TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUE:
BUILDING THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST NETWORKS

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Abstract

Feminist transnational organizing produces complex and conflictual relationships. In particular, global conferences are often a place for women to discover their differences. Studying the conflicts that arise during women's transnational collaboration and how participants negotiate those conflicts helps to illuminate how women from diverse locations develop the relationships and, thus, the social infrastructures necessary for network building. My qualitative study of a budding women's peace network at the 4th UN World Conference on Women revealed that the NGOs used a dialogic process to address the deep-rooted conflicts triggered by unequal access to network agenda-setting. This dialogic process created a desire for the NGO representatives to work together despite on-going conflicts and facilitated relationships in which future conflicts could be negotiated constructively.

Introduction

Feminist transnational organizing produces complex and conflictual relationships. Forming a transnational network is not an easy task given the diverse backgrounds and goals of non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. Not surprisingly, conflicts arise; conflicts within transnational networks over issue priorities, for example, are common. When NGOs come together, they discover their differences. The United Nations (UN) global conferences on women have increased contact between women around the world and, as such, have increased the potential for both conflict and cooperation. Before 1985, North/South and capitalist-socialist divides dominated the conference proceedings. Conflict plays an important role in transnational movement settings bringing attention to power struggles and influencing the development of global discourse. Nevertheless, some scholars maintain that women's NGOs are developing an "enhanced ability to resolve conflicts" (Clark, 1994, p. 181).

Constructive approaches to conflict help to develop the networks of social relations critical to transnational movement mobilization. At the UN conferences, networks form in part through the personal contacts and shared experiences of women

participating in the conference. Further, studies have shown that developing a satisfactory process by which NGOs can work together is as important to NGO representatives as policy development – one of the key functions of transnational social movements (Smith, 2001).   NGOs often represent people who are excluded from participation in the formation of transnational policies that shape global and regional activities. Moreover, transnational networks, specifically feminist transnational networks require flexibility, one of the key characteristics of constructive conflict approaches (Moghadam, 2000). In constructive conflicts, the participants show flexibility; that is, they engage in a wide variety of behaviors to arrive at an acceptable solution.

This paper focuses primarily on how transnational network participants negotiate conflict. It is based on a study that examined the process by which women's peace organizations attempted to reach agreement on common agendas within a network of women gathered for the 4th UN World Conference on Women (FWCW) and the NGO Forum '95 held in Beijing, China in 1995 (Snyder, 2003). The struggle to set the agenda was one of the most important conflicts at the conferences. Civil war, nuclear testing, de-colonization, self-determination, military budgets, police brutality, conflict resolution education and training, land rights, women's involvement in peace negotiations, military prostitution, or rape during war-time – what would the network priorities be? During the agenda-setting, interested parties determined what the substantive areas of their collaboration would be. Generally, if participants believe the agenda does not reflect their interests, they tend to lose their commitment to collaboration so the agenda is often subject to intense debate (Susskind and Madigan, 1984; Gray, 1991). For example, at the conference, some women whose countries were involved in civil war maintained that ending on-going armed conflict was more important than nuclear disarmament in contrast to women whose countries produced nuclear weapons and were not experiencing war.

I conclude that non-governmental organizations use conflict constructively to develop transnational social movements and build consensus around issues of common concern. Social movement conflict serves four purposes. Conflicts over NGO network priorities expose inequalities in large scale, non-governmental decision making. Contention arising from policy development increases understanding of regional, ethnic, racial and ideological differences and expands possibilities for collaboration. Deep-rooted, historical conflicts that surface become starting points for dialogue among NGO representatives. Attempts to resolve conflicts strengthen the network and facilitate future cooperation. The constructive use of conflict helps to explain why the women's peace network was able to grow despite deep-rooted conflicts and regional differences.

Conference Background and History

The FWCW was part of a series of conferences that first began in 1975 in Mexico City during the International Year of the Woman. During the following UN Decade on

Women, two more conferences took place, one in Copenhagen, Sweden (1980) and the other in Nairobi, Kenya (1985). Since 1975, when the first World Conference on Women took place, one of the main themes of the conferences has been peace, along with equality and development.

