

only realistic way to persuade whites to care for Black children, and an expectation that white Americans will not endorse programs that would improve the welfare of Black children living within their own families and communities. White compassion for Black children depends on Black children “belonging” to them, to use Bartholet’s term. This, it seems to me, is a particularly selfish and—given the history of slavery in the United States—an especially toxic and ahistorical way to approach child welfare. It perpetuates, rather than challenges, America’s racial hierarchy.

Feminism’s political critique of private problems, its commitment to improving the lives of the most disadvantaged women, and its method of listening to their voices should yield a radically different response. Feminists should reject the emphasis on adoption to cure the ills of foster care and insist on fundamental change in our approach to child welfare. The racial disparities in the foster care population should prompt us to reconsider the state’s current response to child maltreatment. The price of present policies which rely on child removal and adoption, rather than family support, falls unjustly on Black families. A policy that matches an individual child’s need for a home and an individual woman’s desire to be a mother, while ignoring the societal inequities and injustices that brought them together, is decidedly unfeminist. All feminists should acknowledge that the racial disparities in adoption are powerful reasons to radically transform the child welfare system, so that it generously and noncoercively supports families.

5

The Color of Choice

White Supremacy and Reproductive Justice

Loretta J. Ross¹

[T]he regulation of reproduction and the exploitation of women’s bodies and labor is both a tool and a result of systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age and immigration status.²

It is impossible to understand the resistance of women of color to the reproductive politics of both the Right and the Left without first comprehending how the system of white supremacy constructs different destinies for each ethnic population of the United States through targeted, yet diffuse, policies of population control. Even a cursory examination of the reproductive politics dominating today’s headlines—such as debates on abortion and welfare—reveals that some women are encouraged to have more children while others are discouraged. Why are some women glorified as mothers while others have their motherhood rights contested? Why are there obstacles for women who seek abortions while our society neglects mothers and children already here? As we move toward “designer babies” made possible by advances in assisted reproductive technologies, does anyone truly believe that all women will have an equal right to benefit from these “new reproductive choices,” that children of all races will be promoted, or that vulnerable women will not be exploited?

Women of color reproductive justice activists oppose all political rationales, social theories, and genetic justifications for reproductive oppression against communities of color, whether through blatant policies of sterilization abuse or through the coercive use of dangerous contraceptives. Instead, women of color activists demand “reproductive justice,” which requires the protection of women’s human rights to achieve the physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic and social well-being of women and girls.³ Reproductive justice goes far beyond the demand to eliminate racial disparities in reproductive health services, and beyond the right-to-privacy-based claims to legal abortion made by the pro-choice movement and dictated and limited by the US Supreme Court. A reproductive justice analysis addresses the fact that progressive issues are divided, isolating advocacy for abortion from other social justice issues relevant to the lives of every woman. In the words of SisterSong president Toni Bond, “We have to reconnect women’s health and bodies with the rest of their lives.”⁴ In short, reproductive justice can be described as reproductive rights embedded in a human rights and social justice framework used to counter all forms of population control that deny women’s human rights.

White Supremacy and Population Control on the Right, and Left

Population control is necessary to maintain the normal operation of US commercial interests around the world. Without our trying to help these countries with their economic and social development, the world would rebel against the strong US commercial presence.⁵

Although the United States does not currently have an explicit population control policy, population control ideologies march from the margins to the mainstream of reproductive politics and inform policies promoted by the Right and the Left. Fears of being numerically and politically overwhelmed by people of color bleed meaning from any alternative interpretations of the constellation of population control policies that restrict immigration by people of color, encourage sterilization and contraceptive abuse of people of color, and incarcerate upwards of 2 million people, the vast majority of whom are people of color.

The expanded definition of white supremacy as I use it in this essay is an interlocking system of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, ultranationalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and religious fundamentalism that creates a complex matrix of oppressions faced by people of color in the United States. As a tenacious ideology in practice, it is evidenced on both the Right and the Left—in the Far Right, the Religious Right, paleoconservatives, neoconservatives, neoliberals, and liberals. Abby Ferber, a researcher on the intersection of race, gender, and white supremacy, writes that “defining white supremacy as extremist in its racism often has the result of absolving the mainstream population of its racism, portraying white supremacists as the racist fringe in contrast to some non-racist majority.”⁶

White supremacy not only defines the character of debates on reproductive politics but it also explains and predicts the borders of the debate. In other words, what Americans think as a society about women of color and population control is determined and informed by their relationship to white supremacy as an ideology, and these beliefs affect the country’s reproductive politics. Both conservatives and liberals enforce a reproductive hierarchy of privatization and punishment that targets the fertility, motherhood, and liberty of women of color.

