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Women's Rights, Family Planning, and Population Control: The Emergence of Reproductive Rights in the United Nations (1960s–70s)

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ABSTRACT

The article traces the emergence of reproductive rights principles in the UN during the 1960s–70s. Family planning programmes were the key discursive terrain on which conflicts over fertility, global population, and women's roles in 'third world development' were interlinked. The UN's Commission on the Status of Women was a key actor: in the late 1960s it defined family planning in relation to a broadened definition of human rights, and repositioned it as a women's rights issue. This shift resulted from competing but in some respects converging concepts of women's rights among Western-based, communist-aligned and Global South-based women's organisations at the Commission. While subsequent UN conferences, specifically Bucharest 1974 and Mexico City 1975, revealed enduring global conflicts over 'population management' and 'third world development', the UN reframed family planning in relation to human rights principles. It hereby responsibilised women in their social roles, potentially enhancing their reproductive autonomy – but failing to fully abandon the population control agenda, against the calls of feminist movements in the Global South. The article contributes to histories of the UN and of the emergence of globally connected feminist movements, and is based on archives and publications of women's rights NGOs, UN agencies, and family planning organisations.

KEYWORDS

Reproductive rights; women's rights; family planning; population control; UN Commission on the Status of Women

1. Reproductive politics and the global cold war

At the Fourth World Conference on Women convened by the UN in Beijing in 1995, a Platform for Action was adopted which, among other strategic priorities, called on governments and to '[p]rovide more accessible, available and affordable primary health-care services of high quality, including sexual and reproductive health care, which includes family planning information and services'.¹ Commentators have interpreted the Beijing Conference as a milestone in articulating principles aimed at protecting individual autonomy in procreation.² The UN was key not only in defining global norms of reproductive autonomy and in setting standards to which governments and other actors can be held to account, but also in linking these norms with other important areas of activity including human rights, population policies, women's rights, and women roles in socio-economic development. What it proposed in the mid-1990s was a historically embedded

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definition of human rights, revealing the continued link with population management, and centred on the notion of 'responsible' procreation and parenthood that had been introduced by family planning movements four decades earlier. The contours of this definition of reproductive rights can only be understood by historically analysing global debates in the decades preceding its articulation.

As scholarship has begun to historicise the UN and 20th-century notions of human rights, this article contributes to a post-1945 genealogy of global reproductive rights thinking. It uses 'reproductive rights' as a category of analysis denoting a set of principles protecting individuals' rights in autonomously making decisions on whether, when and in what circumstances to become a parent.³ The article traces the dissemination in the UN system during the 1960s–70s of a new notion of reproductive rights, critical of population control ideology and centred on individual bodily autonomy and human rights principles. It is proposed here, firstly, that it were women's rights campaigners in the UN and NGOs linked to it who played a determining role in the gradual articulation of reproductive rights principles in the 1960s–70s. Secondly, it argues that this new discourse emerged out of women's organisations' diverse responses to the population control agenda and to family planning programmes around the world. After decolonisation, such programmes were implemented in a number of countries in the Global South by US- and UK-based organisations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Population Council – often, though not always, in conjunction with national governments. Underpinned by the theory of global overpopulation, influenced by neo-Malthusianism, and made possible by new birth control technologies, these interventions were aimed at lowering fertility through the dissemination of contraception.

The analysis adopts a gendered lens: it traces political and activist agendas rooted in women's social realities, and explores women's individual and collective political agency. To a degree, the recent scholarship on the UN and human rights has overlooked the role played by women's organisations. Moreover, the historiographic focus on the Mexico City Conference of 1975 has obscured women's contributions in the UN in preceding years.⁴ In a similar vein, both Connelly and Eager have noted that the male-dominated make-up of the post-war family planning and population control milieu has produced male-centred historiographies.⁵ A gendered perspective highlights the articulation of 'woman' as a political subject in global debates on population and human rights, and as an autonomous reproductive agent in family planning. The analysis aims to contribute to the globalisation of the history of twentieth Century feminisms. Drawing on intersectional feminist theory, it highlights what Adrienne Rich termed the 'politics of location' in feminist activism: the inevitable diversity of perspectives, embedded in distinct local conditions and different historical trajectories of particular patriarchies.⁶ Such an approach involves de-centring West European and North American feminisms, and foregrounding organisations from the Global South and communist Eastern Europe and their distinct notions of reproductive agency. As we shall see, of crucial importance was the fact that women's organisations from Africa and Latin America, by and large supported by WIDF, critiqued family planning programmes, some of which, as they argued, had pressured them into having fewer children. In articulating such critiques, women's organisations in the post-colonial states questioned Western feminists' focus on the refusal of motherhood, stressing the right to motherhood as an equally important pillar of reproductive liberty. Thus, women's organisations in the Global South paved the way for a notion of reproductive justice that inscribed bodily autonomy in procreation into wider social justice agendas, cognisant of intersections of class, race and gender inequality, and of reproductive injustices that involve both forced motherhood and the denial of motherhood.

The article focuses on three sets of actors: firstly, the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (henceforth 'The Commission'); secondly, the International Council of Women (ICW) and the Women's International Democratic Forum (WIDF) as the leading women's rights NGOs of the Cold War period; and lastly, the transnational family planning movement. At the centre of the narrative sits the Commission, an agency in which conflicting priorities with regard to women's

rights and diverging understanding of 'the modern family' and of women's roles in 'third world development' provoked the articulation of reproductive rights principles. The focus on WIDF and ICW is motivated by the fact that both were key players of global Cold War feminism: their concepts of rights and women's emancipation were aligned with those of the communist and Western world respectively, and both competed to influence 'third world' women's organisations. Starting with a discussion of responses to the global proliferation of family planning programmes in the Commission, ICW and WIDF, the article discusses the new understanding of women's reproductive rights as articulated by the Commission President, Helvi Sipilä. It maps reactions to these new notions around the UN, specifically at the Conference on Population held in Bucharest in 1974 and the first Conference on Women held in Mexico City the following year. Sources include newsletters, reports and correspondence from ICW and WIDF archives, as well as Commission meeting minutes, and reports and publications by IPPF.