The Women's World Conferences are similar to the other mega-conferences that have taken place in the past twenty years on topics like population, environment, disarmament, and human rights. There are two parts to the conferences, a non-governmental forum for interested organizations and a UN conference. The official UN conferences are attended by representatives of nation-states as voting members and observers from various UN agencies and bodies, international governmental organizations (IGOs), NGOs, and social movements. The NGO conferences are forums organized by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status (CONGO) for anyone who cared to come. The NGO Forums have no official link to the UN conferences, but consist of general sessions and workshops organized by non-governmental organizations and other interest groups (Stephenson, 1995). Most NGOs come to lobby UN representatives for policies to improve the status of women and to network with other NGOs. Participants of both the UN and NGO conferences work on a document that is revised until the document can be approved by all of the UN delegates.

Methodology

In order to research transnational agenda-setting processes, I conducted a two year qualitative study of the process by which women's peace NGOs set agendas at the NGO Forum '95, the FWCW and its preparatory conferences. The UN conferences have become important sites for transnational movement mobilization and construction. I was able to observe and interview 50 peace activists[1] at four preparatory conferences, including regional conferences in Austria and Senegal, two global conferences in New York and then the NGO Forum '95 and the FWCW in Beijing, China. I spent approximately three weeks at each event observing three NGOs primarily – Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP), and Beneath Paradise a network of indigenous women from the Pacific Islands. In addition, I conducted research travelling on the WILPF delegation peace train that started in Helsinki, Finland at the WILPF Congress and ended in Beijing for the conference. Attendance at the preparatory conferences was important because much of the agenda appeared to be set before the final conference in Beijing began.

A qualitative study contributes what has been missing from previous analyses, that is, a look at the challenges and successes of individual activists working as representatives for their organizations. Studying everyday activity often leads to an understanding of social relations intrinsic to and extending beyond them (Smith, 1987). Using qualitative methods, I explored how women's actual activities are connected (or

not) to the abstract formulations that come out of the UN conferences (Devault, 1995). Historical and/or social movement research has tended to focus on NGOs as units of analysis or on transnational movements as a whole. Much of the literature written on transnational women's movements offers historical accounts of women's NGOs and their role at the UN, policy content, NGO reports, personal diaries or the development of international relations and feminist theory (Bulbeck, 1998; Rupp, 1997; McLintock et al., 1997; Winslow, 1995; Marchand and Parpart, 1995, Pietila and Vickers, 1994; Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991; Fraser, 1987). Studying the perspective of the actors involved increases understanding of the complex and often conflictual relationships necessary for and produced by the development of transnational networks. The stories of the activists reveal how conflict emerged and developed based on the meaning and interpretation the women attached to actions and events.

Constructive Conflict Defined

Dissension within women's organizations has been difficult at times for feminists to face given feminist ideologies that emphasize solidarity and consensus building. Conflict has been stifled because it is perceived to threaten the movement (Leidner, 1991). Before 1985, the UN women's conferences were dominated by North/South and capitalist-socialist divides. For many NGO representatives from the South, there were and continue to be more issues that divide them from women in the North than there are to unite them. However, by the end of the UN Decade on Women (1975-1985), NGOs were able to build on their connections and come to more agreement on issues of common concern which led to the increase in the number of transnational NGOs in the 1980's and 1990's (Friedlander, 1996; Smith, 2004). Some scholars maintain that women's NGOs are developing enhanced ability to resolve conflicts (Clark, 1994; Zinsser, 1990).

sometimes competitive because in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome, both parties must stand up for their own interests (Cahn, 1990). Even though disputants exhibit anger and hold strongly to their positions, they are willing to change if it will result in the best outcome.

The outcome of a conflict is considered constructive if the parties find it mutually acceptable. In addition, the extent to which an outcome is constructive is reflected in the degree to which it facilitates an ongoing relationship in which future conflicts can be managed constructively. A destructive outcome results from one party imposing decisions made unilaterally with little or no consideration for the interests and needs of the other party. Often destructive outcomes become the basis for a renewed and destructive struggle (Kriesberg, 1998).

Following is a discussion of how the women's peace organizations utilized conflict in a constructive manner to build their budding network. I observed both constructive means and outcomes. Although the women used some competitive tactics, they showed flexibility and variety in their responses to conflict. Conflict escalation was relatively short and the participants exhibited a willingness to change to achieve outcomes acceptable to both parties involved.