Population control policies are externally imposed by governments, corporations, or private agencies to control—by increasing or limiting—population growth and behavior, usually by controlling women’s reproduction and fertility. All national population policies, even those developed for purportedly benign reasons, put women’s empowerment at risk. Forms of population control include immigration restrictions, selective population movement or dispersal, incarceration, and various forms of discrimination, as well as more blatant manifestations, such as cases in which pregnant illegal immigrants and incarcerated women are forced to have abortions. According to a 1996 study by Human Rights Watch, abuses of incarcerated women not only include denial of adequate health care, but pressure to seek an abortion, particularly if the woman is impregnated by a prison guard.⁷

Meanwhile, impediments are placed in the way of women who voluntarily

choose to terminate their pregnancies. The only logic that explains this apparent moral inconsistency is one that examines precisely who is subjected to which treatment and who is affected by which reproductive policy at which time in history. Women of color have little trouble distinguishing between those who are encouraged to have more children and those who are not, and understanding which social, political, and economic forces influence these determinations.

Population control policies are by no means exclusively a twentieth-century phenomenon. During the Roman Empire, the state was concerned with a falling birthrate among married upper-class couples. As has been the case for elite classes throughout history, procreation was seen as a duty to society. Emperor Augustus consequently enacted laws containing positive and negative incentives to reproduction, promoting at least three children per couple and discouraging childlessness.⁸ Augustus probably knew that the falling birthrate was not a result of abstention among Roman men and women, but rather of contraceptive and abortifacient use by Roman women to control their fertility. Through legislation, he asserted the state’s interest in compelling citizens to have more children for the good of society.⁹ Because no ancient Roman texts offer the perspectives of women on this issue, it is difficult to ascertain what women thought of this territorial assertion of male privilege over their private lives. However, the Roman birthrate continued to decline despite the emperor’s orders, suggesting that Roman women probably did what most women have done throughout the ages: make the decisions that make sense for them and refuse to allow men to control their fertility. As historian Rickie Solinger points out, “The history of reproductive politics will always be in part a record of women controlling their reproductive capacity, no matter what the law says, and by those acts reshaping the law.”¹⁰

Despite the Roman failure to impose the state’s will on individual human reproductive behavior, many governments today have refused to recognize the virtual impossibility of regulating human reproductive behavior through national population policies. China and Romania have instituted population control measures with catastrophic results. Even governments seeking to achieve their population objectives through more benign policies, such as offering financial incentives for women to have children, can only report negligible results. Despite government and moralistic pronouncements, women perceive their reproductive decisions as private, like their periods and other health concerns. Even when the law, the church, or their partners oppose their decisions, they tend to make the decision about whether or not to use birth control or abortion, or to parent, for themselves.

This lived reality has not stopped lawmakers from trying to assert control over women’s reproduction. Who gets targeted for positive, pronatalist policies encouraging childbirth versus negative, antinatalist policies that discourage childbirth is determined by powerful elites, informed by prejudices based on race, class, sexual identity, and immigration status. Policies that restrict abortion access, distort sex and sexuality education, impose parental notification requirements for minors, allow husbands to veto options for abortion, and limit use of emergency and regular contraception all conspire to limit access to fertility control to white women, especially young white women. Meanwhile, women of color face intimidating

obstacles to making reproductive choices, including forced contraception, sterilization abuse, and, in the case of poor women and women of color on social assistance, welfare family caps. These population control policies have both domestic and international dimensions, which are rarely linked in the minds of those who believe that the struggle is principally about abortion.

Internationally, the fertility rate of women of color is the primary preoccupation of those determined to impose population controls on developing countries. According to the United Nations, in 2000, more than one hundred countries worldwide had large "youth bulges"—people aged fifteen to twenty-nine accounted for more than 40% of all adults. All of these extremely youthful countries are in the developing world, where fertility rates are highest, and most are in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Many of the young people who make up these "youth bulges" face dismal prospects because of deliberate underdevelopment. Over the past decade, youth unemployment rates have risen to more than double the overall global unemployment rate. In the absence of a secure livelihood, many experts believe that discontented youth may resort to violence or turn to insurgent organizations as sources of social mobility and self-esteem. Recent studies show that countries with large youth bulges were roughly two and a half times more likely to experience an outbreak of civil conflict than countries below this benchmark.¹¹

To respond to these alarming trends, many on the Right and the Left want to restrict the growth of developing world populations, and in this context, "family planning" becomes a tool to fight terrorism and civil unrest. Some on the Left want to increase access to family planning, economic development, and education as a way to curb population growth, even if achieved through the coercive use of contraceptives and sterilization. Some on the Right prefer military interventions and economic domination to achieve population control.

The Bush administration's family planning and HIV/AIDS policies are also having the impact of serving as tools of population control in the Global South. The US government's "ABC program" (A is for abstinence, B is for being faithful, and C for condom use) is purportedly designed to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. Critics of the policy point out that the ABC approach offers no option for girls or women coerced into sex, for married women who are trying to get pregnant yet have unfaithful husbands, or for victims of rape and incest who have no control over when and under what conditions they will be forced to engage in sexual activity. As a result, instead of decreasing the spread of HIV/AIDS, some suspect the ABC policy of actually increasing the ravages of the disease. In combination with the US government's failure to provide funding for and access to vital medications for individuals infected with HIV, the effects are deadly.

