview has a framework of themes to be explored. This format is also most in keeping with a documentary film style of interviewing – neither rigid nor rambling.

I developed a list of core thematic questions to guide my interview to ensure that each interviewee would explore the same key themes. Robert Weiss cautions that an interview guide is meant to be glanced at when needed and used as a prompter for the researcher. His advice was that interview guides or lists of questions should not be too lengthy or detailed, but rather should serve as aids to the researcher. This is because following a long list of questions will result in too much extraneous data and take the focus away from the key research question. From a film interview perspective, it leads to the danger that you will run out of time in the interview and not get the most critical material. From the perspective of the viewer, if this were a television interview on a news show, for example, the conversation could appear stilted or unbalanced, with the interviewer doing most of the talking. Thus, using this method ensured that I asked each interviewee the same few key questions, without losing the conversational aspect of the

454 See *ibid*.
455 See Julie Matlin, “Interview Tips for Documentary Filmmaking” (5 February 2010), online (blog): National Film Board of Canada <blog.nfb.ca/blog/2010/02/05/interview-tips-for-documentary-filmmaking/>. 
457 See *ibid*. 
This was important for the telling and the listening. The interview format also had to fit the technology used to present the data.

Feminist research theorist Sarah Maddison notes that semi-structured interviews “provide greater breadth and depth of information and the opportunity to discover the respondent’s experiences and interpretations of reality.”458 This is because they provide the respondents with the time and flexibility to elaborate on their answers, resulting in greater access to “ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.”459

In determining the core thematic areas to explore, I was mindful of the caution that Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland issue: when “novice researchers … choose too broad a question for their resources, and take too long to fix on a final version.”460 This points to the danger of not focusing enough on the key research question or thesis statement. According to them, a project has to be “tailored to meet limitations of scale, timing and resources.”461 While this lesson was clear, I struggled with it in the beginning of my project because there were so many questions to ask in covering a thirty-year time period. I was finally able to break down my many overall research questions into a few manageable questions and limit the interviews to the main focus areas of my project. My committee was very helpful in this process by continually encouraging me to focus on my research question.

When there was time in an interview, we would explore the secondary area of questions or elaborate further on national examples and personal stories. The result is that there is some imbalance in the interviews. Some are longer than others because the interviewees had more time

459 See ibid.
460 See Ramazanoğlu & Holland, supra note 36 at 149.
461 See ibid.
available to talk to me, so they may have provided illustrative examples such as how law reform
took place at the national level in their country, an option not available to others.

Here I will address the issue of the sample size of forty-five. Scholars have differing
views on the ideal sample size of interviewees that would provide a solid research base.462
Researchers need to clarify how the sample size might affect the findings, what the strengths and
weaknesses of the sampling selection procedure might be, as well as any other design decisions
that are relevant for interpreting and understanding the reported results.463 I struggled to ascertain
how many interviews would be “enough.” I sought guidance from scholars such as Michael
Patton, who suggested that maximizing the purposive sampling with as much depth as possible
would alleviate concerns about small sample sizes.464 Thus, I worked on the assumption that I
was aiming for a relatively small sample size that would allow my interviews to have depth and
detail.

I reviewed two studies on sample size to guide my consideration so I would be able to
decide when I had a sufficient number. A study by Clive Boddy found that sample sizes in
qualitative research varied from an average range of twenty to thirty interviews.465 Another study
by Mark Mason looked at five hundred and sixty-one PhD theses that used qualitative interviews
as their major source of data collection.466 He found in his study that, overall, the median number

463 See *ibid*.
464 See *ibid*.
466 See Mark Mason, “Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews” (2010) 11:3
Qualitative Social Research 1 [Mason].
of interviews was thirty-one.\textsuperscript{467} I concluded from these two studies that my sample of forty-five was adequate for this qualitative research project when compared to the norm in the discipline.

I looked to the academic research on saturation as another way to determine if my sample was sufficient to express the opinions of the women’s rights advocates I was seeking over the thirty-year time period. Saturation is a methodological principle that is “taken to indicate that, on the basis of the data that [has] been collected or analysed, further data collection is unnecessary.”\textsuperscript{468}

Mark Mason looked at the question of saturation as well as sample size and found that, while there may be other factors that affect sample size in qualitative studies, researchers use saturation as a guiding principle during their data collection.\textsuperscript{469} Mason notes that if a researcher “remains faithful to the principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation.”\textsuperscript{470}

While the technique of saturation should be utilized in a way that is consistent with the research question(s), the theoretical position, and analytic framework, there should also be some limit to its scope, so as to not risk losing its coherence and potency.\textsuperscript{471}

These points on saturation were important for my thesis. The majority of the respondents gave very similar answers when I was conducting the interviews, which was confirmed later in my analysis of the data. This assisted me in making two important decisions. One, I did not need

\textsuperscript{467} See \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{468} See Benjamin Saunders et al, “Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization” (2018) 52:4 Quality & Quantity 1893 at 1893.
\textsuperscript{469} See Mason, \textit{supra} note 466.
\textsuperscript{470} See \textit{ibid} at 2.
\textsuperscript{471} See \textit{ibid}.
to keep conducting more and more interviews, as the ones I had were consistent with each other. I was able to see a point of saturation clearly. Two, saturation provided me with the ability to limit the length of the film. I could not present forty-five characters in the film.\footnote{This issue held up my progress for quite some time as I felt conflicted between the need to present all my interviewees in the film with the fact that doing so would be impossible. I was not producing a mini-series!} This reality imposed constraints on my methodology. Typically, a documentary film has fewer than five lead “characters” presenting the narrative.\footnote{This is advice from noted Canadian documentary filmmaker Robin Benger.} I interviewed a sample of forty-five, as noted above, but then I had to be rigorous in my selection of who got portrayed in the film. For example, if many of the interviewees on camera clearly articulated the same idea or opinion that represented what most of the women said, then I would choose the three most compelling presentations in terms of image, sound, and delivery. Below, I will review how I chose the lead “characters” for the film.

Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, and Gillian Elam outline seven factors that might affect the potential size of a sample: “the heterogeneity of the population; the number of selection criteria; the extent to which ‘nesting’ of criteria is needed; groups of special interest that require intensive study; multiple samples within one study; types of data collection methods; and the budget and resources available”.\footnote{See Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, supra note 448 at 84.} The point about heterogeneity is critical to my section process. For example, the interviewees could not be all from one region, whether North America or Africa. I needed to ensure, as much as possible given my selection criteria, that my interviewees were representative of all the regions of the world. I chose to use the same regional categories that the UN uses to delineate where my research subjects were from. The breakdown of the regional geographic representation of the forty-five women is as follows: Africa (10) (23%); Middle East North Africa (MENA) (2) (4%); Asia Pacific (AP) (15) (33%); Latin America and Caribbean
(LAC) (5) (11%); Europe (2) (4%); North America (NA) (11) [Canada 4 and USA 7] (25%). The sample size is not truly representative of the world population, as the Asia Pacific region represents 60% of the world’s total population, and only 33% of my sample.

Due to geopolitical variables, some countries have a longer and stronger historical connection to the UN. Furthermore, not only do women in different regions have different priorities when it comes to their activism, but funding options also influence their engagement with UN meetings and bodies. North America is represented in a higher percentage of interviews, compared to their percentage of regional population. This was in part because many of the women interviewed in New York at the UN worked for organizations whose head offices are based in New York, and they live there and could easily attend the meetings there. I believe that I resolved this, however, by actively working to make sure that more than half of the interviewees represent the global South.475

The second point about not having heterogeneity is that of intersectionality.476 Feminists have increasingly emphasized the differences among women. Women are not seen as a single category, but as a collection of categories, divided along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. However, my sample of the women I interviewed is not at all representative. It is indicative of a select and elite group of women of my generation who have been able to participate in UN conferences and processes. As I pointed out earlier, I actively recruited as many interviewees as I could who had attended both the 1985 and 1995 conferences, who were

475 While I use this term as a preference over “developing countries” or “third world” it is still not accurate. For example, Australia is considered part of the Asia Pacific region and there are three white Australian women in my sample, and while one of them (Kate Lappin) is the head of an Asia Pacific regional feminist organization and lives in Thailand, she is still a white Australian.

476 See the discussion in the previous Literature Review chapter which refers to feminist work on intersectionality, which has become a multi-disciplinary and global area of scholarship in recent years – see work by Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Nira Yuval-Davis, Ange-Marie Hancock, Leslie McCall, Julia Zachery-Jordan, and Iris Marion Young among others.
as close as possible to my own age and generation. I do not consider this a limitation, but rather that it validates the select sample that I chose.

This is not an intergenerational project. If I had chosen to speak to much younger conference participants, I would of course have had different results. But they would not have had the thirty-year vantage point. While I did not ask any of my interviewees their age, I had a general idea within a decade of their age because of how long I have known them, and what UN meetings they had been active in.

Reinforcing Exclusion

A critical part of the reflexive process is to be clear and honest about who does not appear in the narrative, either on screen or in my findings. The lessons of intersectionality—both theoretically and practically—are important. But my project is not able to make a claim to a full intersectional analysis. This does not mean that the data it collects is not valuable, simply that the data speaks in limited ways to larger questions.

I am aware of the critical role that Indigenous women play in global activism, and the lack of Indigenous women in this project is something I am very conscious of. I employ the UN definition of Indigenous as representing peoples who are non-dominant and distinct in post-colonial societies. I make this distinction because several of the African women I interviewed

477 For example, I conducted interviews for another film project in 2014. I was working with the Women’s International Human Rights Institute (Alda Facio and Angela Lytle) and we conducted a two-week training in Nepal of CEDAW. We had 34 women from 26 countries, all under the age of 35. None of them had been to either the 1985 or the 1995 UN conferences. They all wanted to attend a world women’s conference. Our interviews were about what they did as activists in their countries, how they were planning to use their training on CEDAW when they got home, and how they stayed hopeful given the despair and danger of their work, as many of them came from quite repressive regimes. It was enlightening and lively. However, to have tried to use that footage with this project in an intergenerational dialogue would have been both dishonest, and a totally different project.


Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.
refer to themselves as Indigenous, and while they come from a post-colonial state they do not represent an ethnical or cultural minority. It is important for this project to acknowledge the lack of Indigenous voices as a gap in the research methodology itself. It is not indicative of the lack of participation of Indigenous women at global conferences, as is evidenced by an article on the participation of Pauktuutit, the Canadian Inuit women’s organization, at the Beijing conference.\footnote{See Mary Sillett, “Ensuring Indigenous Women’s Voices are Heard: The Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women” (1996) 16:3 Canadian Woman Studies 62. However, in 2015 the majority of the women who work for Pauktuutit are non-Inuit and I did not feel it was appropriate to have them speak on behalf of Indigenous women in the film.}

The issue of the lack of representation of Indigenous women is acknowledged throughout this dissertation as a major limitation.\footnote{This is also a structural issue within the UN and elsewhere, which is further reflected in this thesis.} There are a number of reasons, not excuses, for this. The first one is that I was not able to find Indigenous women who would agree to be included in this

They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.

\textit{(See ibid at 2.)}

Further:

This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present of one or more of the following factors:

a) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least of part of them;

b) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands;

c) Culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, lifestyle, etc.);

d) Language (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language);

e) Residence on certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world;

f) Other relevant factors.

\textit{(See ibid at 2–3.)}
project. I did not know any or find any Indigenous women who had been to Nairobi or Beijing at the gatherings I was at in 2015. The Indigenous feminist activists I know are involved in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the UN Human Rights Council, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). I did not meet any of them at the CSW meetings. I did not want to interview a few token Indigenous women who did not fulfill any of the criteria for my data set. For example, I met many Indigenous women at climate change conferences, both UN and other global ones, but their focus has been on representing Indigenous peoples in their fight against climate change, not on securing the equality of women. I believe that it is more honest to acknowledge their absence from the film, as indicative of their absence and exclusion from UN processes. And, finally, speaking very personally, I acknowledge that I did not feel at all comfortable asking Indigenous women who have suffered more than 500 years of brutal oppression and exploitation to waste any of their time helping out with some White Settler Girl’s privileged project that would do absolutely nothing to further their struggle for survival, let alone equality. That I was not comfortable in asking these over-burdened Indigenous activists to take the time to privilege my individual research project does not excuse the omission in this project.

The Indigenous women whom I know personally as friends have been involved in the Indigenous people’s forum, the climate change and environmental meetings, the world meetings on racism, and the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.481 The invisibility of Indigenous women in this project mirrors their invisibility in the broader global women’s movement, despite

the Beijing’s *Declaration of Indigenous Women* and their critique of the *BPfA*.  

Proactive steps to ensure Indigenous women’s participation in the CSW meetings are long overdue but now being undertaken by UN Women and other agencies.

The Canadian Indigenous women I know of who have participated in the UN Human Rights Council and CEDAW meetings were not available to me for an interview. Some of the Indigenous women whom I did meet did not speak English (as noted above) and I chose not to use the amateur translation method. Many of my interviewees speak about the oppression and violence against Indigenous women, but I chose not to include non-Indigenous women speaking about Indigenous women in the film, as that would compound the act of appropriating their voices.

In this context, I recognize the representative limits of my interviews.

### 3.3 Coding

Having carried out the interviews and transcribed them, the next step in the film process was to go through each transcript and colour code a series of themes with highlighters to show what I needed to extract from the data in each interview. For some time, I struggled with understanding the difference between a theme and a topic. The themes of my research were general, and the topics were more specific.  