More broadly, the analysis sheds new light on three principal debates animating the UN and the NGOs in its orbit during the 1960s–70s: conflicts over population control, models of 'third world development' and women's role in it, and the shifting meaning of human rights. While these three themes are introduced in the paragraphs that follow, it is important to note from the outset that family planning – its aims, practices, and local impacts – was linked with all three. Key players of the post-1945 transnational family planning movement included IPPF, created in 1952 in London by veteran birth control advocate Margaret Sanger among others, and the Population Council set up by J.D. Rockefeller III in New York in the same year with funding from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.⁷ By 1960 this transnational network of experts and philanthropists had grown into a 'powerful epistemic community',⁸ with over 30 national affiliated family planning associations and programmes in developing countries as well as Europe and the US. Overall, the family planning movement's agenda was centred on the normalisation of the small nuclear family, the 'modernisation' of sexual and reproductive practices including the use of contraception, and the lowering of fertility in developing countries as well as marginalised groups in the 'first' world.⁹

The transnational family planning networks partly overlapped with expert communities (demographers, economists) in the West espousing neo-Malthusianism and advocating population control. The 'global neo-Malthusian moment'¹⁰ of the 1960s saw growing numbers of experts and politicians in the West arguing that population growth in the Global South would fatally harm global prosperity and peace. In the 1950s the population of the developing countries grew by 1%, while in the 1960s population growth peaked at 2.5%. Such growth was due in significant measure to the fact that lowering mortality was accompanied by consistently high or even growing fertility. Most demographers in the US, the UK and to a lesser degree continental Western Europe in this period adhered to demographic transition theory, according to which lower mortality would be followed by lower fertility. They were alarmed by the fact that in the Global South no such succession seemed to occur and called for intervention, although they disagreed on the right time and approaches. The population control paradigm was foundational to the transnational family planning movement: it supported the notion that intervening in demographic trends, specifically fertility, was required in the Global South to remedy what it referred to as the 'population explosion'. The great advances in contraceptive technology, specifically improvements made to the Intra-Uterine Device (IUD) in the early 1960s and the dissemination of the pill from the mid-1960s seemed to render possible their ambition to flood rural communities in Africa and Asia with birth control.¹¹ In the UN, global overpopulation and population control started to be discussed in earnest in the early 1960s, specifically at the second World Population Conference held in Belgrade in 1965 and, as discussed in detail below, at the third such conference held in Bucharest in 1974.

The second major UN theme in which discussions of family planning were embedded was the notion and nature of 'third world development'. The globally spanning process of decolonisation was transforming the UN in terms of its membership, debates, and priorities. The optimism that

accompanied the start of the First Development Decade in 1961 and the creation of the UN Development Programme in 1965, gave way by the end of the decade to frustration among developing nations at the lack of progress. The Non-Aligned Movement granted African and Asian states newfound confidence: their calls for alternative models of development grew louder, as did their anti-(neo)colonial discourse. In 1974 the General Assembly adopted the New International Economic Order, proposed by a number of Global South member-states. As an alternative vision for global economic relations, it foregrounded 'growth plus change' in the global distribution of resources, in Secretary-General U Thant's words.¹² As part of this, fertility and family life were debated in new ways at the UN as women's roles in 'third world development' increasingly generated attention. New visions on how women were instrumental to nations and communities – in terms of healthcare, family welfare, agricultural reform, and education – were captured in the 'Women in Development' framework, which gained much traction in UN discourse after 1970. This framework hinged on the expansion of the notion of human rights into the socio-economic terrain. One aspect of the 'major reframing of the human rights project' in the UN during the 1960s, as put by Steven Jensen, was the articulation of rights principles in areas ranging from access to education and healthcare to family welfare and economic security.¹³

The third key UN debate in which discussions of family planning were embedded was the nature of human rights. From the late 1960s the coercive practices that characterised a number of family planning programmes in the Global South were measured against human rights norms and critically scrutinised in UN agencies. As discussed in more detail below, this prompted a reorientation in the transnational family planning movement, including its increasingly explicit mobilisation of human rights discourse. It also allowed women's rights NGOs to articulate novel principles with regard to procreative choice. Crucially, the Commission on the Status of Women in the late 1960s decided to redefine family planning and claim it as a woman's rights issue. The Commission, created in 1948, was until the 1970s the only UN structure exclusively dedicated to women and gender equality. Given the fears regarding feminism as a 'Western import' among representatives of some Global South member states, as well as a degree of hostility to feminism in other UN agencies, the Commission stopped well before referring to itself as a feminist organisation. Instead, caution and diplomacy were its hallmarks.¹⁴ Its members shared a sense of purpose centred on pushing women's 'social status' higher onto the UN agenda, and this despite their ideological differences. Delegates on the Commission were appointed per country: many of them were chairs of national women's councils, but some, and a growing number from the 1960s, represented women's international NGOs, including professionally-based organisations such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers, and 'third world' organisations such as the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO, founded 1962), and the All-Arab Feminist Union. UN agencies such as the Commission on Human Rights, the International Labour Organization, and UNESCO had a representative at the Commission. It held a plenary session yearly and from 1970 two-yearly, preceded by working groups, which grew in importance after 1970. Despite being allowed to make recommendations to ECOSOC, the Commission struggled to influence the male-dominated UN leadership. However, while some scholarship has labelled the organisation as ineffective before the Mexico City Conference of 1975, recent studies hint at a different picture,¹⁵ and the present article contributes to redressing the narrative. It is proposed here that in the late 1960s and early 1970s it played a key role in articulating a vision of 'women's rights' for and in the UN, by creating a discursive space where 'third world development', women's reproductive agency, and human rights intersected.

A key player in the Commission was the International Council of Women. Created in the USA in 1888, after World War Two it grew into one of the largest international women's organisations, with a clear focal point in the Western world. In Cold War context, its liberal feminism, focused on formal political rights and access to professions and education, became more pronounced as it was engaged in soft diplomacy promoting 'Western' models of emancipation. The Cold War

brought it into conflict with the Women's International Democratic Federation, the most globally connected women's organisation of the post-war era, but led by women from the communist world. Established in 1945 with the intention of bringing together women's organisations from around the globe, WIDF soon came under the influence of the USSR. Despite Western-based NGOs refusing to associate with it, the organisation counted seventy members in 1958.¹⁶ It established numerous links with women's organisations in the Global South, despite losing its consultative status with the UN, and therefore its membership of the Commission, between 1953 and 1968. However, its relationship with organisations such as PAWO were neither egalitarian nor conflict-free. As argued by Yulia Gradszkova, WIDF's approaches vis-à-vis 'third world' women's organisations were often marked by implicit hierarchies, with the latter rarely represented in the WIDF's leading structures. At the same time, while both ICW and WIDF attempted to woo women's movements in the South, the latter's message, which incorporated critiques of imperialism and called for global justice in the distribution of resources, was the more attractive one.¹⁷ As will be discussed, WIDF's acceptance of family planning after 1968 was important in creating consensus in the Commission as well as unsettling the latter's notions of family and women's rights.