Meanwhile, right-wing policies that appear to be pronatalist—such as the Global Gag Rule which prohibits clinics in developing countries that receive USAID funds from discussing abortion—are, in fact, achieving the opposite result. Catering to its radical antiabortion base, the Bush administration has withdrawn funds from programs for family planning for women around the world, withholding \$136 million in funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) since 2002. This money could have prevented at least 1.5 million induced abortions, 9,400 maternal deaths, and 154,000 infant and child deaths.¹² In Septem-

ber 2005, the US State Department announced that it was denying funding to UNFPA for the fourth year.

One might ask why staunch conservatives are opposed to family planning in developing countries when family planning so clearly limits population growth and reduces the need for abortions. One of the leading causes of death for women in developing countries is maternal mortality—death from childbirth. The UN estimated a worldwide total of 529,000 maternal deaths in the year 2000, with less than 1% of deaths occurring in developed nations.¹³ Women of color cannot help but observe that family planning is not nearly as efficient in reducing populations of color as factors such as maternal mortality, infant mortality, and AIDS. We are also not oblivious to the wealth of natural resources like oil, gold, and diamonds in the lands where these populations are shrinking—after all, a depopulated land cannot protect itself.

Overt and covert population control policies are also at play on the domestic front. In October 2005, former secretary of education William Bennett declared on his radio talk show that if "you wanted to reduce crime...if that were your sole purpose, you could abort every Black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down." While Bennett conceded that aborting all African American babies "would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do," he still maintained that "the crime rate would go down."

Bennett is merely echoing widespread perceptions by many radical and moderate conservatives in the United States who directly link social ills with the fertility of women of color. The Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank influential in the national debates on reproductive politics, offers the following analysis: "Far more important than residual material hardship is behavioral poverty: a breakdown in the values and conduct that lead to the formation of healthy families, stable personalities, and self-sufficiency. This includes eroded work ethic and dependency, lack of educational aspiration and achievement, inability or unwillingness to control one's children, increased single parenthood and illegitimacy [emphasis added], criminal activity, and drug and alcohol abuse."¹⁴

"This mainstream white supremacist worldview is based on the notion that people are poor because of behaviors, not because they are born into poverty. In reality, according to Zillah Eisenstein, "poverty is tied to family structures in crisis. Poverty is tied to the unavailability of contraceptives and reproductive rights. Poverty is tied to teenage pregnancy. Poverty is tied to women's wages that are always statistically lower than men's. Poverty is tied to the lack of day care for women who must work. Poverty is tied to insufficient health care for women. Poverty is tied to the lack of access to job training and education."¹⁵

It would be logical to assume that people who claim to value all human life from the moment of conception would fiercely support programs that help disadvantaged children and parents. Sadly, this is not the case. Surveys show that, on average, people who are strongly opposed to abortion are also more likely to define themselves as political conservatives who do not support domestic programs for poor families, single mothers, people of color, and immigrants.¹⁶ They are also opposed to overseas development assistance in general, and to specific programs for improving women's and children's health, reducing domestic violence,

helping women become more economically self-sufficient, and lowering infant mortality.¹⁷

Perspectives from the Left are hardly more reassuring to women of color. Is Bennett, a member of the Heritage Foundation, any worse than an environmentalist who claims that the world is overpopulated and drastic measures must be taken to address this catastrophe? Betsy Hartmann writes about the "greening of hate," or blaming environmental degradation, urban sprawl, and diminishing natural resources on poor populations of color. This is a widely accepted set of racist myths promoted by many in the environmental movement, which is moving rather alarmingly to the right as it absorbs ideas and personnel from the white supremacist movement, including organizations such as the Aryan Women's League.¹⁸

The reality is that 20% of the world's population controls 80% of the global wealth. In other words, it is not the population growth of the developing world that is depleting the world's resources, but the overconsumption of these resources by the richest countries in the world. The real fear of many in the population control movement is that the developing world will become true competitors for the earth's resources and demand local control over their natural wealth of oil and minerals. Rather than perceiving overconsumption by Americans, agricultural mismanagement, and the military-industrial complex as the main sources of environmental degradation, many US environmentalists maintain that the fertility of poor women is the root of environmental evil, and cast women of color, immigrant women, and women of the Global South as the perpetrators, rather than the victims, of environmental degradation.¹⁹ This myth promotes alarmist fears about overpopulation, and leads to genocidal conclusions such as those reached by writers for *Earth First! Journal* who said, "The AIDS virus may be Gaia's tailor-made answer to human overpopulation," and that famine should take its natural course to stem overpopulation.²⁰

Population control groups on the Left will often claim that they are concerned with eliminating gender and economic inequalities, racism, and colonialism, but since these organizations address these issues through a problematic paradigm, inevitably their efforts are directed toward reducing population growth of all peoples in theory and of people of color in reality.²¹ In fact, these efforts are embedded within the context of a dominant neoliberal agenda which trumps women's health and empowerment. And some prochoice feminists have supported the neoliberal projects of "privatization, commodification, and deregulation of public health services that...have led to diminished access and increasing mortality and morbidity of women who constitute the most vulnerable groups in both developing and developed countries."²²