Once I could see the forest

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483 This example is for UN Women in Guatemala, where the one Indigenous woman I interviewed for this project is from: see “Guatemala” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: *UN Women* <http://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala>.


485 My Committee was very helpful in explaining the difference between a theme and a topic, as it was clear that I did not understand, and one of the members sent me these helpful YouTube videos: see Alex Spence, “Theme vs.
(themes) for the many trees (topics), the four key themes on which I wanted to hear my subjects’ opinions presented themselves: the number one key achievement of thirty years of activism as placing male VAW on the global agenda; the rise of autonomous feminist organizations at local, national, and global levels; the space that the UN fora created for women civil society members from around the world; and how women’s rights activists have used key UN documents (treaties, policy statements, platforms of action, resolutions) to further their advocacy and law reform.

The data that are obtained from interviews in this type of research are in raw form and needed to be refined and organized before I could evaluate and draw conclusions from the film footage. Codes help researchers quantify qualitative data and give meaning to raw data.486 “Code” to me sounds very much like computer or spy terminology, but for my purposes it was a phrase or sentence that I could find in a consistent way within my data. There are computer programs that can be used to code data such as Tams, Answer, and RQDA. But I designed my own system that worked extremely well for me and for the way in which I was transcribing the interviews.487 I describe it below.

The data that I organized was based on the responses of my interviewees to the questions that I posed. It is useful to reiterate those here rather than asking the reader to turn to the Appendices. At the outset it must be noted that I did not engage in “leading questions,” and avoided putting words into the mouths of my participants. What follows is a guide to my

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486 This YouTube series on coding made simple was very helpful: Mod-U: Powerful Concepts in Social Science, “What is a Code?: Qualitative Research Methods” (1 November 2016), online: YouTube <www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAKRKZq_Ebo>.

487 To make the film Constitute! I hired transcribers to type out all the transcripts of the film, but I was living in South Africa at the time and the fees were much cheaper given the foreign exchange rate. I could not afford to hire someone in Canada for this project.
questions. I began with asking, what was their involvement with activism and the international women’s rights movement? What conferences did they attend and why were they important to them? What did they see as the three key achievements or advancements in women’s equality rights over that thirty-year period? Could they be specific with examples of how they, and/or their organization(s), used UN processes and international human rights law (IHRL) such as CEDAW, the BPfA, UNSCR1325, and other key treaties or conventions in their international activism. How have they translated or domesticated IHRL into local contexts with specific examples? What do they see as the main challenges facing the transnational feminist movement at this time, in 2015? Given those challenges, what do they see as strategies for the way forward?

I began the editing process by watching all my interview footage and preparing verbatim transcripts of each interview. I found it very awkward to watch the footage on one laptop and type the transcripts on another laptop. I chose to write out all the transcripts in longhand. This process took place over several months. Each transcript also had to have the numeric time codes applied from the recordings for the transcript at an almost sentence-by-sentence basis. In total, I filled ten notebooks. I then took colour highlighters and went through each transcript looking for specific themes and topics that my interviewees discussed. I then catalogued those coloured themes and copied them on to another notebook with the time codes of the interviews. While there are programs that could carry out this work, I felt that both writing by long hand and colour coding by hand with a highlighter gave me a more visceral relationship to my interviewees’ words. I will provide an example as follows.

After watching the film footage literally hundreds of times, it was obvious to me that the key themes that could be drawn out were the following. I have included the colour codes that were used to highlight each one. They were:
• Achievements made in women’s equality to date (blue);

• Use of documents such as BPfA, CEDAW, UNSCR 1325 (purple);

• Importance of attending UN conferences and CSW, including importance of women networking together and sharing experiences and strategies at these very meetings (pink);

• Examples of local domestication of international law (navy);

• The significance of VAW in movement building (black);

• Women’s rights as human rights through the use of IHRL (orange);

• Context of neoliberalism (aqua);

• Role of indigenous women and indigenous women as HRDs (red);

• The current challenges and the way forward (yellow).

I would then tabulate my numbers. Here is an example of the tabulation of the purple coding, references to using IHRL such as the documents/ conventions as indicated above. The tabulation includes the time code of the interview: Marge 5937, 1637; Lesley Ann 05, 04; Di 002, 676, 1987; Gladys 051; Lina 5208, 4141; Aurora 1440; Doo 4:09; Aby 5427: Sameena 1745; Renu 009; Anjlee 25; Ruth 3011; Sizani 1037, 5529; Rokiya 12; Shanthi 3354; Madeleine 5387; Alda 1318, 1923, 1114, 1923, 001; Joanne 4587; Charlotte 2724, 2745, 2768; Oby 3678, 3690, 0049; Cynthia 4838; Kunthea 5609; Kate 1637, 1789; Jessica 3300, 5212, 2931; Thida 4055; Diana 02, 05,07; Florence 08. What is not included here is the number of minutes that each section runs from the initial time code. It could have been 3 minutes or 12 minutes. The extraction end time codes are not included here.

For the above example, then, twenty-seven of my forty-five (60%) interviewees all made comments and answered questions and provided examples to the question of how they used
CEDAW, the BPfA, or the UNSCR 1325. This then became one of my key themes: “How women’s rights activists have used key UN documents to further advocacy and law reform.” This same methodology was applied to all my questions and to the data provided by my interviewees, and then the four salient themes were presented in my findings.

3.4 Editing the Film

There was a huge quantity of complex material to wade through in the editing process. How would I edit over 60 hours of interview film footage down to less than two hours? I knew I would have to engage in a rigorous, even brutal, process that would leave most of my characters on the “cutting room floor.”

After transcribing and coding the interviews, the next step was to create what is called the paper-edit, which contains all the detailed shot and production information. It is the tool the editor uses to cut the footage and includes the elements of time-counters, tape numbers (even though we no longer use tape), and shot in-points and out-points (the beginning and end of each phrase or section). I would extract each of the sentences, paragraphs, and sections from the interviews and type each of them, with the time codes, into a framework document. There is software that can do this kind of sorting for research transcripts, but I am not technologically savvy enough to use it. Filmmaking is now digital, but I really felt like I was still cutting and pasting like the films that used to be made using 32mm or 16mm film. It seemed to be a more intimate process than having impersonal software do sorting based on key words or phrases. My process felt nuanced, as it required me to engage directly with the footage.

The next step was to write the script. The script consisted of my narrative text interspersed with the verbatim words of each interviewee, with the time code for each sentence.

488 There are no cutting rooms anymore, since films are now made digitally, but the expression still stands.
This detailed script was the document that the editor would use to take each clip and cut it out from the overall interview, assembling them in order in the software that she would use to edit the film together. After the film clips of the interviewees were assembled, I sat in front of my camera and recorded myself reading the narrative. This narrative was the commentary that provided the history, illustrated the themes, introduced each of my character’s points, and explained why I was making this film as part of my dissertation. At each juncture of my narration, I introduced which interview clips would be used in the final editing process. My narration was not just a voice-over added to the soundtrack during the production. Rather, with my role on camera, I could speak directly to the viewers, offering my explanations and opinions.

Once this entire process was completed, I had to find someone to carry out the actual editing. I do not have the technical expertise to edit, nor do I possess the expensive software program and the Macintosh computer that it requires. I do not know the difference between video file formats such as MP4, AVI, MOV, or AVCHD! After a lengthy search, I was able to find a wonderful and talented young man, Jesse Joy, who is a film student, and pay him an hourly rate to edit the film. This required me to have all of my colour coded notes in hand, and sit with Jesse over many hours while we edited the film together under my direction. In film parlance, I am the Director, Writer, Director of Photography, and the Producer, while Jesse is the Editor.489

**The Selection for Semi-Representation**

The process of selecting the key interviewees for the film was part of the process of selecting clips to use. The main characters had to be articulate in discussing the main themes that were the most consistent across the findings. For example, I had to make sure that they were not

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489 Just the editing process took seven months in total and I had over twelve rough cuts. I honestly had no idea that it would consume so much of my life, nor did Jesse.
all white, not all from the global North. In my data set, out of the forty-five interviewees, I would estimate visually that twenty-seven (60%) are what we might term racialized, or women of colour, the pejorative definitions we apply to women who are not considered white in a racist dominant global culture. However, I never asked the women I interviewed how they defined themselves. It never occurred to me that it would be useful.

Similarly, I personally know that a certain percentage of the women I spoke to are lesbian, although I did not ask anyone to identify their sexual orientation. For example, while Charlotte Bunch, Alda Facio, Dianne Otto, Madeleine Rees, all publicly discuss being lesbian in terms of their feminist politics, I do not expect all feminists to do so regardless of their personal sexual orientation or gender non-conforming identity. Nor was this project going to be about “ outing” any of the women I interviewed. Participants referenced the issue of the fight for recognition of people who are LGBTQI2, and, in fact, it is included in the comments by Joanne Sandler early on in the film. The fact that SOGI rights were not included in the BPfA is also discussed elsewhere in interviews, but it was not a predominant theme. This in no way lessens this topic’s critical importance.

I did interview two women with disabilities that were visible to me. I did not ask anyone if they defined themselves with a disability, so of course there could be more. These two women, who are wheelchair users, are both disability activists. One of them, Meenu Sikand, is in the film as she is able to refer back to experience in Beijing in 1995 with reference to her ongoing experiences of exclusion in 2015 and 2017.

I interviewed one Indigenous woman, but that interview was in Spanish and I chose not to include the translation through subtitles. I interviewed one Francophone African woman whose interview was in French. This is also an important example of my acknowledgement that
the lack of English is a marker of marginalization for women activists who attend the UN. As I have noted elsewhere, translation devices are available only within the main UN rooms and venues. The workshops, panel discussions, and venues that women attend outside the main UN spaces do not provide translation and the main language spoken is always English. Often women who do not speak English need to travel with an English-speaking colleague, if they can, to assist with basic translation. It makes participating in dialogues and discussions almost impossible.

I also ensured that I included views in the film that were contrary to my main findings, as it was very important to note that not all of the feminists agreed with the same things.

I faced certain aesthetic choices that would not be part of a dilemma in a traditional, written thesis. For example, I could not include footage where there was very bad sound or camera work, as this would affect the overall quality of the film. There would have been real inherent difficulties here had there been a very pertinent point that could not be made in the film because of technical difficulties. Fortunately, this was not the case. If that had been a consideration, I realized I could ultimately have resolved this when I made the decision to be on camera myself and could have used the voice over technique to make the point in the absence of a useable clip.

In a traditional documentary film, the editor, director, and writer decide which scenes, shots, and sentences will get included, what “truth” gets told, which facts or memories get excluded, which scenes the audience will see, and how the story unfolds. These decisions are made both editorially and aesthetically. These are ethical and political choices where the risk is not only misrepresentation, but how much misrepresentation. Like editing, the analysis is a

process of selection and organization, “a process of envisaging patterns, making sense, giving shape and bringing [my] quantities of material under control.”

As an integral part of the editing process, I am imposing my own theoretical viewpoints and subjective biases through the framing process.

To summarize, I had to choose interviews that had decent camera work and sound, represented my key findings, illustrated the racial and geographic diversity of my sample, and that identified both differences of opinion and specific examples of law reform. These were the practical constraints on the substance.

**Adding the B-roll**

Once the overall film editing process was completed, the next step in the editing process was adding in the “B-roll.” The term B-roll is used to describe supplemental or alternative footage intercut with the main shots of the film. This is where the action or archival footage for my film can be found. I had several kinds of B-roll. First, I had about forty additional hours of B-roll that I filmed myself. I recorded the UN meetings, the crowd in the UN General Assembly, and some of the interviewees speaking at microphones, on panels, or engaged in discussions. The B-roll also contains marches, women chanting and singing, interviews I conducted with women outside, images of the tropical landscape (for example at the Beijing +20 meeting in Bangkok), women working, torrential rains, traffic, and so on. The use of the B-roll is critical in situating a character within the film. For example, I interviewed Kate Lappin, Director of the Asia Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD) in New York, but I also filmed her earlier in Bangkok at the UN meeting and I used two shots to show her active in a UN meeting. I

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491 See Ramazanoğlu & Holland, *supra* note 36 at 160.

interviewed Lesley Ann Foster, and I also filmed her presenting at a workshop at the UN. I interviewed Charlotte Bunch at her home in New York and I also filmed her speaking at a podium in the Hague and at a workshop at the CSW meeting. I added in these images and clips to give context to their activism and to make the film itself more interesting. It would be ironic to discuss activism and only portray women sitting and talking to me. The second area of B-roll I used was archival or stock footage. Stock or archive footage is film or video footage that is used in films from a found source.\textsuperscript{493}

I carried out extensive online research to source footage of my interviewees from the past and give historical context to their words on screen. One example was when I chose to show Florence Butegwa presenting the demands of the delegates at the Vienna human rights conference in 1993.\textsuperscript{494} This was a very deliberate choice because this conference is most often associated with the American activist Charlotte Bunch, and I wanted to make the point that an African woman from the global South was not only a key player and an equal partner, representing one of the sixty women’s organizations in that coalition in Vienna, but was co-chair along with Charlotte. Another example was to show Radhika Coomaraswamy delivering her report on the fifteen-year review of UNSCR 1325 in 2015. Although I wanted to interview Radhika, I was unable to. Nor was I able to film the launch of her report, as it was embargoed at the time. So while I attended the launch and spoke with Radhika in person, I was not permitted to film this myself. However, UN TV is a good source of historical footage and it does not require people to pay for the rights to use it. The short section that I used of Radhika reinforced points

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\textsuperscript{493} See generally Alexandra Juhasz & Alisa Lebow, eds, \textit{A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film} (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

\textsuperscript{494} See \textit{The Vienna Tribunal: Women’s Rights are Human Rights}, Film (St John’s, NL & Montreal: Augusta Productions & National Film Board of Canada, 1994) [\textit{The Vienna Tribunal}]. \textit{The Vienna Tribunal} is a documentary on the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Conference, directed by Canadian film maker Gerry Rogers for the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership, produced by Augusta Productions and the National Film Board of Canada.
that my interviewees had made. I also reviewed some documentary films that provided biographical information of key interview subjects, with both historical and archival footage.\textsuperscript{495} Some other footage that I found was historical footage on the launch of CEDAW, the Nairobi and Beijing conferences, marches, and interviews given by my participants from previous decades.