2. Family planning and feminist responses

As demographic debate was globalised at the onset of the Cold War, UN discussions of the desirability and shape of family planning programmes to some degree pitted Western actors against communist states, state actors against NGOs, and governments of the Global South against those of the Global North. At the same time, growing numbers of governments in the South initiated family planning programmes in collaboration with IPPF and the Population Council – as was the case for India, China, and Egypt in the 1950s. IPPF and the Population Council's approaches included 'converting' local officials to family planning ideology by training them at US universities; supporting local officials in rolling out population surveys on birth control practices; organising 'information campaigns' aimed at local health officials; and eventually, creating local clinics.¹⁸ By the late 1960s, population control programmes were operative in over 30 countries, most of these with IPPF or Population Council involvement.¹⁹ Recent scholarship on the local impacts of these programmes has interpreted family planning as an infrastructure allowing for an array of interventions in individuals' intimate practices and knowledge.²⁰ In a number of cases, including the Philippines and Kenya in the 1960s and India in the 1970s, such interventions were accompanied by various forms of coercion, including unconsented abortion and sterilisation, and insufficient information in the administering of the IUD.²¹

In the grip of 'population bomb' ideology and pressured by family planning organisations, USAID started financing family planning programmes after 1965; by 1972 the US financed 80% of such programmes around the world.²² The UN was initially reluctant to debate family planning due to resistance by many member states – not least the USSR, historically opposed to Malthusianism, and the Catholic nations of Latin America. This changed in the 1960s, as a result of the growing numbers of developing countries asking for UN assistance in population planning,²³ and family planning organisations intensifying their lobbying.²⁴ The first UN Conference on Population held in Rome in 1954 was a scientific rather than a policy meeting, and did not go beyond qualifying high fertility combined with reducing mortality in the developing countries as a major problem.²⁵ The second Population Conference, held in Belgrade in 1965, was focused on high fertility as the cause of the 'problem of global overpopulation' and concluded on a set of global policy aims. The UNFPA (UN Fund for Population Activities), created in 1969 to coordinate UN-sponsored family planning initiatives around the world, had the double aim of reducing fertility in developing countries, and disseminating sexual knowledge, modern medical practices, and 'modern' (i.e. small, nuclear) family models. Described by Mark Mazower as a front

organisation for the Population Council, it largely escaped the democratic scrutiny under which other UN structures operated.²⁶

At the same time, a growing number of delegates in the General Assembly, specifically those representing non-aligned countries, questioned the effectiveness of family planning programmes in lowering fertility. They also denounced practices involving coercion or the bypassing of local officials, as reported in publications such as *The Myth of Population Control* (1972) by Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamadani.²⁷ The family planning movement denied the charges of human rights abuse, and it went further: from its inception it had, as argued by Roman Birke, invoked notions of human rights and humanitarianism to justify its programmes. More explicitly than before, human rights discourse was embraced in the *Declaration on Population* produced in 1966 by the Population Council and Rockefeller III and signed by thirty heads of state by the following year. It called for urgent action by governments and the UN aimed at reducing fertility in the Global South, but more specifically stated that 'we believe that the majority of parents desire to have the knowledge and the means to plan their families, that the opportunity to decide the number and spacing of children is a basic human right'.²⁸ IPPF too, from the late 1960s, explicitly mobilised human rights principles. Not only was family planning 'human-rights proof', the rolling out of population control programmes in the developing world was, it argued, in fact a pre-requisite for the realisation of human rights as it led to socio-economic growth.²⁹

The UN Conference on Human Rights held in Tehran in 1968 explicitly brought population management into the realm of human rights, as part of a broadening of the concept of human rights. Numerous delegates from Africa and Asia critiqued the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, considering its abstract political principles to be weakened by their disconnection from socio-economic realities. The 'Third world human rights ideology' proposed here repositioned human rights as linked to socio-economic development, and downplayed civil and political rights.³⁰ Governments from the Global South also foregrounded national sovereignty in deciding population targets, hereby questioning the legitimacy of global family planning interventions, and pre-figuring the conflicts in Bucharest in 1974. The Tehran Final Act did not fundamentally challenge the approaches of the international family planning movement, but it did pressure it into working with and under national officials. Adopting the Population Council and IPPF's argument, the Final Act implied that a true realisation of human rights was contingent on the right population management measures: '[t]he present rate of population growth in some areas of the world hampers the struggle against hunger and poverty [...] thereby impairing full realization of human rights'.³¹ At the same time, Tehran was met with great disappointment by the Commission on the Status of Women. As stated in the conclusions to its 22nd Session of 1969: 'while we welcome the attention to population measures and Family Planning [at the Tehran Conference], more investigation is required regarding the choices couples make regarding family size and the conditions leading them to make these choices'.³² The Commission pinpointed the fact that between the push towards global population control and claims of national sovereignty in demographic policy, Tehran failed to foreground the reproductive agency of individuals or couples.

As fertility was politicised in new ways, women's socio-economic roles, more broadly, were analysed afresh in the UN. Most prominently, Danish economist Ester Boserup argued in *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) that existing models of development, modernisation and industrialisation of the Global South not only rendered invisible the many forms of formal and informal labour performed by women, but further excluded women from what was understood as the 'productive' economy. Significantly, her critique of prevailing development discourse involved a rejection of the neo-Malthusian underpinnings of Western demographic discourse and family planning initiatives, as she contested the assumption that reductions in fertility would benefit countries in development.³³ Enthused, the Commission adopted *Women in Development* as its key framework. This new approach informed the Second Development Decade, the launch of which in 1970 featured routine references to 'the full integration of

women in the development effort'.³⁴ However, in UNESCO and UNFPA reservations existed with regard to the new foregrounding of women's rights: the family was not to be transformed and nor was the private sphere to be politicised. Indeed, in the Resolution opening the Second Development Decade it was declared that 'the family as the cornerstone of society much be protected'.³⁵

The Commission discussed the rights of women in the private sphere – as autonomous agents making decisions in and about the family – in novel ways from around 1965. This resulted from the politicisation of the family in the Women in Development framework, but was also influenced by the radical critiques of the family in the new wave of militant feminism across Western Europe and North America, which interpreted it not only as the cornerstone of patriarchy but quintessentially the site of women's oppression and alienation.³⁶ Until the mid-1960s a liberal notion of women's rights and equality prevailed in the Commission: women were to be emancipated through individual access to education, professions and political representation. Such a view left the family largely unquestioned, and in fact, Western-based organisations such as ICW tended to approach the family as a site of women's power, to be used as such. However, the Commission's first major intervention, the drafting of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (DEDAW) in 1966, revealed important shifts: a move away from an individually-based and towards a socially embedded understanding of women's emancipation, a questioning of gender roles in the family, the acknowledgement of strongly diverging family models around the globe, and the growing influence stemming from women in the 'second' and 'third' worlds.³⁷ Adopted by the UN in 1967, DEDAW was hailed across the UN as the first attempt to weld women's social status with human rights and formed the basis for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). DEDAW crystallised on enhancing women's rights in the family, for instance by articulating norms for economic equality in marriage, child custody and inheritance – hereby hinting at a wider ambition to transform existing family models. Importantly, the declaration recognised the right of 'men and women' to obtain information and education in the field of family planning.³⁸

This politicisation of the family sphere was initiated by women from the communist world and the developing nations: at Commission meetings, they drew attention to the global variety of families and gender roles, critiqued attempts to universalise the small-family model, qualified the family as a site of both women's power and women's oppression, and called for the liberation of women in the family as a starting point for achieving greater social agency.³⁹ Organisations such as the Indonesian women's movement Gerwani (created in 1954) and the National Council of Women of Kenya (1964), emerging from or reconstituted during the decolonisation struggles, gained force during the 1960s thanks in part to the transnational connections of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁴⁰ Alongside PAWO, Gerwani was increasingly vocal in denouncing not the spread of contraception and sexual knowledge, but the coercive aspects of some programmes and the population control paradigm. At the Asian-African Women's Solidarity Conference held in Cairo in 1961, twenty-nine women's organisations from non-aligned countries discussed women's societal roles, gender equality, poverty, family life, and birth control. The Conference's resolutions included a supportive statement of family planning programmes, though conditional on whether the latter were 'respectful of individuals' choices in family size'.⁴¹