Similarly, the prochoice movement, largely directed by middle-class white women, is oblivious to the role of white supremacy in restricting reproductive options for all women, and, as a result, often inadvertently colludes with it. For instance, a study published in 2001 in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* by John J. Donohue III, a professor of law at Stanford University, and Steven D. Levitt, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, claimed that the 1973 legalization of abortion prevented the birth of unwanted children who were likely to

have become criminals. Of course, the authors state that these children would have been born to poor women of color. They also disingenuously and incorrectly assert that "women who have abortions are those most at risk to give birth to children who would engage in criminal activity,"²³ and conclude that the drop in crime rates approximately eighteen years after the *Roe v. Wade* decision was a consequence of legal abortion. Despite the quickly revealed flaws in their research, some prochoice advocates continue to tout their findings as justification for keeping abortion legal, adopting a position similar to Mr. Bennett's.²⁴

Indeed, the prochoice movement's failure to understand the intersection between race, class, and gender led leaders of the movement to try their own "Southern Strategy" in the 1980s. Central to this strategy was an appeal to conservative voters who did not share concerns about women's rights, but who were hostile to the federal government and its public encroachment on individual choice and privacy. Some voters with conservative sympathies were pruned from the antiabortion movement for a while, uneasily joining the ranks of the prochoice movement in an admittedly unstable alliance based on "states' rights" segregationist tendencies.²⁵ Not surprisingly, on questions of abortion policy—whether the government should spend tax money on abortions for poor women or whether teenagers should have to obtain parental consent for abortions—the alliance fell apart. And this appeal to conservative, libertarian Southern voters drove an even deeper wedge in the prochoice movement, divorcing it from its original base of progressive white women and alienating women of color.

Meanwhile, the Right pursued its population control policies targeting communities of color both overtly and indirectly. Family planning initiatives in the Deep South in the 1950s encouraged women of color (predominantly African American women) to use contraceptives and sterilizations to reduce the growth of our populations, while obstacles were simultaneously placed in the paths of white women seeking access to these same services. A Louisiana judge, Leander Perez, was quoted as saying, "The best way to hate a nigger is to hate him before he is born."²⁶ This astonishingly frank outburst represented the sentiments of many racists during this period, although the more temperate ones disavowed gutter epithets.

For example, conservative politicians like Strom Thurmond supported family planning in the 1960s when it was used as a racialized form of population control, aimed at limiting Black voter strength in African American communities.²⁷ When it was presented as a race-directed strategy to reduce their Black populations, North Carolina and South Carolina became the first states to include family planning in their state budgets in the 1950s. One center in Louisiana reported that in its first year of operation, 96% of its clients were Black. The proportion of white clients never rose above 15%.²⁸ Generally speaking, family planning associated with women of color was most frequently supported; but support quickly evaporated when it was associated with white women.

Increased federal spending on contraception coincided with the urban unrest and rise of a militant Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s. In 1969, President Nixon asked Congress to establish a five-year plan for providing family planning services to "all those who want them but cannot afford them."²⁹ However, the rationale behind the proposed policy was to prevent population increases among

Blacks—this would make governance of the world in general, and inner cities in particular, difficult. Reflecting concerns strikingly similar to those driving US population policies overseas, Nixon pointed to statistics that showed a “bulge” in the number of Black Americans between the ages of five and nine. This group of youngsters who would soon enter their teens—“an age group with problems that can create social turbulence”—was 25% larger than ten years before.³⁰ This scarcely disguised race- and class-based appeal for population control persuaded many Republicans to support family planning.

Today the US government’s less obvious—but no less effective—approach of promoting policies overseas that contribute to high maternal mortality rates and devastation as a result of HIV/AIDS was also recently revealed to have a counterpart on the domestic front. Images of chaos and death as Hurricane Katrina’s floodwaters engulfed Black neighborhoods shocked many Americans. But according to Jean Hardisty, a researcher on white supremacy in America, these pictures of poor New Orleans residents, many of them Black women and their children, revealed some essential truths:

Much of the white public will never understand that those images were more than the result of neglected enforcement of civil rights laws, or the “failure” of the poor to rise above race and class. They were images of structural racism. In one of the poorest cities in the country (with 28% of New Orleanians living in poverty—over two times the national poverty rate), the poor were white as well as African American. But, the vast majority (84%) of the poor were Black. This is not an accident. It is the result of white supremacy that is so imbedded in US society that it has become part of the social structure. Structural racism is not only a failure to serve people equally across race, culture and ethnic origin within private and government entities (as well as “third sector” institutions, such as the print, radio and TV media and Hollywood). It is also the predictable consequence of legislation at the federal, state, and local level.³¹

This racial illiteracy on the part of white people is part of the hegemonic power of whiteness. Through a historical mythology, white supremacy has a vested interest in denying what is most obvious: the privileged position of whiteness. For most people who are described as white, since race is believed to be “something” that shapes the lives of people of color, they often fail to recognize the ways in which their own lives and our public policies are shaped by race. Structural or institutionalized racism is not merely a matter of individual attitudes, but the result of centuries of subordination and objectification that reinforce population control policies.