The third form of B-roll that I used was still photographs. Some of them were my own photos taken over many years, some were scanned from my own collection of documents and reports, some photos were given to me by the interviewees themselves, and some of them I found online at UN and other public websites or my subjects’ Facebook pages. Not all of them had enough resolution to be used in the film so I was not able to use as many as I had initially planned.\textsuperscript{496} Again, they were interspersed throughout the film in order to make it more visually interesting. Choosing where to place the B-roll and keeping the voice recording, or voice over, while taking out the video image of the interview was also a time-consuming challenge.

What do these editorial choices and research methodologies have to do with my reflections about the dissertation process? I examine this in the next section.

3.5 Musings: Behind the Camera and in Front of the Screen

All researchers carry intellectual, emotional, and political baggage with them. I have described that making this film and producing this dissertation was a very important journey for me and I repeat the metaphors of journey, travel, baggage, and exploration in my work. Caroline Ramazanoğlu asks us to examine what we have packed for the trip, what we left out, and what

\textsuperscript{495} See \textit{Passionate Politics: The Life & Work of Charlotte Bunch}, Film (Newburgh, NY: New Day Films, 2011); a film on the history of the Beijing Conference: \textit{MAKERS: Once and For All} (last visited 30 December 2018), online (video): \textit{MAKERS} <https://www.makers.com/videos/5651125ce4b0a81533bd934f>; \textit{The Vienna Tribunal}, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{496} To be used in a film, the resolution of the photos needs to be over 1,000 pixels, and many of the ones I found online were reproduced at under 600 pixels.
fits comfortably into our bags.\textsuperscript{497} I also want to ask the common airport security question, “did anyone else give you something to pack?” By this I mean what biases and hidden stereotypes may have crept into my suitcase without my seeing them and how do I pull them out and make them visible? This means that I must examine my own positionality as a researcher.

Reflexivity refers to the researcher examining her own social positions and personal beliefs, and how they enter the research process.\textsuperscript{498} As feminist researchers, we are urged to be reflexive about the exercise of power in our research process. Reflexivity involves self-awareness and transparency. Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland note that “feminism implies that projects should be reflexively conceived and justified.”\textsuperscript{499} How do I locate myself and my research in the same world as those who I am studying? I need to be fully aware of my role in shaping my research agenda, and I need to be transparent in explaining it. I must be clear about “making my aims, assumptions, politics and ethics clear and justifiable.”\textsuperscript{500} As a qualitative researcher, then, I am not only reflexive about my own work but am, as Johnny Saldana describes, “even autoethnographic—introspective about [our] my own investigative journeys—metacognitive of what, how, and especially why we’re doing what we do by exploring the phenomenon or culture of qualitative inquiry through a culture of one’s own experiences.”\textsuperscript{501} He goes on to say that “we cannot bracket ourselves. We must examine what’s inside the brackets. It’s within the brackets that meaning is to be made.”\textsuperscript{502} And in so doing, I

\textsuperscript{497} See Ramazanoğlu & Holland, supra note 36 at 148. 
\textsuperscript{498} See Ping-Chung Hsiung, “Teaching Reflexivity in Qualitative Interviewing” (2008) 36:3 Teaching Sociology 211 at 214. 
\textsuperscript{499} See Ramazanoğlu & Holland, supra note 36 at 148. 
\textsuperscript{500} See ibid. 
\textsuperscript{501} See Saldana, supra note 3 at 2037. 
\textsuperscript{502} See ibid.
examine my own privilege, biases, and social position. I am a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, older, unilingual, English-speaking, professionally-trained woman from Canada, doing a PhD in law. While I cannot presume to what degree this privilege impacted my interviews, particularly with women of colour and those from the global South, most of whom were not lawyers and did not have PhDs, I must presume that it did have an impact. Jill McCorkell and Kristin Meyers point out that the influence of racial privilege on the research process is subtle and complex. The challenge is how to make power explicit in the research account.

In the larger world, my Canadian passport and residency and white skin privilege give me a greater degree of access than many of the women I spoke to. While I did not need visas to travel to my interview sites, many of the interviewees needed visas to the USA for CSW. I take for granted my privileges and live with them often unconsciously. Though some of the women I interviewed might perhaps be considered middle-class in their home countries, the context of their countries is often one of enormous disparity, poverty, post-conflict situations, or high levels of violence. My activist participation in these UN processes could not be considered similar to theirs. For them, the stakes were much higher and gender inequality implied much more serious consequences. Engaging in this academic process reflected one additional aspect of my privilege: I was conducting research for my PhD while they were fighting for equality for the women in their countries; and many of them put their lives at risk on a daily basis.

Reflexivity is also an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction at every step of the research process. Kristi Malterud reminds us that “[a] researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of

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504 And this was pre-Trump. The situation is so much worse now, and I comment on this in the Conclusion.
investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions.”

I must become aware of how my own location and interests are imposed at all stages of the research process – from the questions I asked and those I did not ask, to the subjects I interviewed and those I did not interview (some of which I discussed above).

Researcher reflexivity remains an important element of the research process and relationship. To practice reflexivity means to acknowledge that “all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced and that it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed.” I acknowledge that my findings are limited to the opinions of women who, regardless of race and social location, were privileged enough to be able to fly to a meeting in New York or Geneva; were invested enough in the UN system to be present at UN meetings; and interested enough to share their opinions with me on camera. I cannot claim to provide a general truth or pattern that could be considered representative of all internationally active feminists’ experiences. The nature of my analysis and findings are based on the opinions and perspectives of the women I interviewed, from which I drew some common themes. However, these themes should be considered as but one, albeit important, contribution to the current feminist debate around the future of feminist activism within the UN system.

I feel that I have accounted for all these limitations, since from the very outset I have been clear that I seek opinions from a non-random sample of feminist activists who I know, and I


have never portrayed this endeavour as one that is scientifically objective. It is not a case study that illustrates, for example, how CEDAW has been used for the wording in the drafting of a domestic violence (VAW) law using the text of CEDAW in a specific country. Neither am I conducting an evaluation, as I often do in my professional work, on how gender is mainstreamed, for example, into a UN transboundary water basin project. Nor is it a comparative study where I compare how a domestic violence law might be drafted in several countries, or how the implementation is carried out, or not.

Gesa Kirsch writes that by locating oneself in the work, the goal of reflexivity is to “reveal to readers how our research agenda, political commitments, and personal motivations shape our observations in the field, the conclusions we draw, and the research reports we write.” She discusses that researchers must examine how aspects of identity shape their research, such as their theories, relationships with those they study, and interpretations of data. Moreover, she urges that the choices researchers make should be transparent to readers, as well as to participants.

I believe that I attempted to be as transparent as possible in making my research purpose clear: that I was seeking their opinions on the effectiveness of doing feminist advocacy work using the UN system. I was very clear that while this was part of a research project that would assist me in getting my PhD, the motivation for my inquiry was my disillusionment with seeing UN meetings and conferences as viable tools in the struggle for gender equality. I believe that I was able to interrogate myself to make sure that I was not seeking the answers that I wanted to ally my own cynicism or despair, or a narrative that would make me feel better.

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507 See Kirsch, supra note 490 at 14.
508 See ibid at 85.
I was also transparent about my own theoretical perspectives regarding the critical role that women’s movements have played in our advocacy as feminists. I placed my inquiry squarely within the theoretical framework that I developed from the work of Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon and AWID, as I have reviewed in the previous chapter. I was not pretending to test an objective hypothesis about this idea. I was clear with my interviewees that I was seeking their opinions from their own lived experiences, as women who were “agents in their own lives.”

As long as there has been feminism, there has been a tradition of consciousness-raising and testimony. Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross explore this experiential aspect of feminist interviewing. They point out that “feminists have brought forward a wealth of previously untold stories – those of marginalized peoples, and also those that the more privileged may have kept hidden, awaiting a receptive audience.” I was that audience, and I began with my own intellectual biography and context in the asking of my questions. Because the notion of experience is integral to feminists understanding of our own lives and the lives of other women, the interview is really more about “ways of conceptualizing [the interview] as an encounter between women with common interests who would share knowledge.” Throughout the interviews, we carried on a conversation where both the telling and the listening was discursive. As previously noted, while feminist social scientists warn us that feminist researchers should not be “limited to ‘cozy’ interviews with participants who are comfortably similar”, that is what I was doing. For my project this enhanced, not detracted, from my ability to elicit information and opinions, knowledge and insights, from these very dynamic and powerful women. I was also

509 See DeVault & Gross, supra note 4 at 188.
510 See ibid at 173.
511 See ibid at 178.
512 See ibid at 180.
speaking with experienced activists who gave regular media interviews in their careers, many of whom had graduate degrees and understood the research process.

I did not offer any supposition that my research would be important for addressing or redressing gender inequalities or discrimination. At best, it could only serve to contribute as historical knowledge of how feminists viewed the UN system looking over a thirty-year period.

3.6 The Power of the Camera

Another result of reflexive thinking involves the power of the camera. I believe that people are generous with their time when talking about the issues that are most important to them. In this regard, the women who spoke with me were exceptionally generous. Our society has long been infatuated with television and film media. The very presence of a camera on a tripod, combined with my requests to interview people in a setting that resembled a news room or a television show, could have influenced my subjects’ decisions to agree to talk to me. These factors may have also presented my research agenda in an inflated way. Regardless, I realized that this advantaged my ability to obtain the interviews. I did describe to each interviewee that this was a two-part process: first, I was doing this research for my PhD thesis which was going to be presented in film form; and second, I was planning to make a documentary film for educational purposes, on the International Women’s Rights Project’s website. I referred them all to the Constitute! website to get a sense of what I had done with the LLM thesis.

Each interviewee had to read and sign the University of British Columbia study release form as well as a release form that I developed for the International Women’s Rights Project in case the website project were to go ahead. My plan after the conclusion of the PhD process is to make all the interview footage available on the website as open source material, along with links to publications and other resources. It is possible that some of the interviewees granted the interview thinking that they were going to be in a film rather than assisting with my personal
PhD project, but I did not ask anyone that question. I firmly believe that many of the interviews were granted as a personal favour to me, which is another example of my privilege, and a profound reason for me to hold myself accountable to my colleagues in the women’s movement. Most interviewees acknowledged to me that they felt that this was an important project, especially in 2015, because of the backlash women were experiencing all around the world. The timing of this project was such that many activists of my age or older were also writing up their biographies and the histories of their organizations. No one else was making a film. My accountability is part of the assurance that I accurately reflect the opinions and “herstories” of the women I interview, and that my use of it and my engagement with it will be made available to others.

### 3.7 Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory was also a useful touchpoint for this research and data gathering. Feminist standpoint theories emerged in the 1970s within a variety of disciplines. The feminist scholars working with this analysis, such as Dorothy E. Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, and Donna Haraway, advocated taking women’s lived experiences as the

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beginning of scientific enquiry. This is what I was doing by asking the women about their opinions and experiences.

Standpoint theory is also very significant in describing the world of racialized women, as feminist writers and theorists bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins have described. Standpoint theory is another way of requiring that the researcher put her taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes on the table for dissection. I was forthright about my cynicism and disillusionment, which I realized also came from my position of privilege.

This further required me to consider how I reproduced my own privilege through my analysis in order to explore the implications of identity in the research process. Was my position of privilege also reproduced through my insider/outsider status? I am an insider because I work in the same area of international women’s rights as the interviewees; many of them are friends, peers, and colleagues, and I have had conversations about my research topic with many of them over the years. I have attended some of the same international and UN meetings. I used my insider status to gain access to many interviews and, as Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber points out, this helped me obtain cooperation from and rapport with my respondents.

Jill McCorkell and Kristen Myers have commented that researchers grapple with this dilemma by examining points of connection between the researcher and the researched, noting that “[c]onnectedness, as a theme in the literature on reflexivity, is discursively mapped by

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519 See *ibid.*
detailing the investigator’s commonalities and differences with research subjects. I felt that I was an insider on a number of levels, not just based on our common work. There is a level of comfort in speaking the same language as my interviewees. I do not mean language as in mother tongue, but language as in sharing common experiences, having a common understanding of what it means to be an activist, our own shorthand on UN terminology, and so on. It is about being part of a community, a collective, and a movement with shared goals and values. Practically speaking, it made the interviews easier and shorter as I was not required to explain to each woman what the context was for my research. I did not have to justify that I was being objective. In fact, I do not believe that an “objective” researcher would have had the same access to the interviewees that I did. My experience provided important points of connection with participants and allowed us to have a certain familiarity in our interview conversations. It did save time, as many of the things we were discussing did not need an explanation, such as working with CEDAW, or having been at a certain CSW meeting when specific things were discussed. We share a common history in a movement.