Point 1: Conflicts over NGO network priorities expose inequalities in large scale, non-governmental decision making.

At global conferences, the dominant discourse of inclusion and acceptance of diversity has generated efforts to create a wide range of opportunities for people to participate. Nevertheless, my research shows that NGOs face unique challenges in designing network decision making processes that reflect NGO norms and values. Decision making most often involves conflict. In the context of this study, conflicts over NGO network priorities brought to light inequalities in large-scale, non-governmental decision making opening the door for reflection and potential change. The peace coalition leadership chose to use consensus, a non-hierarchical decision making process, in order to address unequal relations among coalition participants and to maximize participation. However, the use of consensus heightened rather than transformed power imbalances.

WILPF, the NGO leading the Beijing peace activities, used an informal consensual decision making process even though, as an organization, they do not value non-hierarchy (conversation with Mary Day Kent, March 2002). Although their organizational structure is hierarchical, WILPF uses consensus decision making primarily (at the international level voting is also utilized) because it reflects their commitment to inclusivity and empowerment – values reinforced by the dominant discourse at the NGO Forum '95 (Alonso, 1993). Both WILPF and the NGO Forum leadership made an effort to include women of many different backgrounds and to provide various opportunities for participation in the conference activities. Consensus decision making was the norm at the NGO conferences. As leaders of the peace caucus WILPF followed suit.

At the NGO Forum '95 and its preparatory conferences, consensus decision making was used for two reasons. First, some of the conference leadership believed that consensus reflected the values and norms of the 'women's movement.' These collective values included inclusivity, empowerment, and non-hierarchy. Building on perceived norms and values of movements could serve to develop a sense of common identity among very diverse NGOs and social movement organizations. Shared ideology provides a sense of collective identity that is a prerequisite for collective action (Buechler, 1990). Further, the type of organizational structure adopted embodies the collective identity of the social movement and the meaning its members attribute to their actions (Donati, 1984; Gundelach, 1984; Melucci, 1989). Second, NGO Forum '95 leaders were attempting to consolidate the power of women's movements in order to gain and retain influence in the UN arena. Bridging ideological and material differences by reaching consensus would be an indication of the strength of the movement.

Unfortunately, the consensus process facilitated the suppression of conflict and difference and reinforced the power of the Northern organizers. The peace caucus reached a "managed" consensus that did not reflect issues important to some of the participants who were the most disenfranchised. When real conflicts of interest are covered up, a "false or managed consensus" occurs (Mansbridge, 1980). Although no one openly disagreed, the group was nowhere near reaching consensus. The Northern leadership chose what they thought would be best for the group without soliciting much feedback. This meant that the peace caucus did not arrive at a real consensus, that is, one in which the decisions made were acceptable to all and were reached after all members had the opportunity to discuss key issues (Iannello, 1992). At the end of the first meeting, the major points of the peace caucus agenda resembled most closely the North American and Western European regional agenda.

In any setting, consensual decision making has limitations (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Mansbridge, 1980; Freeman, 1972; Brown, 1992; Gastil, 1993). Studies of consensus decision making have shown that: 1) resolving conflicts are difficult; 2) without a formal structure, informal power structures develop that are more difficult to negotiate than formal ones; 3) homogeneity, rather than diversity is fostered; 4) the process is time consuming; and 5) environmental factors may constrain the consensus process. These constraints became evident during the peace caucus meetings.

Difficult issues, like de-colonization and ending military occupation, were avoided in favor of safe topics known to have gained support in the past, e.g. in Nairobi 1985. The expression of difference became more difficult because consensus was required to make decisions and move forward. Military budget cuts had broad support as did women's involvement in peacemaking and peace education; however, these issues were not necessarily top priorities for some of the groups represented in the peace caucus. Instead, their primary concerns were military occupation or de-colonization. When delegates, like the delegates from the South Pacific and Palestinian territory, raised issues such as genocide, self-determination, de-colonization, and/or military occupation, the facilitator

either cut off the speaker or simply ignored what they had said. As a result, these contentious issues were left off the peace caucus agenda and out of the caucus discourse.