WIDF made a crucial contribution to the Commission's articulation of family planning as centred on women's reproductive agency. This was so despite its initial rejection of family planning, underpinned by the pro-natalism that characterised the women's organisations of the post-1945 communist world. In the post-war years, WIDF's maternalist feminism was centred on women's rights 'as mothers, workers and citizens' and on a gendered notion of citizenship whereby women played distinct social roles both as producers and reproducers. It adopted an explicit celebration of motherhood, and this in relation to post-war reconstruction as far as European nations were concerned and in relation to socio-economic development and nation-building in post-colonial states.⁴² Moreover, during the 1950s it adhered to the Soviet critiques of global

overpopulation theory, and routinely labelled family planning interventions in the Global South as driven by 'US imperialism'. It organised a series of World Congresses of Mothers, the first of which was held in 1955 in Lausanne and attended by women's organisations from seventy countries mostly in Eastern Europe and the developing world. Here, and at the World Congress of Women it organised in Moscow in 1963, the message pivoted on 'the defense of women's children, against war, and for the disarmament and friendship of the peoples'. It was a discourse that mobilised women as prime defenders of socialism, and on the basis of their multiple social roles with motherhood at the centre.⁴³

Yet WIDF's positions grew more nuanced in the late 1960s, coinciding with its re-joining of Commission in 1968. Its critique of family planning developed into a principled stance on women's right to autonomously choose whether and when to become a mother, as embedded in local socio-economic context and as part of a critical assessment of the family. At its World Congress of Women held in Helsinki in 1969, an unprecedented number of delegates from the Global South was gathered and they displayed an unseen assertiveness. Discourses on women's key role in third world development were ubiquitous; they focused on literacy, family welfare, and maternal and child health. Much of the discussion dealt with 'the modern family': distinct from ICW's modernising discourse on the family which promoted the small-size model, this notion involved calls for new family models based on 'equal rights and duties and joint responsibilities of the two partners'. At the Helsinki Congress a consensus emerged on prioritising married women's legal status in child custody and inheritance across a range of family forms (including polygamy).⁴⁴ Furthermore, in the late 1960s WIDF embraced the widened, socio-economic concept of human rights. It organised a series of workshops around Latin America in 1968 on the 'defense of the rights of women and children', involving access to health services, education and childcare provision, as well as economic rights ranging from non-discrimination in employment to landownership rights and agrarian reform. Partly as an alternative to family planning programmes, the WIDF announced in 1969 it would create 'WIDF centres' across Africa, Asia and Latin America in partnership with local NGOs, and providing, among other services, health-care and 'hygiene education'.⁴⁵ Thus, increasingly WIDF ambioned to present itself in the UN as a leader on women's rights in relation to family and fertility choices.

Thus, while WIDF aimed to transform gender roles in the family without reducing family size, the ICW envisaged reducing family size without necessarily transforming gender roles. By and large, Western women's organisations were uncritical supporters of family planning as a solution to 'global overpopulation', though they grew more critical after 1965 – a development opposite to WIDF's. In ICW, initial objections to family planning, most often religiously motivated, were outnumbered by the late 1950s. Its international Conference held in Washington DC in 1963, attended primarily by Western-based organisations, passed a resolution expressing support for family planning programmes around the world and calling for the rolling out of 'educational programmes for responsible parenthood'. Adhering to Western discourses of the 'population bomb', speaker after speaker noted high fertility in the developing world as the 'main cause behind war and suffering'.⁴⁶ The following year's Conference strengthened these points, while shifting attention towards 'the modern family', referring to the globalisation of the small nuclear family rather than involving any aim to transform gender roles in it. It also called for the global dissemination of a 'culture of responsible parenthood', a notion which implied that individuals were responsible not only for their own and their family's well-being, but also for the well-being and prosperity of the nation and the imagined international community. As such, it involved a normative view on which procreative choices were favourable to others. The priority now was to 'educate parents in their duty and responsibility' to space their children, and make 'child-spacing information' widely available.⁴⁷

Yet from the mid-1960s, in ICW discourse the focus was increasingly placed on women's agency and their responsibility in reproductive choice. This occurred thanks to the fact that the IUD and the contraceptive pill were woman-based, but it also reflected a radicalisation of ICW's

views on women's agency in transforming gender roles in the family. ICW started making its support for family planning conditional on whether 'information [be] given to women as to their biology and physiology, and problems arising out of overpopulation, without going in for propaganda. The final decision [to use contraception] rests with the woman herself, together with her husband.'⁴⁸ ICW started to note the dissonance of population control ideology vis-à-vis its own vision of family planning as increasingly based on women's agency. Attending IPPF's international conference of 1966 in Copenhagen, the ICW reported it was pleasantly surprised that family planning had been discussed 'from the point of view of the health of the individual and of the family rather than in relation to population problems'.⁴⁹ At the same time, it objected to a discussion at UNESCO's annual congress of July 1967, where an all-male expert seminar on family planning, involving physicians, demographers and development officials, considered family planning exclusively from the perspective of overpopulation.⁵⁰ Thus, while initially diametrically opposed, in the late 1960s WIDF and ICW positions on family planning converged towards conditional enthusiasm, though differences remained.

3. The commission on the status of women and the paradigm shift (1968–1974)

A key intervention in the adoption and reframing of family planning by the UN has been overlooked in the scholarship: the Commission's pioneering research of family planning programmes worldwide. It resulted in a series of reports (1969–74) which resolutely positioned family planning as a women's rights issue. The Commission's activism in this area was facilitated by the fact that its centre of gravity was shifting geographically towards the Global South, and by an administrative change of 1972 whereby its research office (the Section on the Status of Women) was moved from the Human Rights Division to the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, a new structure focusing on 'third world development'.⁵¹ Helvi Sipilä was appointed as the Commission's Chair in 1968, and in 1972 she became the UN's highest-ever female officeholder, as Assistant General-Secretary for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. A Finnish diplomat, she adhered to the liberal feminism espoused by ICW, of which she was a long-standing member. But she was also shaped by her country's neutral status in the Cold War and favoured collaboration with WIDF. A cautious reformist rather than revolutionary, Sipilä soon acquired a reputation for her expertise and sense of initiative. Her crucial insight was to capture the momentum on the questions of population and 'third world development' in order to reclaim family planning as a women's rights issue. When in 1966 the Commission proposed to the General Assembly to embark on wide-ranging research on the impact of family planning on women, the latter agreed and appointed Sipilä as Special Rapporteur.⁵²