Politicians have continuously used policies of population control to conquer this land, produce an enslaved workforce, enshrine racial inequities, and preserve traditional power relations. For just as long, women of color have challenged race-based reproductive politics, including the forced removal of our children; the racialization and destruction of the welfare system; the callousness of the foster

care system that breaks up our families; and the use of the state to criminalize our pregnancies and our children. These become an interlocked set of public policies which Dorothy Roberts calls ‘reproductive punishment.’ She observes that the “system’s racial disparity also reinforces negative stereotypes about...people’s incapacity to govern themselves and need for state supervision.”³²

Reproductive politics are about who decides “whether, when, and which woman can reproduce legitimately and *also* the struggles over which women have the right to be mothers of the children they bear.”³³ Entire communities can be monitored and regulated by controlling how, when, and how many children a woman can have and keep. This is particularly true for women on Native American reservations, incarcerated women, immigrant women, and poor women across the board, whose reproductive behavior is policed by an adroit series of popular racist myths, fierce state regulation, and eugenicist control. The use of the “choice” framework in the arena of abortion, as Rhonda Copelon points out, underwrites “the conservative idea that the personal is separate from the political, and that the larger social structure has no impact on [or responsibility for] private, individual choice.”³⁴

For the past thirty years, women of color have urged the mainstream movement to seriously and consistently support government funding for abortions for poor women. The 1977 Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of taxpayer funds to pay for abortions for women whose health care is dependent on the federal government, and it affects women on Medicaid, women in the military and the Peace Corps, and indigenous women who primarily rely on the Indian Health Service for their medical care. Yet despite its obvious targeting of poor women of color, prochoice groups have not made repealing the Hyde Amendment a priority because polling data has indicated that the majority of Americans do not want taxpayer money used to pay for abortions.

When the Freedom of Choice Act was proposed by prochoice groups in 1993, it retained the provisions of the Hyde Amendment. According to Andrea Smith, one NARAL Pro-Choice America (formerly known as the National Abortion Rights Action League) petition in favor of the act stated that, “the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) will secure the original vision of *Roe v. Wade*, giving *all* women reproductive freedom and securing that right for future generations [emphasis added].”³⁵ As Smith wryly points out, apparently poor women and indigenous women did not qualify as “women” in the eyes of the writers of this petition.

In a 1973 editorial, the National Council of Negro Women pointed out the link between civil rights activism and reproductive oppression that mitigated the concept of choice for oppressed communities:

The key words are “if she chooses.” Bitter experience has taught the Black woman that the administration of justice in this country is not colorblind. Black women on welfare have been forced to accept sterilization in exchange for a continuation of relief benefits and others have been sterilized without their knowledge or consent. A young pregnant woman recently arrested for civil rights activities in North Carolina was convicted and told that her punishment

would be to have a forced abortion. We must be ever vigilant that what appears on the surface to be a step forward, does not in fact become yet another fetter or method of enslavement.³⁶

Yet currently the hard-core Right has begun to demand the political disenfranchisement of people receiving public assistance. For example, in 2005 a law was proposed in Georgia that would have required voters to have driver's licenses or other forms of state identification to vote; right-wing proponents complained that the bill didn't go far enough, and that the vote should be taken away from welfare recipients.³⁷ And while linking political enfranchisement to population control is blatantly coercive and antidemocratic, it has not been unusual in United States. In 1960, when the city of New Orleans was ordered to desegregate its schools, local officials responded by criminalizing the second pregnancies of women on public assistance; after they were threatened with imprisonment and welfare fraud, many of these African American women and children disappeared from the welfare rolls.³⁸ The Right is often blatant in its determination to restrict the fertility of women of color, and thus control our communities. They endlessly proffer an array of schemes and justifications for intruding on the personal decisions of women of color and for withholding the social supports necessary to make healthy reproductive decisions.

On the other hand, in its singular focus on maintaining the legal right to abortion, the prochoice movement often ignores the intersectional matrix of race, gender, sovereignty, class and immigration status that complicates debates on reproductive politics in the United States for women of color. The movement is *not* the personal property of middle-class white women, but without a frank acknowledgement of white supremacist practices in the past and the present, women of color will not be convinced that mainstream prochoice activists and organizations are committed to empowering women of color to make decisions about our fertility, or to reorienting the movement to include the experiences of *all* women.

Mobilizing for Reproductive Justice

Prior to the 1980s, women of color reproductive health activists organized primarily against sterilization abuse and teen pregnancy, yet many were involved in early activities to legalize abortion because of the disparate impact illegal abortion had in African American, Puerto Rican, and Mexican communities. Most women of color refrained from joining mainstream pro-choice organizations, preferring instead to organize autonomous women of color organizations that were more directly responsive to the needs of their communities. The rapid growth of women of color reproductive health organizations in the 1980s and 1990s helped build the organizational strength (in relative terms) to generate an analysis and a new movement in the twenty-first century.