Rather than acknowledging differential access to power, power inequities were denied. During the initial thirty minute peace caucus meeting where the network agenda was set, there was simply not enough time for participants to build agreements based on an understanding of what was important to each other and why it was important. Within the coalition, each NGO acted in its own self-interest without necessarily a commitment to a 'collective.' The deep-rooted political conflicts that played out at the UN and NGO conferences challenged the consensus process to such an extent that consensus appeared possible only through the denial of painful differences.

As a result, for some, historical divisions and unequal relations within women's movements may have been reinforced, which was the opposite of what the peace caucus leadership had hoped for. Most often, it was the Southern NGO delegates, like the delegate from New Caledonia, who did not find their priorities on the peace caucus agenda and who were in the position of having to struggle for visibility. Some of the women chose to challenge the dominant agenda and discourse, escalating the conflict. Their participation in the peace caucus continued because the Northern delegates attempted conflict resolution (if they were made aware of the tension) not because the formal decision making process had been effective. Consensus decision making did not promote the values and goals that were important to WILPF and other peace caucus participants providing the opportunity for the NGO leadership to develop more effective processes that would address asymetric powersharing.

Point 2: Deep-rooted, historical conflicts that surface become starting points for dialogue among NGO representatives

For some of the NGO delegates at the conferences, the tension arising from the struggle to find common network priorities triggered deep-rooted conflicts. The conflicts that became visible had long histories; they had gone on for decades, if not centuries, e.g. racism in the North, the civil war in the Sudan, and French colonization of the Pacific Islands. Typically, protracted or deep-rooted conflict is identified as violent conflict between nations or communities over the preservation of cultures and values, such as the armed conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. However, deep-rooted conflict can occur in any relationship where inequality exists and basic needs for identity and participation are frustrated (Burton, 1987). Protracted conflict can be distinguished from conflicts over interests, choices and preferences that can be negotiated. Because they were deep-rooted and protracted, the conflicts the NGOs experienced were about more than the particular issue discussed. The power to define, to influence discourse and to shape events was also at stake. Nevertheless, the manifestation of deep-rooted conflicts became a starting point for dialogue among the NGOs reinforcing the theory that

conflicts present positive opportunities for growth and development (Bush and Folger, 1994; Rothman, 1993).

The conflicts that developed reflected unease with the dominant agenda. The women of color involved with WILPF, the members of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP), and Madelaine, the Beneath Paradise representative, all felt that their concerns had been marginalized in some way. In some cases, their concern had been named as a priority but the representation of that issue was so different from their own that they felt the issue had not been addressed. There was little discussion of those differences. Conflict escalation was a form of resistance to the leveling of difference (Minh-ha, 1997).

Women who were dissatisfied with the agenda set in the initial peace caucus meeting responded in three ways. Some challenged the peace caucus leadership directly, bringing important issues to the forefront and offering the opportunity for transformation of the conflict. Others expressed their dissatisfaction indirectly by talking with peace caucus members on an individual basis. Some participants did not return.

Conflict became a positive factor in the agenda-setting process because expression of diversity was, in itself, a challenge to the dominant discourse. Once the conflicts/issues were made visible, then they could be dealt with. Geraldine, a British woman of African descent, attempted to insert racism in the WILPF peace discourse in a way that would prioritize police brutality and citizenship rights – issues that were critical to her constituency. At the WILPF Congress (which preceded the peace train and the FWCW), she was afraid that her agenda would be undermined and racism would become invisible. Very quickly, Geraldine found herself in conflict with WILPF over the organization's agenda. As she reflected on her experience in an interview, she made the distinction between racism from a black perspective in contrast to one informed by a white perspective:

> In Helsinki, it was placed on the agenda in a very crude way. It was a debate on racism which was informed by white perspectives, and really there wasn't an attempt to think about black perspectives. It was really a very half-hearted attempt to look at the issues. That left me in position whereby I came into WILPF because of my work around combating racism and because of my experience of looking at that issue then I find myself almost directly in conflict with WILPF because of that (Interview, WILPF Peace Train, August 1995).

Although racism was on the WILPF agenda, Geraldine did not feel that her perspective was represented from the very beginning of her contact with WILPF.

When her persuasive tactics did not help her to achieve her objective, she gathered

confrontation, the WILPF leadership invited her to lead and participate in group discussions concerning racism and/or issues that were important to her and her constituency. She was also asked to give information sessions and as she spoke, the WILPF leadership literally stood by her, supporting and validating her viewpoint. As a result, Geraldine changed her competitive strategy and participated willingly.