My experience as a women’s rights activist has influenced all my research interests, as well as the generation, interpretation, and analysis of data. First, I really do not know much about anything else. Second, feminist activism encompasses all my personal and political interests, the people I know, the I research I read, the employment I have had, the paid work I have done as a consultant, the volunteer work I do for my NGO, how I see the world, and who my friends are. Third, my interest determines which meetings and conferences I attend, the workshops I speak at, and the keynote addresses I am invited to give. It also provided me with the opportunities to meet many of the women I interviewed. I met a few of these activists when I attended the 1985

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520 See McCorkell & Myers, supra note 503 at 204.
conference in Nairobi. Others I met later over the years, and include those who I have worked with, marched with, and partied with.

A researcher’s status as insider or outsider shifts as relationships are developed and negotiated during the course of the research.521 “As researchers we are never fully outside or inside, but just by becoming a researcher we adopt some degree of outsiderness.”522 I believe the emergence of my outsider status began when I focused the process of my research on collecting data for my own PhD. I was no longer an activist totally engaged in the conferences I was attending, but standing just outside, scanning the stage or the rooms for my interviewees, paying more attention to my own needs for the dissertation rather than the policy discussions and resolutions being presented in the moment. This metaphor is really germaine to photography and cinematography. I viewed the interviews through the lense of a camera. I had a piece of equipment mediating the experience of talking to the women I interviewed, creating a symbolic distance.

Dorothy Smith523 was an early feminist critic of the notion that distance, neutrality, and objectivity are essential characteristics of the researcher and of appropriate research practices.524 She noted that these practices often resulted in establishing a “one-sided relationship of observing and telling.”525 According to Smith, there are power asymmetries in the relationship

521 See ibid at 204.  
522 See Colleen Reid, Lorraine Greaves & Sandra Kirby, Experience, Research, Social Change: Critical Methods, 3rd ed (North York, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2017) at 49 [Reid, Greaves & Kirby].  
523 In keeping with the biographical nature of this project, it is important to say that Dorothy Smith’s work has always been important to me. I wrote my BA (Hons) thesis at Queen’s University in 1978 on Dorothy Smith’s work and subsequently moved to Toronto to study with her at OISE at the University of Toronto. While there I also worked for Resources for Feminist Research in 1978-1980. It was a huge honour for me to have Dorothy attend the UBC premiere of my film Constitute!.  
524 See Reid, Greaves & Kirby, supra note 522 at 56.  
525 See Smith, supra note 513 at 114.
between the researcher and the researched. In order to analyze these power asymmetries, I need to be self-reflective about my own power. There was enormous power in choosing who to put in the film, what the editing process would be, and even in determining the words that came out of the subjects’ mouths. While I did not tell them what to say or put words in their mouth, I did have power in deciding how to represent what they said. I chose certain phrases and sentences over others. I could also change the order of their comments without detection.

The second power asymmetry in this process was my decision to go on camera as the narrator. In effect, this made the film my story, with the interviewees playing supporting roles. But that is honest. I think that for all of us researchers, our project is first and foremost a version of our own story. As I said in the introductory chapter and also on camera, the motivation for this project was to question my own life’s work. My narrative is part of the overall story.

The feminist historian Ruth Roach Pierson recommends the value of women’s stories about themselves. Much of her groundbreaking feminist history developed a critique of the Western historical narrative. She combines a theorization of gender and a questioning of experience implicated in what she describes as “difference”, “dominance”, and “voice.” Feminism has a tradition of consciousness-raising and testimony, we bear witness to each other when we reveal our lives. Feminist researching, often open ended, “has brought forth a wealth of previously untold stories.”

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526 See ibid at 116.
529 See DeVault & Gross, supra note 4 at 173.
For my purposes, I am intrigued by her discussion of voice as most pertinent to my project. She notes that “[w]e have valorized oral history because it validates women’s lives.” Pierson’s work focused on women’s history of themselves (ourselves) and has noted that this “valorization has urged women historians in the direction of oral history as the methodology, next to autobiography, promising to bring the researcher to the ‘reality’ of women’s lives.” For my project, while some respondents reported their own stories of becoming involved in the global women’s movement, I am querying them more on their opinions of the work within the UN processes. I cannot rely only on their experience as a source of knowledge, but I can rely on their impressions while they review women’s equality rights activism over the past thirty years and what changes, victories, and challenges they see. Acknowledging the fact that part of this oral history is also my own is integral to my practice of reflexivity. As narrator, I am one of the characters in the film, and this is also part of my story.

3.8 Feminist Documentary Film Theory

I place myself firmly within the activist tradition, whether as a scholar, educator, student, consultant, or filmmaker. Some critical feminist documentary film literature reviews the activist potential of the films themselves. Political documentary has been defined as “any film or video that espouses an explicit opinion or position whose articulation contributes toward some manner of change, using realist forms found in the real world or real experience.” Manohla Dargis and Amy Taubin chronicle the primary lesson of the 1970s documentaries, stating that “the way to

\[530\] See Pierson, supra note 528 at 90.
\[531\] See ibid.
ensure marginalized people a place in history is to record their stories on film.” Dargis and Taubin believe that sharing a feminist articulation of oppression will inspire political action. Alexandra Juhasz goes on to suggest that feminist realist documentary film that is motivated by political struggles, community, and the consequences of identity will position itself in both form and content in some relation to reality – “one of criticality, theoretical sophistication and practice efficacy.”

One way to make a film is to document subjects whose lives will tell a story, as B.J. Wray discusses of same sex marriage films. Wray quotes David Whiteman on the political impact of documentary films as a “catalyst in many different ways”, observing that “social movements continually struggle to create public space for issues they think are important and films can become a critical part of that struggle.” Another way to develop a documentary narrative is to follow the activist filmmaking genre.

Where does my project fit within that theoretical framework? I looked to feminist documentary film theory to help unpack the role of the narrator. Like the scholar, the documentary filmmaker integrates her own standpoints into the work through the posited questions, the selection of shots, the representation of the interviewee’s words, the stories that

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534 See ibid at 204.
535 See ibid at 192.
are told, and even through techniques like lighting and angles. In her article on feminist research, Michelle Fine describes three stances feminist researchers can take that for me mirror feminist documentary theory analysis. The first is “ventriloquism,” or using the third person to cover up authorship. The second is “voices,” which is appearing to let the “other” speak while hiding beneath the covers (or behind the camera). The third stance is “activism,” where the researcher’s stance frames the texts produced and the writers themselves are explicit in their original positions and where their research took them. This is the one she urges us to take and it is the one that I took. I was as transparent as I could be while using the participatory mode of filmmaking, where the filmmaker interacts with her subjects rather than unobtrusively observing them. But having said that, I want to make it very clear that this is also another limitation of my filmmaking process. While the viewer will see me on camera “performing” the narration, they never see me in conversation with my interviewees. You do not see the actual conversation like you would in a television news interview scenario or other forms of documentaries. This is because I did not have two cameras, one of which would have filmed me asking the questions. I could have left in the audio, but the viewer would have seen the interview subject just sitting still while my disembodied voice would come over the audio portion of the film. From a filmmaking perspective, I chose to do the narration rather than the disembodied voice.


541 See ibid at 20.

542 See ibid at 30.
American documentary film theorist Bill Nichols distinguished traits of documentary film styles.\(^{543}\) While not a feminist, Nichols is an acclaimed film theorist who describes narration as a distinct innovation of the expositional mode of the documentary, where its manifestation of participatory filmmaking at its simplest means that “the voice of the filmmaker is heard within the film.”\(^{544}\) I am on camera speaking directly to the audience.\(^{545}\)

Audience is another specific methodological consideration. Films can evoke a myriad of different reactions in audiences. The writer must always know that each film chooses its own audience depending on how she chooses to tell the story. My penultimate audience is my PhD committee and external examiner. By using this medium, I hoped that they would be able to understand the points I was trying to make in the film as I wove together words, images, sounds, and structure into a narrative. I was not trying to persuade a non-feminist audience or a larger public audience of feminism, but rather, I was trying to inform a small group of informed feminist scholars of a particular aspect of the feminist process of advocacy and activism that can be generalized when using the UN system to further policy reform for women’s equality. I return to Dorothy Smith who says, “it is in walking away with the data and making your own interpretation of [them] that your power as a researcher is most acute.”\(^{546}\) I claim that power.

It was important for me to be rigorously ethical in my research behavior. Of course, this is true for any researcher, and particularly for all PhD researchers. It was even more critical for

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More autobiographical disclosure: I had delusions of becoming a documentary filmmaker while going to Queen’s University from 1975 to 1978 and I studied with Bill Nichols while completing my major in Sociology and my minor in Film Studies. My main influences studying film at Queen’s were the fantastic feminist filmmakers Barbara Halpern Martineau and Lorna Rasmussen whose work is still relevant and important forty years later.

\(^{544}\) See *ibid* at 107.

\(^{545}\) I want to acknowledge that I would never have gone on camera without the urging of Professor Rebecca Johnson.

\(^{546}\) See Smith, *supra* note 513 at 35–36.
me because I am engaging in this project with my peers, friends, and the community that I work in. I need to answer the following question: who am I accountable to for the knowledge that I have produced in this project?

I feel accountable not just to the particular women I interviewed, but to the women’s movement as a whole because I see it as a part of the larger feminist liberatory project. I also feel that it is important to ask my research subjects what they get out of the research and what the value of the research is to them. Several of the interviewees expressed an interest in seeing the final film project, but it was very interesting that no one asked to approve their content prior to the film being screened. In part they acknowledged that by signing the release forms. I felt that the women I interviewed trusted that I would treat their interviews with respect, but I also know that this is an example of my incredible privilege.

3.9 Internet Research Methodology

In this section I will make a few points about internet research methodology. Using online discussion platforms, blogs, websites, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook postings illustrate the internet as a discursive space that provide us with rich data that avoid the strictures of traditional research. One of the benefits is the collaborative and accessible nature of these media. As Rebecca Zak noted, “Twitter, wikis, blogs and YouTube are all dynamic pillars of the 21st century classrooms, social media has become the norm in educational practice for good reason.” Another advantage is the immediacy of the research, opinions, or conversation. I know from my own publications that the time from the beginning of the writing to the

547 For a full discussion of this issue, see Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup & Matthew Allen, eds, The International Handbook of Internet Research (New York: Springer, 2010).

publication in a peer reviewed journal can take several years. I am beholden to those scholars whose academic published work I reviewed through my thesis to provide my theoretical framework and to rely on the rigor of their social science research. However, reading contemporary and current debates and discussions of feminist activism integrated with theory is available through social media without waiting the years for “peer review”. Having such access contributes to being able to contextualize what I heard in 2015, within the political moment of 2018.549

3.10 Practical Challenges

My determination to film the interviews led to some time limitations. I was constantly having to find a venue for the interviews that was relatively quiet. I would arrange to interview someone at a particular time and place. While waiting for them, I would run around the building looking for a quiet place, if possible, to set up the equipment, my tripod and camera. Sometimes I could borrow someone’s office or their library, or I could find a stairwell that had adequate lighting. I had to pay special attention to the lighting since I carried no extra lighting equipment with me. I needed two chairs and a table or another chair to set up my external microphone that was plugged into the camera. I needed electrical outlets and had to carry extension cords with multiple adapters for the various countries. To ensure that I was able to have backup recordings, I had to set up a digital recorder with a second external microphone on another tripod. Even so, quite a few interviews had to be conducted in noisy venues such as restaurants or conference halls which would render them not usable for a professional documentary film. By the time the set up was complete, we sometimes had less than the sixty minutes I had hoped to have for each

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549 I subscribe to a myriad of feminist list servs – AWID, GWA, WUNRN, NGOCSW, CEDAW, WPSN, IHRLC, etc. I also read copious postings on feminist organizations’ Facebook pages. I do not use Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat. My newsfeed informs me on a daily basis of the current issues. With the rise of “fake news,” I can distinguish the “real news” only if the source is a trusted one.
interview. It was very difficult for many interviewees as they were doing me the courtesy of either meeting with me during their meal break, in between speaking on panels, or before they had to make the long trek to another conference building. And they had to eat.

It would have been easier if I had a professional camera person handling the equipment so that I could focus solely on the interviews. It was often unsettling to have to worry about the sound quality, the framing of the interviews, the camera recording, and conducting the interviews all at the same time. I was not able to take notes as I was recording, so there was no written backup. This was exacerbated by the fact that I recorded the interviews on film myself, so I had to constantly play the dual role as the camera/sound person and the interviewer. At times the technological limitations distracted from my ability to fully engage in the conversations, although I was not aware of this at the time. This meant that rather than being fully engaged in the interview, I might also have been paying attention to the crooked line on the bookshelf or some other issue in the background that was distracting me.

I had to respect the interviewee’s time to leave, so when I knew that time was very short I would focus on a few questions related to the key themes and make sure that I moved the interview along rather than letting the interviewee ramble. I had to keep them on track so that they did not go off on a tangent or engage in describing something that, while interesting, was off topic for my thesis. This is a test of the interviewer’s skill, because it is often more interesting, and certainly easier, to just let people talk.

Thus, there is an important distinction between being a researcher and an interviewer.

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550 I did not have the budget for this, and the one time that I hired a professional camera person, in New York by recommendation, her filming style and old equipment made the recording actually worse than mine.