This was a period of explosive autonomous organizing.³⁹ Women of color searched for a conceptual framework that would convey our twinned values—the right to have and not to have a child—as well as the myriad ways our rights to be mothers and parent our children are constantly threatened. We believed these values and concerns separated us from the liberal pro-choice movement in the United

States, which was preoccupied with privacy rights and maintaining the legality of abortion. We were also skeptical about leaders in the pro-choice movement who seemed more interested in population restrictions than women's empowerment. Some promoted dangerous contraceptives and coercive sterilizations, and were mostly silent about economic inequalities and power imbalances between the developed and the developing worlds. Progressive women of color felt closest to the radical wing of the women's movement that articulated demands for abortion access and shared our class analysis, and even closer to radical feminists who demanded an end to sterilization and contraceptive abuse. Yet we lacked a framework that aligned reproductive rights with social justice in an intersectional way, bridging the multiple domestic and global movements to which we belonged.

We found an answer in the global women's health movement through the voices of women from the Global South. By forming small but significant delegations, women of color from the United States participated in all of the international conferences and significant events of the global feminist movement. A significant milestone was the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo, Egypt. In Cairo, women of color witnessed how women in other countries were successfully using a human rights framework in their advocacy for reproductive health and sexual rights.

Shortly after the Cairo conference, drawing on the perspectives of women of color engaged in both domestic and international activism, women of color in the United States coined the term "reproductive justice." In particular, we made the link between poverty and the denial of women's human rights, and critiqued how shared opposition to fundamentalists and misogynists strengthened a problematic alliance between feminists and the population control establishment.

The first step toward implementing a reproductive justice framework in our work was taken two months after the September Cairo conference. A group of African American women (some of whom became cofounders of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective) spontaneously organized an informal Black Women's Caucus at a national pro-choice conference sponsored in 1994 by the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance in Chicago. We were attempting to "Bring Cairo Home" by adapting agreements from the Cairo program of action to a US-specific context. In the immediate future, we were very concerned that the Clinton administration's health care reform proposals were ominously silent about abortion rights, which appeared to renege on the promises the Administration made at Cairo. Even without a structured organization, we mobilized for a national signature ad in the *Washington Post* to express our concerns, raising twenty-seven thousand dollars and collecting six hundred signatures from African American women to place the ad in the *Post*. After debating and rejecting the choice framework in our deliberations, we called ourselves Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice. We defined reproductive justice, at that time, as "reproductive health integrated into social justice," bespeaking our perception that reproductive health is a social justice issue for women of color because health care reform without a reproductive health component would do more harm than good for women of color. Three years later, using human rights as a unifying framework and reproductive justice as a central organizing concept, the SisterSong Women

of Color Reproductive Health Collective was formed in 1997 by autonomous women of color organizations.

SisterSong maintains that reproductive justice—the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls—will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality, and reproduction for ourselves, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives. For this to become a reality, we need to make change on the individual, community, institutional, and societal levels to end all forms of oppression, including forces that deprive us of self-determination and control over our bodies, and limit our reproductive choices to achieve undivided justice.⁴⁰

An instructive example of how the reproductive justice framework employed by SisterSong has influenced the mainstream movement is the organizing story behind the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., on April 25, 2004. The march, which mobilized 1.15 million participants, was the largest demonstration in US history. Originally organized to protest antiwoman policies (such as the badly named Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act) and to call attention to the delicate pro-choice majority on the Supreme Court, it also exposed fissures in the pro-choice movement that have not been fully analyzed.

Mobilizing for the march uncovered cleavages on the Left. The event's original title, the "March for Freedom of Choice," reflected a traditional focus on a privacy-based abortion rights framework established by the Supreme Court. At the same time, the dominant issue on the American Left was the illegal war against Iraq, not abortion politics. Tens of millions of people had marched around the globe to protest Bush's invasion in February 2003. As the initial organizing for the march progressed in 2003, it became clear that targeted supporters would not turn out in sufficient numbers if the march focused solely on the right to legal abortion and the need to protect the Supreme Court. Abortion isolated from other social justice issues would not work.

Ultimately, in order to broaden the appeal of the march and mobilize the entire spectrum of social justice activists in the United States, organizers sought a strategic framework that could connect various sectors of US social justice movements. They approached SisterSong in the fall of 2003, asking for endorsement of and participation in the march. SisterSong pushed back, expressing problems with the march title and the then all-white decision-makers on the steering committee. SisterSong demanded that women of color organizations be added to the highest decision-making body, and counteroffered with its own "reproductive justice" framework. (The original March organizers were the Feminist Majority Foundation, the National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and NARAL Pro-Choice America. Eventually, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, the Black Women's Health Imperative and the American Civil Liberties Union were added to the march steering committee.) Reproductive justice was a viable way to mobilize broader support for the march. It also had the potential to revitalize an admittedly disheartened pro-choice movement. The central question was: were pro-choice leaders ready and willing to finally respect the leadership and vision of women of color?

Through the leadership of Alice Cohan, the march director, the March for Freedom of Choice was renamed in the fall of 2003, and women of color organizations were added to the steering committee. Using the intersectional, multi-issue approach fundamental to the reproductive justice framework, march organizers reached out to women of color, civil rights organizations, labor, youth, antiwar groups, anti-globalization activists, environmentalists, immigrants' rights organizations, and many, many others.