Madelaine, an indigenous delegate from New Caledonia who represented Beneath Paradise, also used competitive tactics when the peace caucus ignored her concerns about de-colonization at the New York global preparatory conference. For her, colonization,

> address the real issues and these are some of the practical issues many people
> have here in this [peace] tent (Interview, Senegal, October 1994).

They saw themselves as peacemakers and did not wish to escalate the conflict further.

Nevertheless, they were working for a just peace in the Sudan, which meant for them, in 1995, a referendum on self-determination for the South. However, self-determination was not on the peace agenda. Furthermore, at the NGO Forum '95 some of the northern Sudanese women publically questioned the right of the southern Sudanese women to speak with their own voice. They disrupted regional workshops and forums where SWVP spoke making the deeply rooted conflict visible to other NGOs. The SWVP publically called for conflict resolution between women from the North and the South. With the support and pressure from international allies, the Sudanese women held a series of dialogue sessions during the conferences.

Confrontation and conflict escalation raised awareness within the network of contentious issues. Had the frustrated NGO delegates walked away, the other women would probably not have realized how the delegates differed in their perspectives or that their attempts at collaboration had triggered deep-rooted conflicts. Once Geraldine, Madelaine and the members of SWVP had unmasked their differences, the women began to talk at a deeper level where underlying problems in their relationships could be identified.

Point 3: Contention arising from policy development increases understanding of regional, ethnic, racial and ideological differences and expands possibilities for collaboration

In the context of the conferences, declaring difference and exposing inequalities was not enough for the NGOs. Their objectives were to gain support for and build alliances around their issues. As such, their task was very complex. In addition, challenges to the dominant peace agenda in the context of the UN conference were very difficult. Social movement theory characterizes this type of conflict as a strategic framing process, or the struggle to find common meaning. Participants construct the substantive content of particular issues; it is not inherent in the issues themselves. New social meanings are the products of the struggles within social movements – and between them and opponents (McAdam et al., 1996). Transnational networks use issue frames like "women's rights are human rights" to help launch global campaigns. Through conflict, NGOs learned more about each other and expanded the possibilities for finding common frames that in turn increased the potential for cooperation.

One of the main challenges that NGOs face in setting global agendas is to come up with a frame that resonates in diverse cultural and ethnic contexts. Struggles over meaning tend to be part of the early formation of advocacy networks (Snow and Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1992). Moreover, they compete with other NGOs who are also trying to

gain attention for their issues, framed in their own way. Some of the NGOs, particularly an international NGO like WILPF, had more resources, experience, access to information, and were supported by dominant cultural norms at the UN making them powerful competitors. Participants' identification as women had drawn them to the same conference to work together but as NGO representatives they competed for resources and for international attention. Further, many of the NGO delegates did not know one another and may have had little, if any, awareness of each other's priorities or perspectives.

Madelaine, the Beneath Paradise representative, developed a frame that communicated her concerns quickly and effectively – de-nuclearization, de-colonization, de-militarization. Not only was the slogan easy to remember but the frame combined concepts that were already part of an existing frame for the Northern peace NGOs – de-nuclearization and de-militarization – with a concept that was not unfamiliar, that is, de-colonization. As such, with some pressure/using competing tactics, the frame was accepted by Madelaine's target constituency. Madelaine's frame built on familiar concepts that were not normally combined. For Madelaine, nuclear weapons and colonization were inextricably connected; policies promoting nuclear disarmament were irrelevant if they did not simultaneously address dismantling French colonial empire. In this way, women in the peace network not only learned how Madelaine perceived the conflict in the Pacific but also learned about areas of common concern.

Geraldine constantly experimented, using one frame after another to find one that would resonate with the more powerful, experienced peace NGOs. The women of color affiliated with WILPF used an 'anti-racism' frame successfully when addressing the WILPF membership. The slogan 'anti-racism' built on the values of the white Northern women and at the same time bridged the different experiences of some of the Southern women affiliated with WILPF. Using competitive, confrontational, tactics and employing the slogan, Geraldine eventually gained the respect and attention of WILPF leadership who invited her to share formally with the WILPF membership about issues that were important to her constituency.