551 I ended up purchasing three different microphones for this project.

552 I was an interviewer on Rogers community cable television shows in Toronto during my time at law school in the 1980s, so I did have some training in this technique.
I played a dual role as a documentarian who had to pay strict attention to the consistency of questioning in order to ensure that the data produced would be sufficient for a PhD dissertation. Therefore, the interviews had to be disciplined. At the same time, the experience was mediated through the lens, which meant that I had to focus on the framing of the shot, making sure the background was even, checking that the microphone was working, and ensuring that the battery was charged and that there was plenty of time left on the camera. I also did not have time to watch the interviews in between, but regardless I would not have had time to fix any problems as the women had gone on to their next event. I had three memory cards that I used, and when they were full I had to download all the interviews to several portable hard drives as there was not enough space on the drive in my laptop. To make sure I did not lose any interviews, I carried three different hard drives with me and made triplicate copies.

3.11 Conclusion

Throughout this process, I found a symbiotic relationship between the reflexive process of filmmaking and my own research methodology. I am mindful of Brooke Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True’s admonition that the researcher must be encouraged to re-interrogate her own scholarship. They further note that this self-reflection on methodology and method “trumps an epistemological or a normative stance for feminist researchers.” My own process throughout this project was both reflexive and reflective, since I constantly considered my role in the interviews and my relationship to the interviewees. Diving further into this relationship and linking the feminist theory and methodology to documentary filmmaking, Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman point out that elements of feminist research “make the invisible visible, bringing

553 See Brooke A Ackerly, Maria Stern & Jacqui True, eds, Feminist Methodologies for International Relations (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006) at 4 [Ackerly, Stern & True].

554 See ibid at 13.
the margin to the centre … putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right.”555 Ackerly et al make it clear that “many feminists believe that the researcher must be actively engaged in political struggle and be aware of the policy implications of her work.”556 I would agree that the aim of much feminist research has been the empowerment of women. Therefore, I contextualize my project not only in its contributions to scholarship on feminist activism, but also in its honesty regarding my own role in this activism.

I would argue that feminist documentary filmmaking methodology and feminist research methodology both provide a window on how truth, that is women’s truth, can be told. The structures that “determine who speaks, which truths are told and who has power” in documentary film are similar to a written PhD thesis in the reproduction of the stories told through the interviews.557 Interviewing for both formats is a powerful tool to explore women’s experiences as they are part of “an apparatus of knowledge production” that is relational and powerful.558

556 See Ackerly, Stern & True, supra note 553 at 29.
557 See Winton & Turnin, supra note 436 at 21.
558 See DeVault & Gross, supra note 4 at 192.
Chapter 4: The Film

There is a documentary film that was made as part of the research process for this dissertation. The interviews were filmed and edited together with other footage. I provided the narration to the film. The film was made for background and context and was viewed by the PhD Examining Committee. It is not a standalone product.
Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss what has been seen in the film and read in the preceding chapters, and explain why the findings from my interviews matter. The film presents my findings, interweaving my narrative with select interview material. This chapter crystalizes those findings in a shorter form and discusses the impact of my research, which is further explored in the Conclusion.

Returning to my guiding question, how do a selection of feminist activists of a particular generation, engaged in international feminist activism for decades, view the effectiveness of international multilateral processes in furthering women’s equality rights at the local, national, and global level? How does this generation of feminist activists, working across sectors, view the attainment of gender equality through the UN system?

The answers can be gleaned from a number of trends that emerged from my interviews. Four key themes were observable across this set of interviews:

1. This particular group of women’s rights advocates strongly believe that engaging with the UN system has strengthened women’s organizations and coalitions through networking and the sharing of strategies and ideas. This was true for 90% of my interviews;

2. In my sample, 75% of the activists I interviewed think that their work has resulted in changes to the UN system itself and to international law and policy on issues of women’s rights, especially violence against women;

3. Almost all, 90% of them, believe that the work of activism and advocacy must be done at both the international and local level in order to have the greatest impact on women’s
lives. Almost all of the women interviewed for this project saw work at the local and the
global as integrated, integral, and equally necessary;
4. In general, they argued that global and local perspectives work together as part of a
dynamic, intersectional paradigm. Different actions and objectives call for different
strategies, both globally and domestically.
Within these four themes, a number of recurring, though not dominant, topics emerged:
a. A full 75% of the interviewees answered the question “what do you see as the three main
achievements of the transnational feminist movement” by stating that the violence against
women agenda was the number one key achievement of their 30 years of activism. (This
is also found in theme two above);
b. While 40% discussed the importance of the rise of autonomous feminist organizations at
the local, national, and global levels, this was not a specific question put to them, but I
draw it as one of my themes;
c. Some 40% of the women discussed how UN fora created “space” for feminist civil
society;
d. Many also discussed how women’s rights activists used key UN documents to further
advocacy and law reform.

At the outset of my research, I had concerns that attending UN conferences and “talk
shops” was a distraction from feminist political work at the local and national levels. However,
the findings of my interviews communicate an assessment of activists’ international work that is
encouraging, although not simply so, of continued feminist involvement in the various
apparatuses of the UN.
5.2 Analysis

This is where we press the rewind button, looking back to some of the highlights, the prominent opinions, of the film. Gladys Acosta Vargas notes in the film that “we need to be working at all levels.” She urges us to work with the UN processes, using whatever legal frameworks we can access, and connect these multilateral mechanisms to the “field and base” – the term she uses to describe the local women’s movements that mobilize and strategize from the grassroots level. As Charlotte Bunch acknowledges, “times have changed since we went to Beijing and we have to reimagine the feminist movement in order to work simultaneously with broader alliances across all movements.” Joanne Sandler and Lesley Ann Foster say that “we cannot give up on the space that the UN provides us, the UN is our space”; but Kate Lappin sees another way of “using regional mechanisms more strategically.” Florence Butegwa and Oby Nwankwo know that grassroots women organizing can use UN treaties in their local context. Marge Schuler is convinced that women meeting with each other at the NGO fora is key, as are developing regional networks of women using law for development. Renu Adhikari places feminist struggles in the nexus of the victories achieved, which are many, with the “increasing attacks on women’s human rights defenders.” Dianne Otto notes that “terrible things are happening in the world and that we must be vigilant to not allow states to divide us due to global inequities and nationalistic pride – hence we need a global women’s movement that is non-state

559 See interview with Gladys Acosta Vargas.
560 See interview with Charlotte Bunch.
561 See interviews with Joanne Sandler, Lesley Ann Foster, and Kate Lappin.
562 See interviews with Oby Kwankwo and Florence Butegwa.
563 See interview with Marge Schuler.
564 See interview with Renu Adhikari.
based.”

Meenu Sikand is skeptical that change can take place even within our own movement for the most marginalized women. Lee Lakeman does not see any real possibility of change using the UN, but rather “we need to be in each other’s rallies and in the streets.”

Now we press the fast forward button so that I can move out of the film and incorporate these opinions into present discussions. In 2015, participants in this study all pointed to concrete examples of changes to the status of women and girls that they attributed to feminist activism, including feminist activism occurring in UN processes. The participants mused about the need for, or possibility of, another world conference of some type, as indicated by the interview with Joanne Sandler. But will the experience of this particular generation of feminist activists hold true for future UN engagement?

Laura Parisi finds that “[a]s the international system continues to evolve, feminist theorizing and activism will, as it has always done, adapt by drawing strength from the past to chart a path for the future.” I wonder if this still holds true? Are there lessons we can adapt from our past use of the UN system, at a time when we are seeing the decline of nation states and a weakening of the UN and other systems of global governance? This illustrates how fragile all human rights are, how easy to roll back. My research and my own involvement with the transnational feminist movement confirm what South African scholar Penelope Andrews says

565 See interview with Dianne Otto.
566 See interview with Meenu Sikand.
567 See interview with Lee Lakeman.
about human rights approaches and, I would add, feminist political strategies, that “there is no one-size fits all solution.”

It is imperative to include contemporary commentary in this chapter. Most of the theoretical and empirical literature that I reviewed in the Literature Review chapter was written prior to 2015, much of it at least a decade or two before. From my experience, gains that were seen as significant in the period following Beijing are now being substantially eroded, and the transnational feminist movement is undertaking quite different analyses and tactics compared to the period just after 1995. As has been repeated several times, the combined threat of globalization and neoliberalism, along with “dramatic changes in international politics, border protections, global militarization and toxic masculinities”, all add to caution against holding a fifth conference less the fragile gains from Beijing be lost.

In 2017, Anne-Marie Goetz and Joanne Sandler wrote this online:

It is stating the obvious, we know, to point out that feminist anti-patriarchal strategies need a massive global re-think. The strategies of the 70s, 80s and 90s have helped us make great strides, but the terrain has changed. Feminist movements are at the forefront of this resistance, and gender equality is a foundational principle of building open societies. It is not clear that another women’s world conference in 2020 is necessarily the best way to channel this energy. But it is worth debating whether it would help to build intersectional feminist strategies to rebuild inclusive democracies.

Thus, they argue, whether it is to be an official UN conference or not, there needs to be a global strategy meeting to inform contemporary transnational feminist movements, not only to share tactics but to develop a vision for the feminist future. Their argument reflects a debate that has

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570 See Andrews, supra note 393 at 13.
571 See Pettman, supra note 146 at 49.
been building since my research in 2015. Now that the decision seems to have been made for a UN Women hosted conference to take place in 2020, their overarching point is really about how to strengthen the feminist responses to current challenges.\textsuperscript{573}

While I did not interview Anne Marie Goetz for this project, her writing on this topic has been influential and I have spoken to her about it at various events.\textsuperscript{574} She spent a decade working at UNIFEM (which in 2010 became UN Women) as the Policy Director of Governance, Peace, and Security, before returning to academia.\textsuperscript{575} Goetz and Sandler’s 2017 article was followed in October 2018 by another thought piece, this time by Goetz only, published on social media and entitled “Should there be a 5\textsuperscript{th} World Conference on Women in 2020?”\textsuperscript{576} The question was answered in the thread to the posting by a number of feminist commentators whose opinions bear repeating here.

In her response to Goetz, Shahra Razavi, who is Chief of the Research and Data Section at UN Women, says that what was remarkable about the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was that it enabled feminists to forge what Gita Sen refers to as an “insider-outsider” strategy, where women’s rights organizations engaged with each other and were able to enter the world of formal inter-governmental negotiations with great success, planting their progressive claims into the consensus documents.\textsuperscript{577} Razavi’s response emphatically reinforces my research findings. Razavi elaborates that this dual strategy worked because the feminist agenda had a

\textsuperscript{573} See “CSW64 / Beijing+25 (2020)” (last visited 13 April 2019), online: UN Women <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020> [CSW64 / Beijing+25].
\textsuperscript{574} Most recently, I spoke with her at an International Women’s Day event at the CSW in March 2018.
\textsuperscript{575} She has been a Professor at the NYU School of Professional Studies Center for Global Affairs since 2014.
\textsuperscript{576} See Anne Marie Goetz, “Should there be a 5th World Conference on Women in 2020?” (24 October 2018), online: NYU Global Citizen <wp.nyu.edu/sps-nyuglobalcitizen/2018/10/24/should-there-be-a-5th-world-conference-on-women-in-2020/> [Goetz].
\textsuperscript{577} See Shahra Razavi in ibid.
strong human rights foundation and an evidential base that addressed key policy issues of the day. However, she is adamant that we must be concerned about the danger of backsliding. This point is at the heart of the debate about how the opening up of the BPfA can cause a dilution and even decimation of the gains made in 1995.

Nevertheless, Razavi is employed by UN Women, and despite her disclaimer, I would argue that there is a strong self-interest on the part of UN Women to hold a 2020 conference. They are under pressure to increase their profile and to be seen to deliver on another world conference.

Aili Tripp, an author whose work I referenced extensively in Chapter Two, also comments on Goetz’s blog. From her research in Africa, Tripp notes that women’s legislative representation tripled between 1990 and 2010 in many countries in Africa due to the introduction of quotas, where national governments adopted the recommendation set out in the BPfA. She also notes landmark changes in legislation for women and women’s rights that are being incorporated into constitutions at an unprecedented degree. For Tripp, both of these changes were “major accomplishments that were a direct outcome of the 1995 meeting in Beijing.”

578 See Shahra Razavi in ibid. While Razavi states this commentary is in her personal capacity, it should be noted that I am aware that it is obvious that anyone I quote who is in favour of working for the UN while they are working for the UN is in some sense self-serving, no matter how much of a feminist they may be.
579 See Shahra Razavi in ibid.
580 UN Women has come under strong criticism from autonomous feminist organizations for their liberalism and their very corporate image, including developing partnerships with such private sector companies as Uber, Coca Cola, Unilever, Proctor and Gamble, etc. On the other hand, UN Women receives the least amount of funding from the UN and has had a great deal of pressure to raise funds from the private sector.
581 I understand this from conversations with friends at UN Women, who will remain anonymous.
582 See Aili Tripp in Goetz, supra note 576.
583 See ibid.
584 See ibid.
This thesis focuses on answers from interviewees about the last thirty years. What are our speculations, our fears, our hopes, our visions, for the next thirty years? What do those who are in the trenches see as the limitations and possibilities? What are their accounts of hope and despair, paradox and conundrum, repetition and conflict, and the importance of history in the moment.\textsuperscript{585} In 2015, some interviewees expressed ambivalence about staying involved with the UN. Most of the literature I reviewed was written well before 2015. Given that I am writing this three years after the interviews were completed, I wanted to find compelling statements of their current opinions. I chose to enhance my interviews with internet published commentaries by some of the women I interviewed. I know that traditionally this is not considered “peer reviewed” academic literature. But I would argue that we, in a political movement, are peers, and what activists say is important for our deliberations.