The success of the march was a testament to the power of reproductive justice as a framework to mobilize and unite diverse sectors of the social justice movement to support women's human rights in the United States and abroad. Just as importantly, it also showed how women of color have to take on the Right and the Left when asserting control over our bodies, our communities, and our destinies.

I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name
 My name is my own my own my own
 and I can't tell you who in the hell set things up like this
 but I can tell you that from now on my resistance
 my simple and daily and nightly self-determination
 may very well cost you your life.

—June Jordan

of gender identity or expression in regards to employment, housing, and public accommodations, including city agencies. Nationally, over 236 employers, including 53 Fortune 500 and 104 private sector companies, have adopted gender identity guidelines within their hiring policies.

We, as trans and gender nonconforming people of color living in New York, are taking the initiative to ensure that our communities reap the full benefits of the CHR guidelines by organizing the *New York City Trans and Gender Nonconforming People of Color Job and Education Fair*. We see this endeavor as part of the dismantling of the oppressive standards of the two-gender system that have disenfranchised our communities, reducing us to second-class status. We strive to change the political climate in this country that has historically forced many Trans and Gender Nonconforming people to have few economic opportunities and/or be dependent on substandard governmental programs for our survival. We demand:

- The right to secure the basic human entitlements of jobs and educational opportunities
- An end to the daily harassment, discrimination, and violence we encounter in the workplace or at schools
- The right to the proper recognition of our identities, pronouns, or the freedom to not use pronouns
- The right to use the restrooms, locker rooms, or living accommodations of our choosing, free from gender profiling and the fear of possible arrest.

Moreover, we are organizing the *New York City Trans and Gender Nonconforming People of Color Job and Education Fair* to spotlight the historical class, racial, sexual, and gender oppression of poor and communities of color for centuries in this country. The recent blatant governmental negligence in the Gulf region during Hurricane Katrina—particularly in New Orleans, Louisiana, a cultural center for African American trans and gender nonconforming people—is a glaring example of how economic disenfranchisement plagues poor people and communities of color in the United States.

As all people living in the United States face record unemployment and underemployment, while the Bush administration continues to spend billions of dollars on the war in Iraq, we as trans and gender nonconforming peoples of color stand in solidarity with all working and poor people who are struggling for the right to a living-wage job, health benefits, and access to affordable education.

“The Personal is the Private is the Cultural” South Asian Women Organizing Against Domestic Violence

Puneet Kaur Chawla Sahota

Women of color have participated in and changed the movement against domestic violence in the United States. South Asian women are an important part of this story. Here, the term “South Asia” refers to countries found within the “Indian subcontinent,” including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. First-generation immigrant women who came to the United States in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s founded the first South Asian women’s organizations (SAWOs), all of which work to end domestic violence in South Asian immigrant communities. Since then, second-generation South Asian women—those who were born in the United States or immigrated before the age of five years—have also founded SAWOs. Today, there are SAWOs in most of the urban areas in the United States where there are significant South Asian immigrant populations, and new organizations continue to emerge. These organizations constitute a new movement, with increasing numbers of South Asian women joining grassroots efforts to improve their communities. As a South Asian woman, I am deeply grateful to the activists who work in SAWOs. We can honor these activists by including their stories as part of the history of women’s movements in the United States.

In this chapter, I first discuss the personal and political factors that influenced first- and second-generation South Asian activists to form anti-domestic violence organizations. Then, I examine some of the strategies these activists have used to work most effectively with their communities on issues around domestic violence. All of the information presented in this chapter is from interviews I conducted with first- and second-generation founders of SAWOs from 2002–2003. I interviewed first-generation activists who founded three SAWOs: Manavi of New Jersey, Sakhi of New York City, and Apna Ghar of Chicago. I also interviewed second generation founders of Raksha of Atlanta and Chaya of Seattle. In addition, I interviewed second-generation activists who have become involved in the SAWOs that were founded by first-generation women.

The activists who participated in interviews have my deepest gratitude. Only a portion of the interviews could be included in this chapter, but I appreciate all who shared their stories with me. Their work is vital to the health of the South Asian community and I thank them for their tireless dedication. This research was funded by the Katherine L. Kriehbaum Scholarship at Northwestern University. Many thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Ji-Yeon Yuh, for her encouragement, wisdom, and thoughtful guidance throughout this work. I am also grateful to students and faculty in the American Studies program at Northwestern University, especially Professor Nicola Beisel, for their insightful comments.