In her first interim report to the Commission of 1968, her attempt was clear: to shift the narrative with regard to family planning, re-situating it closer to women's social roles and rights, but without challenging the consensus on the need for 'global population management'. ILO and UNESCO representatives remained unconvinced, instead re-emphasising the urgency around overpopulation as driving family planning programmes. Sipilä highlighted that since no UN agency had defined family planning with any clarity, articulating such a definition was part of her remit. Invoking DEDAW, she stressed the need for an explicit recognition of choosing the number and spacing of children as a right belonging to parents, as well as their right to obtain information on family planning programmes. While a number of Commission members noted that abortion should form part of the discussions on family planning, Sipilä avoided this controversial theme. Instead she centred family planning on access to birth control and information, embedded in cultures of 'responsible parenthood' and 'marriage education'. Major opposition to Sipilä's interim report came from the USSR representatives, who considered it an attempt to 'white-wash' problematic family planning initiatives. Remarkably, WIDF was cautiously supportive:

its delegate acknowledged the merits of the initiative as the first encompassing exploration of what family planning meant on the ground.⁵³

Conducted between 1968 and 1973, Sipilä's research was an ambitious endeavour, covering uncharted territory. It involved obtaining information on the functioning of programmes, legal contexts, and women's social conditions from a range of stakeholders: national government agencies, national and international family planning organisations, national and international women's rights NGOs and councils, and UN agencies. The NGOs with which the Commission had a privileged established relationship, including ICW, WIDF and IPPF, were asked for a more detailed appraisal of how existing family planning programmes were impacting on women's lives. In particular, Sipilä wanted to know whether women's rights organisations were recommending family planning to their governments and in what form.⁵⁴ Numerous organisations from the Global South, including PAWO, protested at Commission meetings against the continued framing of family planning in relation to demographic imperatives, despite their overall support for the initiative.⁵⁵

More surprisingly, ICW voiced similar concerns, and it threatened to withhold collaboration until Bernard Berelson from the Population Council convinced it otherwise.⁵⁶ ICW members were also dismayed at the routine subordination of couples' procreative decisions to national and global demographic targets in reports by ECOSOC and UNFPA. For instance, writing to the Commission, ICW President Anne Price commented on ECOSOC Resolution 1346 adopted in 1968, which proposed the convening of an international conference on the human environment. She referred to ECOSOC's framing here of family planning as an explicitly anti-natalist intervention as 'chilling in its logic'. ICW urged the Commission to call upon all UN agencies to instead consider family planning 'in relation to child and maternal health, rather than in relation to the population explosion'.⁵⁷

In her second interim report to the Commission of 1970, Sipilä approached family planning from two 'equally important' aspects, human rights and population management. Despite reservations about this among women's NGOs, she had continued to work with UNFPA and the Population Commission, both of which had taken an interest in her work and aimed to incorporate her findings into their own studies of fertility in the developing world. Sipilä recommended that family planning continue to be approached by governments as a way to 'stabilise the population', while at the same time resolving that its own specific role was to 'point at the impacts of family planning programmes on women'. The Session concluded on a few novel points: family planning programmes should be incorporated into healthcare infrastructure and education and literacy programmes aimed specifically at women, and women themselves ought to be given leading roles in designing family planning services. ILO and UNESCO representatives now displayed a more positive attitude: noting that it would be paramount for family planning programmes to 'adapt to local cultures' (usually code-language for accepting religious restrictions on birth control, abortion, and sexual education), they reported to have begun incorporating family planning in some of their projects. The Commission invested Sipilä with the task of preparing UN guidelines to national governments on producing surveys of family planning programmes, and recommended that she 'hold(s) consultations at regional and national levels with officials, experts and woman leaders' regarding the future of family planning more broadly.⁵⁸

While Sipilä found that many government doors remained closed in her quest for information, she sensed that the momentum was favourable and kept the conversation alive in all sectors of the UN and NGO sphere. She held regional seminars with government officials, medical experts, demographers and family planning operators in Africa (Nairobi, 1971), Central and Latin America (Dominican Republic, 1972), and Asia (Indonesia, 1972). As argued by a representative of the Indonesian NGO Gerwani at the latter seminar: 'Many Family Planning programmes have failed to ask women what they want. [...] We need to look at the long history of foreign interventions, forcing women to have either less or more children.'⁵⁹ These meetings, I suggest, led to no less than a paradigm shift, forcing Sipilä to think about women's rights intersectionally. Here she

encountered different perspectives: women activists denounced human rights abuses by the international family planning movement in countries such as Puerto Rico and Kenya, drew attention not only to forced motherhood but also the forced denial of motherhood, and placed both phenomena in a long historical perspective on reproductive control by colonial authorities. To be sure, most of her interlocutors were official women's organisations dependent on their governments, and therefore reluctant to openly critique national family planning programmes. Nonetheless a fundamentally new point had been articulated: that in the context of family planning, human rights should encompass not only the right to reject motherhood but also the right to be a mother, and that any family planning intervention ought to be underpinned by principles of bodily autonomy rather than pro- or anti-natalist agendas.

Discussions at the Commission's 24th Session of 1972 revealed the shift in perspective: Sipilä stressed that family planning ought to be aimed 'not only at limiting births', and must also 'help women who so desired to have children' – undoubtedly also as a concession to the continued religious opposition to birth control for instance among state-feminist organisations in Latin America. The Commission concluded that family planning 'must respect personal freedom and the dignity of the human being', whether she or he wished to have many, one, or no children. Another theme gaining prominence was the need to embed family planning services in programmes for enhancing women's social status and rights, and this with regard to family law (including raising the minimum age at marriage and laws regarding spouses' equal rights in marriage), maternity healthcare, women's education (including sexual education), and women's access to waged work and financial independence (including maternity cover provisions). Sipilä reported on the ubiquity of legal or cultural obstacles, including child marriage and polygamy, preventing women from exercising their 'independence with regard to the choice of motherhood'. Reframing family planning in such a way that it might contribute to the women's rights agenda in these interrelated areas, the Commission now concluded that family planning was 'a basic human right' that was 'extremely important to women'.⁶⁰

Sipilä's Report was presented in 1974 at the Commission amidst acclaim by UNESCO, WHO and ILO representatives, and at the General Assembly, where it was approved. Its central idea was that 'the status of women', 'population change' and 'third world development' were interrelated, and that women's role in the latter two areas 'had not yet been fully recognised'.⁶¹ Importantly, it did not challenge the theory of global overpopulation or the proposition that family planning was the ideal remedy; however, it stated that parents had 'the right to decide on the number and spacing of their children'. It qualified this as 'a fundamental right of individuals', which 'facilitates other rights, especially for women'. Family planning should constitute an 'integrated and essential part of development plans and programmes in countries suffering from overpopulation', and these could only succeed 'in concert with other measures which also improve the status of women'. The Report recommended that when establishing institutions dealing with population growth, governments of developing countries should include not only family planning services but also representatives of women's organisations. At the General Assembly, the Commission benefited from the momentum around women's rights: this was also the meeting at which the proposal to hold a women's conference in 1975 was approved. Further, the Commission requested that the Report was sent to all member states in advance of the Bucharest Conference.⁶² WIDF was now fully supportive of this concept of family planning which linked development with women's rights, and called on the Commission to articulate norms around family planning in conjunction with the deepening of DEDAW.⁶³

