

PREFACE

This book started out as one on the emergence of the international women's rights regime. My plans changed, however, when I arrived in New York to gather documents and materials at the United Nations libraries. There, the last preparatory conference for the International Conference on Population and Development was taking place, and in the midst of it women's organizations were busily lobbying and making their presence felt. So I changed my plans. Rather than tracing the evolution of international norms historically, I shifted my focus to what was happening. The events at the UN gave me an opportunity to write about those who had been missing from most of the international relations texts I had been reading: the agents—in this case the members of women's organizations—who are actively shaping international agendas and are involved in crafting new norms.

Little did I know about the challenges ahead. Theoretically, it meant leaving the familiar plain of international relations theory and venturing into the less-well-known terrain of social movement approaches to explore their goodness of fit for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) engaged at the global level. In terms of data collection, the recommendations one generally finds in method books about "how to gain access" did not seem feasible with an organization such as the UN. It took creativity and great patience when I confronted the voicemail of an interview partner for the fifth time or when I learned that an agency had moved and that the boxes with the information I needed would remain unpacked—unless, of course, I would be willing to open, sort through, and file the documents. Also, doing research at the UN sometimes simply required luck, for example, when the person with whom

I had been waiting to talk mistook me for a friend and hugged and kissed me, leaving me no choice but to ask if I could have an interview. Finally, doing research on women's issues also was sometimes challenging. I remember quite a few moments when it was more than difficult to remain polite and tolerant toward my interview partner, who was negating that women had certain rights. But I persevered, and for that I owe thanks to many individuals.

Much of my research would not have been possible without the generosity and support of individuals and international women's organizations in New York. Special thanks go to Anne Walker and her staff of the International Women's Tribune Center for their warm welcome and for allowing me to rummage for hours and days in their impressive NGO library. I am indebted to Kay Frailaigh of the International Alliance for Women. As a seasoned lobbyist at the UN, Kay helped me gain access to many UN and NGO meetings from which I would have otherwise been excluded, and she always seemed to have a copy to spare from her marvelous private collection of UN documents. I also would like to thank Alice Mastrangelo and Meera Singh of the International Women's Tribune Center, Rachel Kyte of the International Women's Health Coalition, Roxanna Carrillo of UNIFEM, and Michelle Burger of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, who connected me with women's organizations or provided the missing context for my observations. I would like to extend gratitude to all my interview partners, who took time out of their busy schedules and offered me valuable insights. More generally, I would like to acknowledge the many women's activists at the UN who did not grow tired of explaining their cause to government delegates or stayed up many nights to revise draft documents. Witnessing their devotion, determination, and resolve inspired my work.

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