SWVP developed three different frames that they employed in different contexts at the conferences. The 'just peace' frame resonated with international women unfamiliar with the Sudan because it referred to key values – peace and justice. At the same time, the frame did not incite northern Sudanese women because it merely hinted at contentious issues like self-determination for southern Sudan. However, the frame was too general or too familiar to motivate action or influence policy. The frame 'self-determination' identified their key concern effectively and had the potential to draw people who identified with struggles for independence around the world. Nevertheless, some international NGOs were cautious in their support until they had decided where they stood on the issue of self-determination.

The third SWVP frame, 'conflict resolution,' resonated with diverse representatives at the conferences. Potential international allies, uncertain how to respond to calls for self-determination, were interested in supporting conflict resolution.

Resolving conflicts peacefully was one of the highest values of the women taking part in the peace activities at the conference. Under pressure from the SWVP and international allies, the call for conflict resolution mobilized northern Sudanese NGOs leading to a series of reconciliation sessions at the NGO Forum '95.

These newer, smaller NGO representatives struggled creatively to make their differences known using frames that would increase international understanding of the issues important to them and, at the same time, mobilize the support of the larger, well established NGOs. Frames must resonate within the movement: in other words, it is essential that a strategic frame relate to existing popular understandings of the target audience (Snow and Benford, 1992). By employing different frames that both informed and engaged representatives involved in the conference peace activities, Madelaine, Geraldine, and the SWVP found areas of common ground. They began to communicate some of the nuances of their perspectives and, in the process, expand possibilities for collaboration with other NGOs.

Point 4: Attempts to resolve conflicts strengthen the network, facilitating the construction of transnational activist identities, and building relationships suited for future collaboration

As they negotiated areas of common concern, the NGOs used various strategies to resolve conflicts and ease tensions. The WILPF leadership: incorporated some new issues into the peace caucus agenda; included women who had felt marginalized into their discussions of priorities for the future and helped them to advocate for their issues; set up many workshops and forums for women to speak for themselves about their own issues; and, finally, they organized group conflict resolution sessions for the NGO delegates. Moreover, SWVP initiated a number of conflict resolution meetings with northern Sudanese delegates. Most of these efforts helped to build relations within the network and to create a common identity as transnational activists.

The process of identity formation significantly shapes the dynamics of movement mobilization. Social identities help to define what is right, to identify correct behaviors or attitudes, and to promote certain goals. Collective identities must be forged and maintained (Melucci, 1989). However, during the course of a conflict, a group's sense of identity in opposition to another group forms and transforms (Kriesberg, 1982). During conflict, the meaning and importance of social identities are constantly negotiated. Specific conflicts cause the significance of the multiple aspects of individual and collective identities to shift (Cook-Huffman, 2000). Although the participants at the FWCW gathered because they identified as women, their identities were multiple and layered. As they came into conflict over the peace agenda, other facets of participants' multiple identities, e.g. indigenous, New Caledonian, black, southern Sudanese, refugee, became more salient. As a result, they no longer identified with the diverse group of transnational women's peace activists.

The NGO delegates adapted three methods of group interaction to address contention: debate, prejudice reduction, and dialogue. I argue that dialogue was the most useful model for processing the deep-rooted conflicts arising from network agenda setting. Dialogue is a type of facilitated face-to-face activity that promotes "collaborative conflict analysis and problem solving among parties engaged in protracted conflict in a manner that addresses basic human needs and promotes the building of peace, justice, and equality" (Fisher, 1997, p. 8). Fisher (1997) maintains that dialogue interventions are most helpful in a pre-settlement phase, that is, before negotiations take place. Dialogue is useful to the agenda-setting process because it allows participants to identify deeper motivations and to explore ways of satisfying common human needs when protracted conflict arises. Action possibilities emerge only when identity issues, historical grievances, and strong emotions have been considered and empathetic communication has been established (Volkan and Harris, 1993).

All of the attempts at international discourse were useful to the NGO representatives in some way. Initially, WILPF members used debate which brought attention to a marginalized issue, racism, and helped to clarify participants' positions. However, the debate model did not increase understanding or create a desire to work together in the future. Prejudice reduction, a workshop format developed by the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), increased understanding and explored difference but did not delve into problems and conflicts between participants leaving the social infrastructure weak. The NCBI model was "designed to assist participants to come to an understanding of the dynamics of institutionalized racism by working through a series of personal and small group explorations" (Brown and Mazza, 1992, p.4). On the other hand, the dialogue sessions between diverse WILPF delegates and between the Sudanese women began to address deep-rooted conflicts that had been triggered through the agenda-setting process and started to lay a foundation for future cooperation.