This new understanding of family planning soon gained traction around the UN: at a joint seminar on 'Strengthening Family Life' held in the Philippines in 1971, FAO and UNDP concluded that family planning was central to global health and development, with the 'dissemination of information on health and contraception' as a priority. It was stressed that family planning programmes ought to be integrated into local strategies for multi-faceted development.⁶⁴ However, Sipilä's vision allowed for a range of interpretations. For ICW, family planning still involved a

normative notion of the small nuclear family as the cornerstone of society. Its emphasis on 'responsible parenthood', too, was undiminished as women were tasked with transforming their communities according to 'modern' parenting practices – including choosing small families. It espoused this view both at an NGO/UNICEF workshop in 1969 on 'The family in a changing society',⁶⁵ and at its 20th Triennial Conference held in Vienna in 1973, where the culture of responsible parenthood received much attention.⁶⁶

ICW organised a seminar on 'The African woman: Planning for better family living' in Yaoundé (Cameroon) in 1971, one of its first interventions in Africa. Attended by health officials and women's organisations from Cameroun, Gabon and Nigeria, the meeting concluded on a view on 'woman-centred development' that prioritised women's education, maternity rights, health services and specifically dissemination of contraception and sexual education. The seminar generated much interest: FAO and UNICEF attended, as did IPPF and the Population Council. The population control agenda featured clearly in the discussions, and this was due partly to the influence exercised by UNFPA. After the Ford Foundation refused financial support for the event, ICW sought and received UNFPA support, but on the understanding that a greater emphasis on 'the danger of overpopulation' was required in the preparatory material.⁶⁷ ICW's adherence to reproductive autonomy continued to be compromised by population concerns. This was evident at its 1974 regional conference in Sydney, where a proposal to encourage governments to penalise large families through higher taxation or removal of benefits was discussed at length. While not pursued, the Conference resolutions did mention it as a possibility.⁶⁸

4. Population and development reframed at Bucharest

The UN's Intergovernmental Conference on Population held in Bucharest in 1974 sharply brought global conflicts over population to the fore. The Conference was attended by 136 national delegations, and fifty-nine of these countries had family planning programmes in place. It set out to discuss the World Population Plan of Action prepared by the Population Division, ECOSOC, government representatives, and population experts – intended as a coordinated programme for family planning around the world. Thoroughly neo-Malthusian, it centred on the 'demography before development' approach. A coalition of developing nations challenged this perspective and reversed the causal relationship between demography and socio-economic development. Presenting amendment after amendment, the G-77 contended that overpopulation was the consequence rather than cause of underdevelopment, and that 'development is the best contraceptive'. They called for much further-reaching support for socio-economic development in line with NIOE.⁶⁹ While the US, UK and West Germany continued to stress the dissemination of birth control in the Global South as a precondition for economic growth, the G-77 denounced human rights abuses in some international family planning interventions. However, despite their vocal critiques of population control, many government in the Global South pursued family planning programme after 1974, in some cases strengthening their commitment to these.⁷⁰

The Bucharest Plan of Action reflected the primacy of socio-economic development over population control in concepts of 'third world development', and committed the UN and the Global North to investment in rural economies, social welfare, and health infrastructure. It stated that socio-economic development would create the conditions for the 'modernisation' of family life and reproductive practices – i.e. the move to a small-family model and the broad adoption of birth control.⁷¹ Unexpected support for the latter set of views came from part of the transnational family planning movement: to the shock of many, John D. Rockefeller III of the Population Council acknowledged in his address to the NGO Forum that a conceptual shift was required which envisaged a 'two-way relationship' between demographic change and socio-economic development, and that the aims and methods of fertility control through family planning programmes ought to be fundamentally rethought.⁷²

Not only fertility became central to the grand narratives of socio-economic development, so did women's rights. Women's role in 'third world' development received ample attention at the Bucharest discussions, specifically in relation to literacy, rights in marriage, and discrimination in work. Influenced by the Women in Development framework, the Conference called on governments to enhance women's participation in social life and political decision-making.⁷³ In advance of the Conference, Sipilä tirelessly mobilised women in governments and NGO delegations, asking them to put women's rights on the agenda at every opportunity.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, women's rights remained elusive when it came to reproductive choice: far from proposing a definition of reproductive rights as based on individual self-determination, the Bucharest Plan of Action brought to the fore the competing claims by state and non-state actors to intervene in individuals' reproductive decisions, and the competing visions among Global North and Global South nations. The Plan of Action balanced the principle that 'it is the right and duty of every state, by virtue of national sovereignty, to formulate and implement policies likely to promote the well-being of the family', with the role played by 'the international community' which could 'by the formulation of certain general principles help each state to find efficient optimum solutions' to demographic problems. To be sure, human rights principles were invoked: 'if [incentives towards larger or smaller families] are adopted or modified [by governments], it is essential that they should not violate human rights'. The Plan of Action reiterated the Tehran affirmation that 'all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children', and specified, echoing the Sipilä Report, that they should 'have the information, education and means to do so'. The Commission's impact was clear also in the statement, albeit non-binding, that the '[e]qual status of men and women in the family and in society improves the overall quality of life', and that the '[i]mprovement of the status of women in the family and in society can contribute, where desired, to smaller family size, and the opportunity for women to plan births also improves their individual status'.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, key international women's organisations, including ICW, were disappointed by this limited commitment to women's rights in family planning. As Anne Price noted in the ICW Bulletin: 'Between national sovereignty in setting demographic targets and international family planning interventions, it is unclear how women's rights are protected.'⁷⁶ WIDF welcomed the Plan of Action in its recognition of the right of nations to independently set their population policies. It continued to argue that the statistical and economic data from developing countries did not suggest that economic progress suffered from growing populations – 'on the contrary', it claimed. While it stressed its adherence to the Commission's definition of family planning, integrated with 'measures to improve the status of women', there were traces of its earlier pro-natalism, as it commented that in setting population targets for developing countries, surely 'natural morality' would be to 'increase the number of hands'. However, in its enthusiasm for national sovereignty in population policies, WIDF failed to unambiguously advocate for individual reproductive agency. Its principled adherence to women's rights was mitigated: it affirmed their right to decide number and spacing of children, although 'in the context of social interest'.⁷⁷

Bucharest marked a genuine shift in the perspectives of the transnational family planning movement: Rockefeller's break with the past, which provoked many personnel changes around the Population Council, resulted from a sense that existing programmes had failed to produce the necessary fertility decline.⁷⁸ He was influenced by women such as Adrienne Germain at the Ford Foundation, who foregrounded women's rights in family planning and saw the latter as a cultural transformation involving entire communities and led by women.⁷⁹ Similarly, IPPF strengthened its focus on education: in its 'New Educational Policy' of 1976, education was understood as a 'learning process through which people can extend their understanding of population-related issues in a broader perspective, and regard family planning practice as contributing to a better family life as well as social and community life'.⁸⁰ 'Family education' involved not only information on birth control, rights, and sex, but also an awareness that couples ought to envisage their procreative choices part of 'the wider perspective of social and economic

development'. It was a discourse that continued to subordinate individual autonomy in reproduction to perceptions of societal, economic or demographic needs. Adopted also by ICW,⁸¹ it was akin to WIDF's position on 'social interest'.