In 2015 my participants agreed with Joanne Sandler’s comment that “we are not willing to give up on the UN space.”\textsuperscript{586} Kate Lappin commented on the UN providing a “safe space” to meet.\textsuperscript{587} Lesley Ann Foster referred to the “closing of space.”\textsuperscript{588} Because there is “shrinking space for civil society” – meaning the process of increasing restrictions on civil society – protecting the UN space is critical.\textsuperscript{589}

Part of protecting that space for Madeleine Rees meant that the feminist transnational movement must stay involved in the multilateral system, as “it is the only game in town.”\textsuperscript{590}

\textsuperscript{585} See generally Otto, “Feminist Approaches to International Law,” \textit{supra} note 331.
\textsuperscript{586} See interview with Joanne Sandler.
\textsuperscript{587} See interview with Kate Lappin.
\textsuperscript{588} See interview with Lesley Ann Foster.
\textsuperscript{590} See interview with Madeleine Rees.
And, as noted previously, some participants provided region-specific analysis. For example, Kate Lappin found that women in the Asia Pacific region worked more effectively at the regional level.\footnote{See interview with Kate Lappin.} But participants also recognized the importance of their work at the local level.

Is it important that Sandler, Rees, and Lappin are all white women, from the global North, who work for international organizations? Some critics might see this as one more example of how the white, imperial, liberal feminist cabal has captured the UN system.\footnote{Comment made to me by Professor Lenora Angeles, University of British Columbia, on 2 April 2019.} I am, of course, a member of this elite group. It is not my finding that the UN has been captured by feminists. It is a valid observation that over emphasis of UN processes has had a far-reaching role in shaping women’s movements themselves; this was one of my motivating questions for my research. However, based on my interviews, no one I interviewed raised such over emphasis as a primary concern. They focused much more on what their movements and activism had been able to achieve and what the challenges, such as the never-ending scourge of violence against women, were continuing to be.

It is my opinion that women have not captured anything at the UN. Feminist activists may have much housekeeping to do in our own house. For instance, my interviewees and I are all women who are opposed to UN Women’s partnership with Uber,\footnote{In 2015, UN Women tried to claim that they had a partnership that would provide thousands of jobs to women, by partnering with Uber – setting up women for fragile work, with no union, and unsafe conditions. Many of us who were at the CSW that year opposed it, had a protest, and UN Women rescinded.} Sharon Sandberg’s concept of “Lean In”,\footnote{Sheryl Sandberg, \textit{Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead} (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 2013).} and Emma Watson’s token UN Women Ambassadorial “feminism.”\footnote{This is part of the UN Women He for She campaign to involve men and boys, which they do by using celebrity culture. To my knowledge there has never been any evaluation done of the effectiveness of celebrity campaigning. See “UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson” (last visited 15 April 2019), online: \textit{UN Women} <www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/goodwill-ambassadors/emma-watson>.}
But to the extent we have any power at all, it does not lie within the UN but only within our own movement(s).

Some interviewees from the global South describe themselves as working with grassroots women. Constance Okellet and Margaret Tuhumwire from Uganda, and Kunthea Chan and Thida Kuis from Cambodia, for example, see their local activism as much more relevant than “going to the UN.” However, they were all interviewed at UN meetings! We live with our contradictions.

Comments from other activists from the global South, Lesley Ann Foster, Obi Nwankwo, and Doo Apane from Africa and Renu Radhikari from Nepal, illustrate that many women take lessons learned at the UN – from the newly ratified conventions to the drafted documents – home with them to implement at the national and local level. This illustrates the importance of analyzing the overlapping and intersecting local and global paradigms of activism as dynamic powers that are in constant play and conversation with each other – rather than as binary opposites in competition with one another. This also returns us to the earlier scholarship of feminists like Aili Tripp and others. My research reinforces their earlier findings, and their scholarship legitimizes my results.

The findings from my interviews of long-time activists, after seeking their opinions about working at the international level, confirmed their commitment and their belief that working with the UN was important. However, all indications point to the conclusion that these battle-weary activists are convinced that both levels are of critical importance. It is the strategic use of both

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596 See interviews with Constance Okellet, Margaret Tuhumwire, Kuntha Chan, and Thida Kuis.

597 See generally Aili Mari Tripp et al, supra note 238; Mohanty, Feminism without Borders, supra note 198.
levels, the global and the local, by autonomous transnational feminist movements that determines their levels of success. Vrushali Patil reminds us that we need to

    re-centre the notion that there are no locals and globals, only locals in relation to various global processes. We need to approach the production of various patriarchies as intersectionalities emergent from multiple histories of local-global processes [that are] relative to and in relation to each other. 598

Considering the comments from my interviewees, it seems clear that specific and appropriate tactics have been developed, and will continue to develop, that merge the local and the global. I hope that my research has helped to clarify that some of the activists in the transnational feminist movement understand that choosing different strategies at different times depends on political situations.

    That there is a constant tension pulling activists toward the global and the local is inevitable; and vigilance is chronic. Dianne Otto cautiously urges us to remember that everything we do within this system is double-edged; we have to learn to work within hegemonic institutions and retain our own identity (as activists and feminists). 599 While future UN engagement by feminist activists will no doubt take different shapes, that engagement has been perceived by a generation of feminist activists as essential in tandem with local processes.

598 See Patil, supra note 179 at 863.
599 See interview with Dianne Otto.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides some commentary on the findings of my research and elucidates a few strengths and key limitations of the thesis. Recommendations for future research are provided with some very practical applications of the research to UN and other global events planned for 2019 and 2020, including a UN sponsored 5th World Conference on Women.

6.2 Contributions of the Research

How do we envision the next stage of the transnational feminist movement in the current context of 2019/2020? This project has been very much an exercise in reflection, enabling an in-depth look at some specific women who have been located at the nexus of using the UN system and engaging with struggles at local and national levels. It could be described as a “life cycle” project, depicting reflections by a certain generation and class of women on more than thirty years of their work, activism, and theory development.

What theoretical contributions can this thesis make to that project? Stuart Hall makes a point that resonates with me and with what I have attempted to do:

If you ask me what is the object of my work [it] is to always reproduce the concrete in thought – not to generate another good theory, but to give it a better-theorized account of concrete historical reality. This is not an anti-theoretical stance. I need theory in order to do this. But the goal is to understand the situation you started out with better than before.600

I hope that one contribution of this research has been my attempt to increase the transparency of the notion of reflexivity, particularly given the nature of the documentary film in

the context of the PhD. Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland reminded us in their article on feminist research methodology that “[r]ather than struggling to fit into a particular category, your [my] efforts would be better spent in making your aims, assumptions, politics and ethics clear and justifiable.” As part of this process, I hope that my efforts at self-awareness and self-critique, and the biographical notes I have added throughout, might add another layer to the meaning of self-reflexivity in the research paradigm.

6.3 Whose Party? Practical Application of the Research

This section briefly describes upcoming events in 2019 and 2020 with comments on my involvement. I asked my interviewees what they thought should happen over the next decade, wondering aloud that if this year (remember, it was 2015 when I was conducting the interviews) had been Beijing Plus 30 instead of Beijing Plus 20, what would they recommend as strategic actions for the transnational feminist movement to undertake? While I did not ask whether there should be another world conference, several interviewees chose to pose this question to themselves in the interview.

Many feminists do not want the BPfA to be reopened at a time in political history “when state receptivity to feminist claims-making is at an all time low.” Many feminists have argued that fundamentalist and right wing governments would roll back the gains from 1995 that are entrenched in the BPfA. This concern about rolling back gains is critical. Jackie Jones reminds

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601 I have attempted to be vigilant and rigorous about self-disclosure ever since my comprehensive exams when my committee criticized me for not acknowledging my white skin privilege. I recognize that self-disclosure is an important part of the PhD process and wherever I can I try to illustrate my privilege. Even writing this is an act of privilege. I know there will be many shortcomings and just saying one tried to be conscious is not sufficient.

602 See Ramazanoğlu & Holland, supra note 36 at 148.

603 See Shahra Razavi in Goetz, supra note 576.

604 See interview with Aurora de Dios. Aurora does not appear in the film but she was very adamant in Bangkok that the BPfA be maintained without being weakened. She also comments on how well the women at the B+20 meeting in Bangkok were able to ensure SOGI rights.
us that the fight for women’s equality rights has always been a struggle, and while there have been modest, incremental gains, there has been much pushback and backlash. Pettman notes that “the combined effects of these threats, particularly after 9/11 and the ensuing dramatic changes in international politics, re-staging global militarism, border protections, toxic masculinities – led feminists to caution against holding a fifth international women’s conference in case the tentative gains from Nairobi to Beijing were lost.” Hester Lessard unpacks elements of backlash and sees that feminist success is more often than not followed by resistance, resulting in a “widely supported middle ground.” I think this accurately describes the BPfA as a compromise document – but one that we do not want to lose. As Lee Lakeman pointed out, women’s rights have been threatened exponentially since 1995 from intensifying globalization and neoliberalism and from rising identity-based politics such as religious fundamentalists. Could there be a 5th World Conference without risking, for example, the loss of reproductive rights or the rights of lesbian women (which are not even included in the BPfA).

While I was conducting my research there was a campaign under way to hold a forward-looking 5th World Conference in 2020, but one that would not be a UN-specific conference. Sunila Abeysekera, the late Sri Lankan human rights activist and leader of the peace movement, decried the fact that there was no mechanism for joining together “around the key challenges and demands of women from around the world irrespective of their class, race or any other status to combat the challenges of discrimination and violence they confront on a daily basis”,

605 See Manjoo & Jones, supra note 253 at 16.
606 See Pettman, supra note 146 at 49.
608 See interview with Lee Lakeman.
encouraging women to “build a cohesive platform for action for women’s movements worldwide.”  

This is what many feminists, old and young, think could be done in 2020, at a global gathering of feminist activists that would be more like the World Social Forum. I found the opinions of my interviewees were split, some in favour of another world conference, and some, like Cora Weiss, adamantly opposed. Others wanted the younger generation to have a chance to attend. Some see the reason for feminists to meet, but not at the UN. I have no way of knowing what some of their answers would be now almost four years later. Roberta Clarke was not someone I interviewed, as time did not permit, but she was the head of UN Women for Asia and facilitated my attendance at the Beijing +20 UN meeting in Bangkok. On Clarke’s Facebook page recently she said this:

I am a skeptic. Year after year, thousands gather at CSW. For what? With what impact? The feelings of solidarity for those present is important. But otherwise what is the work that we need to be doing to combat what is happening in places like Brazil, US, Philippines etc? Maybe we need a new model. A global gathering that focuses on social justice, political economy and gender and other inequalities. Maybe a focus on intersectionality of systems of oppression and the need for some ‘common normative politics’. A conference to (re)build a story of change – for women and girls and men and boys.

But the dilemma is this: a UN conference with a declaration or agreement is binding on its signatories. Having a global feminist conference will provide us with new strategies, vision, and

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611 See interview with Cora Weiss. President of the Hague Appeal for Peace, Cora is one of the people most responsible for the existence of UNSCR 1325.  
612 Roberta Clarke, “I am a skeptic” (26 October 2018), posted on private account of Roberta Clarke, online: Facebook.
energy, but binds no one.\footnote{I have attended AWID forums over the years, and they are wonderful feminist gatherings with much exchange of knowledge, best practices, and solidarity – but they do not result in any concrete recommendations or measures with any authority to implement.} With the decline in the nation state (at the same time as the rise of nationalism), perhaps institutions of global governance have never been more necessary. Feminists often critique the state but are also among its strongest defenders, recognizing that a functioning state is essential to the achievement of gender equality and the protection of women’s human rights.\footnote{See Gita Sen, “The SDGs and Feminist Movement Building” (December 2018), online (pdf): <www.unwomen.org/-media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/discussion-paper-the-sdgs-and-feminist-movement-building-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2356> [Sen].}

In a 2018 study for UN Women on the role of the feminist movement in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), renowned feminist scholar Gita Sen\footnote{Gita Sen is an Indian feminist scholar. She is a Distinguished Professor & Director at the Ramalingaswami Centre on Equity & Social Determinants of Health, at the Public Health Foundation of India. She is also an Adjunct Professor at Harvard University, a Professor Emeritus at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and the General Coordinator of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era).}\footnote{See Sen, supra note 614.} applied an analytical framework, similar to mine, to the SDG negotiation process. She attributes the success to the fact that the mobilization of feminist movements from the 1990s conferences saw women graduate from the NGO forums to the intergovernmental negotiating spaces.\footnote{See Sen, supra note 614.} Combining these two factors, loss of the nation state with feminists at least marginal victories in that intergovernmental space, illustrate why feminists’ faith in the process is not completely without merit.