Using the dialogue process, the peace activists began to develop a desire and a capacity to negotiate even though there was serious disagreement. Dialogue is a way to show variety or difference from stereotypic images (Kelman, 1986; Rothman, 1991). Disputants often dehumanize and stereotype the other in order to maintain the conflict. Through dialogue, differences among participants on the same 'side' are revealed as individual and personal foundations of beliefs and values are explored. Dialogue allows participants to identify problems underlying relationships and to move towards working on those issues identified. Furthermore, the conflict resolution frame through which dialogue was presented had broad appeal to the women's identity as peace activists. As such, dialogue provides a frame within which the participants can challenge the dominant discourse, uncover difference and find common ground with which to build or rebuild transnational activist identities.

At the FWCW, several NGO delegates, led by an Indian women, Subhara, offered to mediate when a fight broke out between northern and southern Sudanese women during the peace caucus. A southern Sudanese refugee mentioned that her daughter had

been kidnapped and sold as a slave. The northern Sudanese delegates, one of them a young soldier, accused her of lying and began shouting. The context was a discussion of war crimes – the southern Sudanese woman wanted to see her country focus on the future rather than on the past using war tribunals as other countries have done. Toward the beginning of the meeting, Subhara stressed the importance of listening to different perspectives. After the dialogue session, Subhara maintained that the attitude of the young soldier began to change when the women exchanged personal stories:

> But I felt encouraged when Sayida, the young and more outspoken woman talked about her mother's friend who had lost a son and who was unforgiving. And what the dissident said to her about the mothers in the South who had their lost sons and were unforgiving. There was some intellectual acknowledgment of the fact that the same suffering can afflict two bitterly opposing groups of people. And at root it is the same suffering…That, I thought was a movement in her thinking and her attitude… (Interview, China, September 1995)

They began to see their common ground by listening to each other's experience of war.

During the journey of the WILPF peace train from Helsinki to Beijing, the WILPF leadership organized a dialogue session at a stopover in the Ukraine. After the conflict concerning racism had escalated at the WILPF Congress, quite of few of the women then boarded the train where the conflict continued in a variety of ways. Approximately 45 passengers from 20 countries participated in the dialogue session. Bhuvana, the dialogue leader and an NGO delegate from India, opened the session saying "But what we'd like to know from you is how do you feel about this experiment, about this metaphorical community that we have become?" The team of facilitators made an effort to create some safety for participants, giving them an indication they had been heard, and encouraging confrontation and questioning that explored the complexity of issues. Bhuvana challenged the women to examine dominant and potentially oppressive assumptions/ discourse. Without addressing inequities of power, the dialogue process may simply reinforce the asymmetry of the parties involved (Abu-Nimer, 1999). During the meeting, participants spoke as individuals and variation within identity groups started to become obvious resulting in new information and greater understanding.

At the end of the dialogue session, one of the participants, Barrie, an African American delegate, emphasized the need to learn to work together if they were going to form global alliances. She maintained that:

> This progressive community represents the democracy and the world, the global world which we think we are trying to create. And if we can't figure out how to do it among ourselves, you know, the issue gets to be, how on earth are we goina change the world when we can't work internally, you know. What I'm hearing, is we're moving, you know, we're starting to move in that direction (Lloyd, 1996).

In her statement, Barrie articulates key aspects of a transnational woman's peace activist identity. Resolving conflicts, learning to get along, was an important facet of that identity. As global peacemakers, how could they promote peace if they could not get along amongst themselves? The dialogue process affirmed their identity as peacemakers and strengthened their capacity to negotiate on-going conflicts.