5. The Mexico City conference and its impact

Amidst the complex global discussions around family planning, feminist positions varied. If the 1970s saw feminist claims for women's reproductive autonomy taking shape around the globe, the distinct perspectives reveal how women's battles against male control intersected with race, social class, and geography. This diversity illustrates the 'politics of location', or the heavy weight of local social context and political history in shaping feminist agendas. The denunciation of aggressive family planning interventions by women's organisations in the Global South and the lingering pro-natalism in the WIDF contrasted with the centrality of access to contraception and abortion to a new generation of feminists in the West. From around 1968, a new wave of militant feminism swept Western nations: sharply critiquing what they saw as the conservative agenda of established women's councils (including ICW), women's liberation groups claimed to articulate a fundamentally new politics. Central to it was the politicisation of the private sphere, as well as a radical utopianism that envisaged women's full liberation from patriarchal control rather than formal equality with men. Broadly speaking, and beyond local differences, the principle of full bodily self-determination was crucial to the Western feminist agenda of the long 1970s, and in practice much of the activism was centred on access to contraception and safe abortion (often in collaboration with local family planning groups), the transformation of sexual cultures, and the battle against sexual violence. The focus on abortion in women's liberation movements in the Western world can be seen not only as a reaction against the repressive legal frameworks in place up to the 1960s–70s, but also as a fundamental rejection of the pro-natalism and the cult of motherhood that had characterised Western societies in the early post-war years.⁸²

At the first UN Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975, family planning emerged as a divisive issue among women campaigners. The Mexico City Conference, as demonstrated by Jocelyn Olcott, formed the object of much diplomatic friction between and instrumentalisation by governments.⁸³ It provided Mexico with an unprecedented opportunity for soft diplomacy, while allowing other governments in the Global South to evidence both their influence and their progressive credentials. To the US government, the Conference became a way to break the 'spectacular exhibition of non-aligned solidarity', as put by one official.⁸⁴ Despite being the initiators behind International Women's Year, most communist states did not welcome the idea of a women's conference, and WIDF played a relatively minor role in the preparations.

Religiously opposed to birth control, a number of Latin American governments successfully lobbied for family planning to be taken off the Conference agenda. Nonetheless, the theme was discussed at various points, thanks to insistence by the Commission, and to the presence of the Ford Foundation (which financed the NGO Tribune), the Population Council, and IPPF.⁸⁵ The most extensive discussion occurred at a 'Development Seminar' attended by family planning organisations, women's international NGOs, and national women's councils mostly from the Global South. It was clear that the global divisions that had characterised Bucharest remained unresolved: while the Ford Foundation continued to argue that a 'vicious circle' of large families leads to poverty, many African and Asian government delegates called for a recognition of the diversity of family forms.⁸⁶ Such discussions sat close to debates on how to implement the Women in Development framework. As Latin American NGOs critically remarked, the latter's popularisation placed women at risk of being instrumentalised – that is to say, their labour and skills placed at the service of the community and wider modernisation processes with their own rights falling by the wayside. They referred to the relative lack of attention to subsistence labour

(women's unwaged domestic work) in the Conference discussions, but also to the discourse of 'responsibilisation' in birth control failing to enhance women's autonomy.⁸⁷

Differing understandings of women's rights and women's reproductive autonomy were revealed also at the NGO Tribune, an exercise in grassroots democracy with close to 5000 attendees and where all registered NGOs were allowed to speak freely. Here, speaker after speaker from the Global South, specifically Central and South America, denounced neo-colonialism and its effects on women, hereby drawing on dependency theory and referring to the devastating effects of structural adjustment programmes. Numerous clashes occurred, primarily between US feminists such as Betty Friedan of the National Coalition of Women (NOW), and NGOs from Latin America, with leading figures such as Mexican journalist and activist Esperanza Brito de Marti and Bolivian labour and feminist organiser Domitila Barrios de Chungara. They accused NOW of claiming to speak for women universally from a US, white perspective that failed to understand that for many women around the world the denial of motherhood was as much a human rights violation as forced motherhood. They demanded that the Tribune propose amendments to the World Plan of Action that would embed women's emancipation into the fight for global social justice. To them, this should involve an understanding of reproductive choice as embedded in socio-economic context and in the long histories of violations of reproductive bodies in the context of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.⁸⁸

Friedan and her supporters were suspicious of any agenda not exclusively focused on access to contraception and abortion – failing hereby, as noted by many speakers, to acknowledge the geographic situated-ness of this position. After Bucharest, Friedan had labelled any critique of family planning programmes as 'a curious alliance of the Vatican, the Communists and the Third World nations' aimed at restricting women's right to control their bodies.⁸⁹ Yet despite the disagreements, abortion emerged as an area of convergence between NOW and the Latin American Causus: both called for women's self-determination in abortion, an issue that continued to be met with a degree of unease at the Conference. Another important connection was established in the fact that the US National Committee of Negro Women held a closed meeting with NGOs from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, benefiting from USAID funding.⁹⁰ According to Eager, it was at this encounter that Black US feminist groups coined the notion of 'reproductive rights', as a framework including but going beyond access to birth control and abortion, and based on unalienable bodily autonomy. It encompassed the right to use contraception, have an abortion or be sterilised, as well as the right to be safe from such interventions being enforced.⁹¹ This notion of reproductive rights influenced subsequent UN debates, but it also sat in a more militant lineage of women-of-colour feminism in the US, resonating with Angela Davis's 1981 essay 'Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive rights'.⁹² Later it fed into the definition of reproductive justice by the SisterSong Collective in 1997 as 'the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities'.⁹³

The Mexico City Plan of Action, adopted at the Plenary following over 800 amendments, included a number of resolutions on family planning, despite opposition by many Latin American governments.⁹⁴ Building on Bucharest, the UN took ownership of family planning as the programmatic and discursive framework for a new set of obligations and norms to which member-states could be held to account. This was so despite the Plan of Action featuring a key concession to religiously motivated objections, in the statement that the means of contraception ought to be 'compatible with cultural values' of the society in question. The UN now situated family planning foremost in relation to women's rights, health, and socio-economic development, clarifying that states' demographic strategies ought to be but one factor in the articulation of a family planning strategy. A crucial innovation was that the Plan of Action replaced the language of 'parents' and 'couples' (which had characterised earlier UN discourse) with that of 'women', abandoning assumptions of spouse harmony. It was stated explicitly that women had the same rights in the spacing of children as their husbands. The terms of debate revealed the

dissemination of Sipilä's concepts and her focus on women as agents: the Resolutions adopted Sipilä's findings that women themselves in large parts of the world demanded access to family planning services, and that in the latter's absence the social and health costs for women were high.⁹⁵ Concretely, the Conference called on states to roll out family planning services integrated with healthcare and family welfare programmes, and to eliminate legal and other barriers preventing people from gaining access to such services. It proposed that all agencies with a stake in family planning – UNFPA, the UN Development Programme, the UN Fund for International Women's Year, and the Commission – henceforth coordinate their agendas. Finally, the Conference supported a proposal to significantly expand the Commission's remit and budget, despite the fact that the latter had not played a key role in its organisation.⁹⁶