Should we participate? Should we boycott? What should we do? Indeed, as I write this, these same questions are now being raised regarding the CSW meetings in New York. Madeleine Rees does not appear in the film, but, as the Secretary-General of WILPF, the oldest women’s organization in the world, and the former director of women’s rights for the UNHCHR, she is a
prominent figure in the international feminist arena.\footnote{Madeleine was the first to hold this position; she was hired by the then High Commissioner, Canadian Judge Louise Arbour. When Louise was appointed she realized the lack of women’s rights within the UNOHCHR. She had met Madeleine during their work together in Bosnia. Madeleine’s work in Bosnia was profiled in the film The Whistleblower, where she was played by Vanessa Redgrave.} After Trump’s election in 2016, many feminists questioned whether we should boycott attending the 61st CSW meeting in New York because of the travel ban issued by President Trump forbidding Muslims from entering the US.\footnote{Made on January 27, 2017, Executive Order 13769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, often referred to as the Muslim ban or the travel ban, was an executive order by United States President Donald Trump, banning Muslims from specific countries from entering the USA. On June 26, 2018, the US Supreme Court upheld the executive order and its accompanying travel ban in a 5–4 decision.} Many women already marginalized or from conflict zones could no longer get visas to attend, despite the fact that Section 11 of the UN 1947 treaty is supposed to allow all citizens to travel to New York to attend UN meetings.\footnote{See Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, 26 June 1947, 1 UNTS 147:}

WILPF is a strong supporter of the UN. They consulted with their membership and decided not to boycott CSW but to not attend in their official capacity. They chose to continue their work on women, peace, and security in Geneva at the Human Rights Council. We have to pick our battles, and the work that WILPF does at the Human Rights Council is important, perhaps more so than at CSW anyway. Madeleine says, “[t]he UN is ours, it has just lost its way and we need to get it back.”\footnote{See Madeleine Rees, “Women’s Meaningful Participation: The Missing Ingredient at CSW61”, HuffPost (10 March 2017), online: <www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/womens-meaningful-participation-the-missing-ingredient_us_58c28dd7e4b0a797c1d39b6f>.
} This is a constant theme, women feel ownership over UN processes, but we really have no idea how to get it back.
This dissertation is concluding at the dawn of 2019. More milestones and anniversaries in women’s rights “herstory” are being planned. At a private meeting on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on November 27, 2018, UN Women announced that they were going to hold the 5th World Conference on Women in the year 2020. I was a participant at this select meeting. According to the UN Women representatives who had come to Canada, this UN Women’s World Conference is going to be hosted by a government in the North, in partnership with a country from the global South. In March 2019 the decision was announced at CSW that France and Mexico would co-host the “Women’s Forum” in June 2020 and the BPfA will not be on the table. In other words, it will not be opened up for increasing regressive governments to further erode the limited rights contained within the Platform.

In addition, the 25-year review of Beijing (Beijing +25 or B+25) will be held in 2020 at the CSW in New York. The main focus of the session will be once again on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA. The review will include an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the BPfA and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The year 2020 will also be the five-year milestone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development evaluating progress towards global indicators of the SDGs. At least the UN community and the women’s NGOs that orbit around the UN anniversaries see 2020 as a pivotal year for some analysis and accountability of the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.621

There are a number of preparatory activities under way. Hopefully this research can be a small contribution to our reflections on how we want to be involved in this process. I am writing

621 See CSW64 / Beijing+25, supra note 573.
in the first person as I am a member of a Canadian NGO coalition that is involved in this process. Canadian feminist NGOs, under the leadership of our steering committee, will be involved in both the World Conference and the B+25 review. While states are called upon to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered, we will most assuredly not be relying on the Canadian government to assess its own progress. This government excels at image management. We will be conducting our own reviews and preparing a shadow report by May 2019 addressing all the issues reflected in the BPFA. There will also be regional commissions of the UN invited to undertake regional reviews and convene regional intergovernmental meetings like the one I attended in Bangkok in 2014. These processes will feed into the sixty-fourth session of the CSW in March 2020. Feminists in Canada will be incorporating this review process into our activist work in the upcoming federal election in October 2019, where members of the Up for Debate coalition will be conducting grassroots participatory research on the state of women’s equality in Canada. This will be utilized as part of the overall UN review process.

I urge caution. I argue that autonomous feminist organizations were essential to building the transnational feminist movement which could engage with the UN and the multilateral processes with critical mass. However, at this point in our history we must question the

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623 The Up for Debate (U4D) campaign created a Canada-wide conversation on gender justice and equality, and generated a call for all political parties to make meaningful commitments to change women’s lives for the better. U4D was led by the Alliance for Women’s Rights. As Canada headed into a federal election in 2015, Oxfam Canada was part of the 175 members of the Alliance For Women’s Rights united in calling for measurable commitments that show our political leaders understand the diverse needs and realities of women: see “Up For Debate” (last visited 30 December 2018), online: Oxfam Canada <www.oxfam.ca/upfordebate>. IWRP was a member of U4D in Vancouver.
increasingly larger footprint that the private sector is having on what is now mostly called the “gender” agenda. We must be ever mindful of Audre Lorde: “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.”

Bearing Lorde’s caution in mind, and as a postscript to this chapter, Anne Marie Goetz commented on the 63rd CSW in March 2019. This was held after my thesis was written, but prior to my revisions following my defence. Hence I make a brief follow up to her earlier remarks from 2017. I did not attend the 63rd session, but IWRP did have an NGO representative there, along with the large delegation of Canadian feminists. The session was held for the first time to discuss social protection – women’s access to pensions, health insurance, social security, child benefits, parental leave, and infrastructure. These are issues that go to the heart of women’s role in society and include their unpaid work and care work. Goetz commented on the alliances of nations that, social conservative and fundamentalist, opposed women’s social protection because it challenged gender norm and roles. Many countries, including the USA, Russia, Bahrain, reiterated that the family – a heterosexual one – and not the state is the sole source of protection for women. Driven by neoliberalism, social protection is a private matter. However, there was a diverse group of states also countering these notions, as diverse as South American and African states. I include this postscript here as it illustrates the fluidity of the debates, and the

624 And it continues: “They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support”. This Audre Lorde quote has become an axiom of women’s liberation. One reference for the full extract is from Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007) at 110–4. Though this can be traced back to comments at “The Personal and the Political” panel of the Second Sex Conference, October 29, 1979.


626 See ibid.
need for feminist activists’ constant vigilance and mobilization as we continue to counter these global trends of repression. I do not expect 2020 to be any different.

6.4 Strengths and Limitations

I hope that the strength of this dissertation is the depth of the stories and biographies of the sample of women I interviewed. Presenting these women’s assessment of thirty years of feminist activism in the film, without turning it into a mini-series, was a significant accomplishment. Throughout this written part of the dissertation, I have tried to describe the film as a kind of unique vehicle taking us on this journey. I wanted the film to be what Victoria Foster calls “ways of knowing and ways of showing.”627 While Foster’s research looks at women’s experiences of raising children in poverty, she uses participatory research to find her ways of knowing. Most relevant for my film project is that she discusses how post-modern ethnographies are a “dialogical process, emphasizing a collaborative nature.”628 While I do not appear in camera in conversation, in dialogue, with my participants, as that would have required two cameras, I am most certainly in dialogue with them. Foster sees using the arts in a participatory social inquiry as allowing the research goals to be authentically realized.629 I am not alone. While the incorporation of a film in a PhD dissertation at UBC in law might be new, I am just continuing a tradition of innovative and creative ways of presenting research.630 In summary, you can see the women speaking, you can hear their voices, see what they are wearing, get a sense of how old they are, what race they are, what their environment might look like. It might not be

628 See ibid.
629 See ibid.
630 These include through art, poetry, photographs, narrative, and so on. For more on this see Anna Banks & Stephen P Banks, eds, Fiction and Social Research: By Ice Or Fire (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), cited in ibid at 365.
more authentic than the quotation marks around their words would be on this page, but it feels
more authentic. The viewer can bond with the person on the screen. And perhaps in a world full
of fake news and misrepresentation, there will be less disregard for the truth these feminists
speak. Truth to power.

The limitations are both practical, as well as substantive and theoretical. The film would
have been much better if there had been access to a professional film crew. The narration would
have been more engaging if a professional narrator was involved. I speak well on my feet
without notes, but for this project I had to follow a very rigid script. My voice is monotonous in
narration and I relied too heavily on my notes without the use of a teleprompter. However, it
would not have been my story without my character. Also, the film in the thesis will not be used
in a public setting without being re-cut and edited as it is much too long. More engaging use of
the data the film conveys would involve a more pointed narrative, effectively a smaller plot line
configured to specific uses. However, the film’s length is necessary in order to successfully
deliver the themes of the thesis and to present the data of the interviews. Like all dissertations,
they live a second life in the products they subsequently get turned into.631

Substantively, the film is weak in one critical area: the presentation of the important
perspectives of Indigenous women. Indigenous women should have had a prominent place in the
film, and the fact that they did not is indicative of their marginalization in the research process
itself. I have described this in the chapters above, but this omission must stand as a qualification
of the output of the project.

631 My LLM thesis film Constitute! has had a broad reach since completion. I have shown it in eight countries. It has
been premiered across Canada. Every high school in BC, Manitoba, and Ontario has a copy of the film with the
study guide that was written in collaboration with the BC and Ontario Teachers Federations. Every university and
college library in Canada has a copy. The Constitute! website has extensive material that is regularly updated.
The theoretical gap in the research is the project’s limited focus on UN processes and institutions without expanding the area to other development organizations. The research addressed what the participants thought participating in the UN processes had contributed to gains made in women’s equality. It did not look at other global development organizations such as the multi-lateral development banks or other large development agencies that also have programs on gender equality. This expansion of global focus is addressed in the following section on future research.

6.5 Future Research

In addition to the application of my research findings to the ongoing discussion, debate, and deliberations about the next World Conference and the Beijing +25 CSW, both to be held in 2020, there are several key areas of research that I was not able to include in the dissertation. While I had some discussions with some of my interviewees about the funding of women’s NGOs, there was not enough time or space to delve into the complexities of this issue. Significant research has been undertaken over the past decade and it would have been beneficial to have updated and applied it to my interviews and subsequent analysis.632 We know that most women’s NGOs could not attend global, or regional, conferences or meetings without the support of donors. What role did these donors, funders, and philanthropic agencies play in enhancing or subverting the agenda of feminist movements? Did they fund women to attend meetings but not fund their operational costs? Was there a particular political perspective that attracted funding? Were others not funded because of their views? Was there a conscious conspiracy or was this a result of the natural progression of a neoliberal agenda? How has it

changed from 1985 to now? What was, and is, the influence of donors on the “gender agenda”? How can we interrogate how donors put their own interests ahead of those of feminist organizations? Many of the donors are foundations whose source of capital is derived from the very capitalist activities that feminists critique, for example, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society Institute (funds from George Soros’ hedge funds), and so on.

My study was framed by the 2012 study by Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, with the framework of the significance of autonomous, resourced, independent feminist organizations being the most important mechanism to address violence against women (VAW). As noted in the Literature Review section, I referred to the work of both Deo and Desai and their comments on the link between donor funding and the decline of a radical critique due to the “NGOization” of the struggle. Further, there is the issue of Northern feminists and their donors framing the dominance of the VAW agenda, downplaying poverty (or what I would call an economic analysis of neoliberalism) as a feminist issue.

A December 2018 commentary on Al Jazeera by Hala Al-Karib raises this crucial issue about the NGOization of women’s rights in Africa. She notes that the “challenge of NGO-ization is that it is predominantly subject to the imagination, assumptions, and interests of Northern funding institutions and their surrogates.” Al-Karib tries to appeal to younger activists not to get caught in this trap that is de-politicizing the women’s movements in Africa where “the local NGO elites use their positions to gain privilege while making a point of

634 See Deo, *ibid* at 167.
636 See *ibid*. 
avoiding the pain of politics.”637 She notes that “the conversation about women’s rights and building the women’s agenda cannot be attained without political activism.”638 Another way of articulating this is to excavate what structural factors are excluded or included in an analysis. This is particularly important since the legal discourse on VAW is driven by a succession of hegemonic nation states like the USA or the EU.639

Another framework of my analysis was “Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: The Status of Financing for Women’s Rights Organizing and Gender Equality”, a very important 2013 publication by AWID.640 Several of my interviewees reference it, including Charlotte Bunch and Joanne Sandler, who refers to this metaphor in the film. This is the fourth report in the AWID series entitled “Where is the Money for Women’s Rights”, which analyzes funding trends over the past decade. The “Leaves and Roots” study is an analysis of over one thousand women’s rights organizations around the world, tracking their funding. Their conclusion is that more and more funding is being directed to individual women and projects, rather than funding the sustained operational funding that would keep feminist organizations alive.641 Combining the outcomes of the Htun and Weldon study with this finding, it seems clear that the one thing that we know makes a difference to the realization of women’s equality, autonomous feminist organizations, is the key thing that is not being funded by donors. If I were to take my current

637 See ibid.
638 See ibid.
641 See ibid.
project and revisit my interviewees and focus on the link between funding and depoliticization, the findings would be fascinating; or as Joanne Sandler says, “bone chilling”.  

Another area of research is long overdue for scrutiny. “Engaging men and boys” is part of the rhetoric used in UN-speak on the issue of gender equality and women’s empowerment (more UN-speak). It is a philosophy that is front and centre in the Canadian Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). For my research, I did interview one man who is the co-founder and co-director of one of the leading organizations that focuses on mobilizing men and boys in the struggle for gender equality. However, as I describe in the Methodology Chapter, I decided to focus only on women in the film and so did not include him in my research findings or list of interviewees.

The notion of alliances with men to promote gender equality has been an official theme at many sessions of UN agencies and conferences, where it has been presented as a positive, even necessary, development. It can be traced back to the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and then consolidated in Beijing the following year. The subject has captured the imagination of the public at large, attracting the attention of feminists, celebrities, scholars, activists, cultural critics, and even, at times, the mainstream media.

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642 See interview with Joanne Sandler.

643 That man was Dean Peacock, Co-Director, Sonke Gender Justice (SGJ), South Africa. Dean is one of the leading men working on gender equality issues, and SGJ is one of the partners of the global coalition Men Engage. I have known Dean since he worked with Men Engage in South Africa and I was working in the office next door, at Civicus, in Johannesburg in 2005 when SGJ was formed. However, I decided that my target for participants would be limited to women. As well, while Dean has participated every year in CSW and many other UN conferences, he did not attend either Beijing or Nairobi (he was too young).