Most of the conflict resolution efforts helped to strengthen the ties between the NGO delegates. Although the conflicts were not necessarily 'resolved,' the NGO delegates noticed that other NGOs tended to take a constructive approach. Instead of constantly avoiding or escalating the conflicts as an end in itself, the NGOs attempted to find an acceptable solution for all participants. The positive outcomes resulting from their interaction empowered the NGO delegates. Many of them would continue to identify with the other women they met through the peace activities at the conferences despite limited success in altering the agenda. Positive social identity can be developed through constructive relationships with other groups, not solely through competition and differentiation (Williams, 1984). Women are more likely to experience this type of communal identification than men (Skevington and Baker, 1989). NGO conflict resolution helped to facilitate social relations within the network and offered models for processing conflicts constructively in the future.

Conclusion

NGOs play an important role in transnational social movements by resolving conflicts, building consensus on global issues among diverse organizations, and developing social infrastructure. Focusing on network dissension reveals asymmetrical relations and deep-rooted conflicts within NGO networks as well as conflicts of interest. If they address these tensions constructively, NGOs learn more about other NGOs, strengthen relationships, discover more opportunities for cooperation, and set up a strong basis for on-going collaboration. However, disagreement must be constructive and caring – "expression of hostility as an end in itself is a useless activity, but when it is the catalyst pushing us on to greater clarity and understanding, it serves a meaningful function" (hooks, 1997, p. 410).

The stories of individual activists fill in gaps in understanding how transnational networks develop given the potential for polarizing conflict. This paper showed that in one network, both the means and the outcome of the conflicts were constructive illuminating why the NGOs wished to continue working together despite the deep-rooted conflicts that were unmasked. The constructive organizing and dialogue process was important to the NGO delegates in the network. When I asked Madelaine what she thought of the peace caucus, she replied that they were "doing okay" (Interview, New York, March 1994). SWVP was pleased with the international alliances they had made with NGOs around the world and with other women's peace NGOs in Africa. Geraldine

maintained that although the WILPF leadership was responsible for "the fact that racism was not on the agenda in any real way," they had in some ways dealt with the racial conflict well. Most important, they did not run away from conflict instead demonstrating a willingness to deal with the issues. As a result, she said, anti-racism was beginning to "creep up on the agenda" (Interview, WILPF Peace Train, August 1995).

This paper highlights the positive potential that conflict has to transform relationships and, in turn, social movement infrastructure. Without challenges to the informal hierarchy that had developed, the network leaders would have been unaware that the consensus decision making process had suppressed difference. Conflict provided an opportunity to learn about differences in meaning and salience regarding the agenda items and simultaneously expanded areas for collaboration as the participants came to know each other's issues better. Awareness of the destructive potential of the deep-rooted conflicts that surfaced, pushed the representatives toward a dialogue process that led participants beyond assumptions of sameness as women. Constructive conflict resolution was especially important to the collective identity formation of this network of women peace activists.

Conflict will continue to be a part of women's transnational organizing. Further research is needed on transnational network conflict management processes. The potential for conflicts, particularly those between Northern and Southern NGOs, to become polarized and destructive is evident. Such polarization could effect transnational collaboration and/or the formation of transnational NGOs (Smith, 2004). If, as Moghadam (2000) maintains, transnational women's networks continue to be non-hierarchical in structure, then understanding constructive conflict resolution is critical for addressing the problems that arise as women develop large-scale non-hierarchical decision making.

Notes

1.   The names of the interviewees have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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Transnational Social Spaces Network is a scientific work- and discussion forum. Bringing Transnational Relations Back in. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3-33. Robinson, W. I., 2001: Social Theory and Globalization: The Rise of a transnational State. In: Theory and Society 30, 157- 200 http://journals.kluweronline.com/ Please use: "Search Articles" (top-left) with following string: Social Theory and Globalization: The Rise of a transnational State. Wimmer, A./Glick Schiller, N., 2002: Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation state building, migration and the social sciences. In: Global Networks 2 (4): 301-334. Transnationalism and migration. Al-Ali, N. S., 2002: New approaches to migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home. A transnational feminist network (TFN) is a network of women's groups who work together for women's rights at both a national and transnational level. They emerged in the mid 1980s as a response to structural adjustment and neoliberal policies, guided by ideas categorized as global feminism.[1] TNF's are composed of representatives from a variety of NGO's from around the globe. TFNs are similar to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) but while NGOs work at a local and national level, TFNs create coalitions across borders. Globalization affects women worldwide in adverse ways and TFNs emerged in response to these effects. Feminism is best understand as a global phenomenon as it is a product of transnational dialogues and disagreements.[3].