In the longer-term history of the gradual articulation of reproductive rights principles, the significance of the first UN Conference on Women lies primarily in the connections that were established between women's organisations around the world. As argued by Leila Rupp, the UN Conferences on Women held in Mexico City, Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985), and the International Decade of Women, facilitated the emergence of transnational women's rights networks and their growing influence at the UN.⁹⁷ A key illustration is the role played in Mexico City by the National Committee of Negro Women, and its contribution to the creation of the US Reproductive Rights Network in 1979. Mobilised by various international campaigns against the harmful contraceptive Depo-Provera, the Reproductive Rights Network established links with European networks such as the Rome-based women's health campaign ISIS, created in 1976 by activists engaged in underground abortion work. By 1984 the latter had grown into a network across Europe and Latin America and gained consultative status with ECOSOC. ISIS had at the time of the Bucharest Conference critiqued both Western family planning interventions motivated by population control and the claims by African and Asian governments to speak on behalf of ordinary women and men in their countries – and it had denounced the general silence on abortion.⁹⁸ The UN Conferences allowed it to connect to Black US feminism and women's organisations in the Global South and undergo their influence.

Another key grassroots organisation that was transformed during the UN Decade of Women into an influential, human-rights based women's international NGO, was the International Campaign for Abortion, Contraception and Sterilization (ICASC), created in London in 1978 and initially involving feminists from across North-Western Europe.⁹⁹ It convened an international conference in Amsterdam in 1984, entitled 'Divided in Culture, United in Struggle'. Bringing together nearly 500 women from 65 different countries (including representatives from WIDF, PAWO, and ISIS), the meeting aimed to articulate a global feminist strategy for reproductive rights in advance of the UN Nairobi Conference. Yet a sharp confrontation occurred, echoing the Mexico City Tribune: adopting slogans such as 'women's control, not population control', women from developing countries challenged the Global North representatives, calling for a more contextualised notion of reproductive rights, cognisant of the legacies of racialised practices of forced abortion and sterilisation during colonialism. At the same time, the principle of women's full bodily autonomy was shared and unambiguous: the Conference called for free contraception and sexual education around the globe and regardless of cultural context, as well as a woman's undeniable right to choose on abortion. It also stressed that the right to parent was as valid as the right not to be a parent and denounced population control policies.¹⁰⁰ Following the meeting, the organisation was re-founded as the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights with seat in Amsterdam. It gained consultative status with ECOSOC in 1992.¹⁰¹

In conclusion, the 1960s–70s emerge as a key moment in the gradual articulation of reproductive rights norms at the UN. Discussions of family planning were pivotal as the discursive terrain on which wider debates on fertility, global population, and 'third world development' and women's roles in it were fought. The Commission on the Status of Women was a key actor as in the late 1960s it defined family planning in relation to a broadened definition of human rights, and repositioned it as a women's rights issue. This paradigmatic shift resulted from distinct

perspectives on women's rights struggles among Western-based, communist-aligned and Global South-based women's organisations at the Commission. Out of the different standpoints of women activists around the world, a principled notion of women's bodily autonomy in procreation emerged at the Commission. It included the right not to be a mother, so important for Western women pushing back against the post-war pro-natalist drive, as well as the right to choose motherhood against coercive family planning programmes and the legacies of the racialised anti-natalism of the colonial period. While subsequent UN conferences, specifically Bucharest and Mexico City, amply illustrated the enduring global conflicts over 'population management' and 'third world development', family planning was now reframed in relation to human rights principles. It was centred on the responsabilisation of women in multiple social roles and potentially enhanced their reproductive autonomy. At the same time, reproductive rights at the UN continued to be discussed in relation to population management, and this against the demands of an increasingly active network of reproductive rights NGOs spanning the globe.

Notes

1. https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf (last accessed 20 May 2021).
2. Charlotte Bunch, Susana Fried, 'Beijing '95: Moving Women's Human Rights from Margin to Center', *Signs*, 20:1 (1996), 220–213.
3. A similar definition in: Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, 'From population control to reproductive rights: feminist fault lines', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 3:6 (1995), 152–161.
4. D. Stienstra, 'Shifting the Focus on Women in the United Nations, 1970–90' in D. Stienstra (ed) *Women's Movements and International Organizations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 118–135.
5. Matthew Connelly, 'Population Control Is History: New Perspectives on the International Campaign to Limit Population Growth', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45:1 (2003), 122–147 at 133; Paige W. Eager, 'From Population Control to Reproductive rights: Understanding Normative Change in Global Population Policy (1965–1994)', *Global Society*, 18:2 (2004), 145–173; Dennis Hodgson, Susan Watkins, 'Feminists and neo-Malthusians: Past and present alliances', *Population and Development Review*, 23:3 (1997), 469–523.
6. I rely on the discussion of the politics of location in global feminism and distinct struggles against local, 'particular' patriarchies: Adrienne Rich, 'Notes towards a politics of location', in Adrienne Rich, *Blood, bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (Boston MA: Little Brown & Co, 1984), 210–231.
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8. Marc Frey, 'Neo-Malthusianism and development: Shifting interpretations of a contested paradigm', *Journal of Global History*, 6:1 (2011), 75–97 at 90. See also Mathieu Caulier, 'The Population Revolution: From Population Policies to Reproductive Health and Women's Rights Politics', *International Review of Sociology*, XX:2 (2010), 321–346; Mathieu Caulier, 'L'antiféminisme des « populationnistes »', *Recherches féministes*, 25:1, 2012, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rf/2012-v25-n1-rf0153/1011117ar.pdf> (last accessed 19 May 2021).
9. Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 155–165.
10. Frey, 'Neo-Malthusianism and development'.
11. Klancher Merchant, *Building the Population Bomb*, 40–92; Simon Szreter, 'The Idea of Demographic Transition and the Study of Fertility Change: A Critical Intellectual History', *Population and Development Review*, 19:4 (1993), 659–701; R. Jolly, L. Emmerij, D. Ghai, F. Lapere, *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 93.
12. Amy L. Sayward, *The United Nations in International History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 83–120. Two distinct, critical perspectives on UN development discourse: Marc Mazover, *The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Aram Ziai, *Development discourse and global history: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
13. Steven L. B. Jensen, *The Making of international Human Rights: The 1960s, decolonization, and the reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). See also: Roger Normand, Sarah Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge:

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