There is an increasing number of men’s organizations, which I would define as groups founded by men which engage in programming that is predominantly directed at men. Often they may identify as pro-feminist and work on gender-based violence. The extent to which the feminist anti-violence movement has had their funds reduced because of men who are “once more in charge” has yet to be determined, but is indicative of important research still to be done. A recent unpublished article has begun an analysis of the dispersal of funding to men’s organizations, analyzing the hypothesis that, once men are involved, as always, the flow of money will be re-directed to them.

Another issue that calls for future research is the effects and influence of feminist UN bureaucrats. The role of feminist bureaucrats and their role in UN processes was touched on by three of my interviewees, Diana Rivington, Lina Abirafeh, and Joanne Sandler. All of them noted the important role that feminists have played within institutions such as the UN or the Canadian government in support for the feminist agenda from the inside. The definitive text on this issue, Feminists in Development Organizations: Change from the margins, edited by Rosalind Eyben and Laura Turquet, is a riveting read that draws on the direct experiences of feminist bureaucrats working within large institutions such as the UN, the EU, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Australian Aid (Oz Aid), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Oxfam, the Organization for the Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE), and others. This edited volume offers many insights into the role of feminists within

645 For example, the White Ribbon Campaign, Men Engage, Promundo, etc.
646 See Megan Kammerer & Susan Bazilli, “Once More in Charge”: An Analysis of Men’s Organizations Engaged in Feminist Anti-Violence Activities”, which was presented as a paper at a conference at UBC in May 2015 and at Law and Society in June 2015, and recently submitted for publication. On file with author.
these bureaucracies, highlighting through their own insider perspectives how they tackle obstacles and resistance within their workplaces. These strategic activists are simultaneously trying to reform those patriarchal institutions and to use their privilege within these same structures to assist women’s mobilizing. As Joanne Sandler points out in her contribution, “the potholes on the road to gender equality must be pointed out … [to] swerve to avoid them or confront them head on”. The bureaucracy is such a pothole.

With such a comprehensive text already in publication, why would I suggest this as an area of future research? This is to my knowledge the only text that reviews this subject. Written over five years ago, its findings could be updated in light of the #Me Too movement within the UN, highlighting multiple disclosures of sexual abuse committed by senior UN men, as well as the role of these feminists in a time of shrinking space in civil society. Also, and not coincidentally, many of the authors within this text no longer work for the institutions that they then represented. Why did they leave? What insights can they share about this particular moment in history that can assist with new strategies or avoidance of those potholes.

Another area of critical importance is a gendered analysis of climate change. There is no greater threat to the very existence of the planet, let alone the survival of feminist organizations, than climate change. Ongoing research is crucial on this issue. Much of my own consulting work over the past decade has focused on gender and climate change, incorporating a gendered analysis and action plan into environmental and water projects. Attending UN world climate change conferences in my NGO capacity, I have seen over and over again how grassroots

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649 These consulting projects have been for the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Central Asian Regional Environment Centre (CAREC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Organization for the Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE), and others.
women are exploited. They are brought to the meetings, given a platform to speak, and are subsequently paraded around, but rarely, if ever, do they receive funding for their adaptation at the community level. Without investing in their adaptation efforts, the communities most vulnerable to climate change – which are sadly those least responsible for it – will have less and less food security. The tensions between global and local activism that my interviewees provide insight into are also indicative of the climate crisis. When I interviewed Constance Okellet about the importance of going to UN conferences, her response was clear: “It is not for us, it is for them.” She meant that she gets nothing out of it, not even access to funding; but she provides a photo opportunity to the elite who love being seen with grassroots women farmers.

I suggest that these are critical issues for feminists to confront as we head into 2019 and prepare for 2020. They are worthy of more in-depth research on the relationship between transnational feminist movements and international human rights law through engagement with UN processes, as well as between the international and the local.

6.6 A Luta Continua

The interviews for this thesis were carried out in 2015. But my conversations with feminists around the world who are engaged in the struggle for women’s equality did not end in 2015. Nor did my own research, thinking, and activism. Arguably, this project would look very

650 After a decade of being a star speaker at all the climate change COPs, and being heralded in the book by Mary Robinson on climate justice, and profiled in the New York Times, Constance Okellet’s organization, the Osokuru Women’s United Network, just received their first grant. The sum of $10,000 was provided by the MATCH International Women’s Fund, of Canada, which thankfully I was able to facilitate through my role as Advisor to Climate Wise Women (and friend of Joanna Kerr, Executive Director of Greenpeace Canada, who is chair of the Board of MATCH).

651 See interview with Constance Okellet.

652 “A luta continua!” was originally the slogan in Portuguese for the FRELIMO movement in the Mozambican liberation struggle; it means “the struggle continues.” It is often used in various activist moments. For me it has a personal resonance, as I lived next door in South Africa during those days. (Although these days in South Africa we say “the looting continues”.)
different if I had been conducting the research in 2018, the year that I am writing the dissertation and completing the film. I cannot go back and re-interview my participants for this particular project. Nevertheless, I suspect that I know what many of them would say. The past three years since 2015 have been an extraordinary time for the loss of democracy and human rights around the world. The need for strong, autonomously-resourced, feminist movements has perhaps never been more important. We are seeing the rise of fundamentalisms and authoritarian and fascist regimes, causing the loss of women’s equality in many ways: reproductive rights, political freedom, labour rights, and political participation – not to mention the rise of devastating conflicts such as those in Syria, Yemen, and the DRC. The shrinking civil society space that some of the women speak about in my film has shrunk beyond recognition. The IWRP website project is completely separate from the PhD film. While this has no relevance to the dissertation now, it is my intention to interview a number of these same women in March 2020 at the Beijing +25 meeting, to record their reflections on that five-year period from 2015 to 2020.

My purpose in telling these stories is two-fold. As an examination of my life’s work, I am relieved to conclude, based on my and others’ perspectives, that it has not all been wasted. I have learned from my colleagues and friends that there is a strong consensus that activism at the transnational and global level and engaging with the UN system was and is important. As a reflection on the past thirty years, we have collectively concluded that it was indicative of a time in history that no longer exists. We acknowledge that we must collectively change our strategies, and we re-affirm that only autonomously-resourced, feminist, women-led organizations in a transnational feminist movement can lead the way.

Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon support a sophisticated yet pragmatic view that many activists take. Gender equality and women’s rights are not projects that can be pursued in a
single domain or silo, or point in time, and require comprehensive solutions in all directions, with sometimes incremental changes as the only possible outcome. That is where I began my film.

Mohanty reminds us that it is always important to turn the critique of privilege on ourselves when we compromise our politics. Patil says, “[o]nly then can we begin to advance analyses that are appropriate for our complex, globalized world.” We reflect on this, we learn from our multi-faceted and intersectional analysis, we listen to the women who are the most marginalized, and we move forward. There is nowhere else to go. The journey continues. As I come to the end of my life, I feel that I live in a world with less and less hope. Hope is inchoate at best. But we must have something to believe in. In my film, Dianne Otto sees that “the hope is in continuing to build the women’s movement.” Commenting on historical memory and the complexity of liberation movements, Buss and Manji, paraphrasing Otto, remind us, “[the] struggle may have advanced to a point where reinvention is necessary.” Hilary Charlesworth, Shelley Wright, and Christine Chinkin point out that “[f]eminist explorations in international law require critique, theorizing, law reform, legal challenges, advocacy, education, and grassroots work. Above all, they depend on hope and activism.”

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653 See Htun & Weldon, The Logics of Gender Justice, supra note 16 at 256.
654 See Mohanty, “Transnational Feminist Crossings,” supra note 348 at 986. This phrase is significant because despite what I say in this dissertation, I believe that my politics have been compromised by my own liberalism in everything I have ever done. My feminist bona fides may look good on paper, but I have never really been in the trenches. If I were, I would never have done this academic work.
655 See Patil, supra note 179 at 863.
656 See interview with Dianne Otto.
658 See Chinkin, Wright & Charlesworth, supra note 376 at 45.
I want to participate in the reimagining that Charlotte Bunch envisions, with the critical analysis that Lee Lakeman embodies. If the world has never been at greater risk of annihilation, then we have never had a more opportune time for activism, nor more of an obligation to do so. This dissertation is my rededication to that project with whatever time that I have left.

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⁶⁵⁹ I was inspired by a conversation in November 2018 with Dr. Tillman Ruff, winner of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). We discussed how to keep doing this work when we know how close we are in the world to nuclear war, climate change is not being addressed, and there seems to be such a loss of democracy and human rights. I asked him how he stayed so hopeful.
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Commissioner for Human Rights

Appendix A: Informed Consent Sample Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PETER A. ALLARD HALL SCHOOL OF LAW
1822 East Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Consent Form for Research Study  -- Exploring the Route from Nairobi to Beijing +20:
Feminist Activist Reflections on Rights Advocacy

I STUDY TEAM Principal Investigator: Professor Margot Young, School of Law, University of British Columbia, Canada. Contact telephone: __________ Email address: __________ Co-Investigator: Susan Bazilli, School of Law, University of British Columbia, PhD student. Contact: __________

This study is being conducted by Susan Bazilli for her PhD research.

II INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE Why are we doing this study? You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your involvement in the international women’s rights movement. We are doing this study to learn more about the 20 years since the Beijing conference in 1995 and the work that has been done on women’s rights as human rights and their use of international human rights law, mechanisms and processes over those 20 years.

III STUDY PROCEDURES How is the study being done? If you decide to take part in this research study, we will conduct an interview with you on camera for the purposes of making this study into a documentary film. There is no confidentiality as we are asking you to participate in this film with the intent to make it public. If you are not comfortable with that, then we will not interview you. If you agree to be interviewed on camera, we will need between 30 and 60 minutes to ask you questions.

IV STUDY RESULTS What will happen with the results of the study? The results of the study will be reported in a PhD thesis that is being produced as a documentary film. The film will be shown in public and be used for educational and teaching purposes about the subject matter.

V POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY What are the potential risks to you? There are no potential risks to you that could result from this interview. You are choosing to allow your identity to be revealed in the film resulting from this study.

VI POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY What are the benefits of participating? The benefits that will result from this interview are: (1) that if you wish, the investigator will furnish you with a copy of the completed film that results from this study; and (2) that you and your organization are able to use the film in teaching and pedagogical activities.

VII CONFIDENTIALITY Will your identity be protected? There is no confidentiality for this research. If you consent to be filmed, the filmed interview will, or may, be used in the film project. However, if there are things that you wish to say off the record, then by giving advance notice to the principal investigator you may indicate that you do not want certain statements used in the film. All video recordings and handwritten notes from this interview will be kept in a locked cabinet in the investigator’s office at the University of British Columbia. Any computer data files of information from this interview will be kept on the investigator’s computer, which is protected by an entry password.

VIII PAYMENT Will you be paid for taking part? You will receive no payment for your participation in this study.

IX CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY Who can you contact for information about this study? If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact the co-investigator, Susan Bazilli at __________ or by email at __________
X CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS Who can you contact if you have any complaints or concerns about this study?
If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

XI PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE
You need to sign this form to give your consent. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time up until the production phase of the film without any adverse consequences. However, once the film production is in process, it will not be possible to withdraw. You will receive one month’s notice of that date. You may also refuse to answer any particular questions the interviewer asks, or to request that particular statements not be quoted with attribution to you. Your signature indicates that you grant consent for the investigator to cite statements from this interview.

-----------------------------------------
Participant Signature           Date
----------------------------------------
Printed Name of the Participant
Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

What is, or has been, your involvement with activism and the international women’s rights movement?

What international UN conferences have you attended?

What was the importance of these conferences to you?

What do you see as three key achievements made in women’s equality over the past 30 years?

How have you engaged in your advocacy with international human rights law and UN processes such as CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, the Beijing Platform for Action, and other key treaties or conventions in your activism?

What strategic choices did you/your organization make to use international processes and how did you determine those choices? What were the outcomes?

Can you speak about the challenges you have seen to autonomous independent feminist organizations in your region?

Have you/your organizations translated international human rights law and principles into local contexts? Can you provide some examples?

Are there specific achievements that your organization has secured where international human rights standards, agreements, or mechanisms have played a key role?

What do you see as the main three challenges facing us now?

In your opinion, what are some options for the way forward?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Appendix C: List of Interviewees

Lina Abirafeh
Priscilla Achakapa
Renu Rajbhandari Adikari
Anjlee Agarwal
Doo Aphere
Fatima Atip
Charlotte Bunch
Florence Butegwa
Kunthea Chan
Shanthi Dairiam
Aurora De Dios
Cynthia Enloe
Alda Facio
Lesley Ann Foster
Marsha Freeman
Ruchira Gupta
Ruth Halpern-Kaddiri
Rokiya Kabir
Lizzie Kiame
Thida Kuis
Kate Lappin
Lee Lakeman
Sylvia Tecun Leon
Marilou McPhedran
Joke Muylwijk
Sameena Nazir
Sylvia Ndongomo
Jessica Neuwirth
Sizani Ngubane
Donna Nicolls
Oby Nwankwo
Constance Okellet
Dianne Otto
Kenita Placide
Madeleine Rees
Diana Rivington
Abigail Ruane
Joanne Sandler
Margaret Schuler
Meenu Sikand
Margaret Tuhumwire
Undarya Tumursukh
Gladys Acosta Vargas
Anne Walker
Cora Weiss