Roots of Activism

In 1965, the Immigration Reform Act opened US borders to immigrants in “preferred” categories of employment, which included science, engineering, and medicine. A large wave of Asian immigrants who had these “preferred” occupations followed. Immigrants from India who came to the United States early in this wave were the first generation to come of age after Indian independence. As a result, the independence movement had a profound influence on them. Several of the women who founded SAWOs in the United States had family members who protested and participated actively in the struggle for India’s independence. Even those without family members in this movement experienced post-Independence optimism and the faith in political activism that accompanied it. In describing “her generation,” Anannya Bhattacharjee, one of the founders of Sakhi in New York, said:

Our parents experienced the independence movement. They may not have been part of it directly, but there is this very visceral sense of colonialism and the importance of Third World power, and India was a very important decolonized country ... You could not grow up without admiring the independence movement in India, without knowing all the icons and where they lived and what they ate. I basically arrived here with the importance of independence of colonialism ingrained in my head.

She also noted that the state she grew up in, Bengal, was especially active in political struggles. Student movements and peasant movements that were underway while she was still a child may not have been comprehensible to her; however, they formed “part of the background noise” that shaped her ideology and motivated her to pursue a life of community organizing and activism.

Shamita Das Dasgupta, one of the founders of Manavi in New Jersey, also came from a family where political engagement was very important. In describing the development of her social consciousness, Shamita said:

In my family we talked about imperialism and colonization since I can remember. We heard stories, read stories of the independence movement. There were women involved, and men involved in the revolutionary parts of it. It wasn’t as if it [her social consciousness] was something that suddenly happened, it was something I was very conscious of. And it wasn’t something that was invisible in my mind, it was very clear. And my school—this was after independence, so everything was possible. The idea was that you were supposed to change the world. Our school encouraged us to go into the *bastis* ... you know, the tenements, the huts, and work with kids there. So you know, we really were very conscious that we had a responsibility to our society and to our environment. This wasn’t something that happened to me because I came here [to the United States]. I came here and got involved [in the women’s movement] *because* those things were already there.

Thus, the development of an activist sensibility did not depend on South Asian immigrants’ exposure to the women’s movement in the United States. The ways in which their activism manifested itself were certainly influenced by their immigration, but they “came with” the initial motivation to effect social change. Shamita explicitly stated that her identification of herself as “a feminist” did not simply begin when she came to the United States. She said:

It’s not just the USA. I was very much influenced by a history of resistance in India, women’s resistance as well as resistance to imperialist forces, peasant movements. So there’s a long history of activism in India. It’s always been a part of my reality. It’s not something new ... I’m in a long line of people that were influenced by what happened.

While India’s hard-won independence gave future immigrants confidence in political action, other movements in India also provided a source of inspiration. Even if they had remained in India, women that shared Anannya and Shamita’s political and family influences might still have worked for social change.

Prem Sharma, one of the founders of Apna Ghar in Chicago, said that her parents’ activism had a significant influence on her own desire to engage in community service activities. Her father was a physician who donated his services for free, and she described her mother as a “reformer.” When I asked Prem where she got her activist energy, she said:

I think it came from my mother. My mother was this activist ... she brought a lot of reforms in the families back home. She was not a degree holder or anything. Actually she only went to school up to second grade. She was a very, very amazing woman, very dynamic. She would just offer her services to anybody, even strangers, and helped them out. She ... brought people home from nowhere, helped them out, cooked dinners for them, found their families. I mean, you name it, she would do it, anything. And I think I saw when I was growing up, that without any expectations of any return or anything, she would just offer ... [a]nd although she herself didn’t go to school she made sure her children and her daughters were all highly educated. She was a reformer ... [s]he had some sort of a power that people would listen to her.

Prem’s mother passed down her passion for activism and community service to her daughter. Prem has founded several community organizations, beginning with the Chicago-area Club of Indian Women in 1977. This group was initially a social one, but the women soon looked for a need that they could fill in the South Asian community. In 1983, Prem founded a crisis hotline for Chicago-area Indians. People who called the number were then connected with Indian professionals who donated their services, such as physicians, lawyers, and counselors. Women in abusive relationships were referred to mainstream battered women’s shelters, but

these shelters were not able to cater to the specific needs of South Asian women. As Prem said, she soon "realized there was a problem because our women had different food habits ... religious, languages, clothing, the whole attitude and culture was different." Five years after the crisis hotline was founded, volunteers analyzed the type of calls and found that domestic violence was second only to requests for divorces. Based on this knowledge,⁴ Prem set out to found a shelter for South Asian women. In her networking efforts, she met Kanta Khipple, who was working as a counselor for Asian Human Services at the time. Together, the two women founded Apna Ghar, which means "our home," along with four other women from around Chicago. Apna Ghar was incorporated in 1989 and is now open to immigrant women of all backgrounds in the Chicagoland area, although the majority of women who come to the shelter are South Asian.

Kanta Khipple came to the United States with an activist mindset, and, like Shamita Das Dasgupta, she soon found ways to engage in activism through participating in United States social movements. Kanta was involved in social justice work in India and continued this type of work after immigrating to the United States. One of her many projects was cofounding Apna Ghar. At the time of India's independence in 1947, she had a successful career in public health. She worked with the World Health Organization and was one of the first professionals to perform family planning education in developing countries. She was also a member of an intellectual cadre of politically liberal scholars. She and her husband, a journalist, would gather for frequent political talks with such noted independence era intellectuals as Khushwant Singh. Soon after immigrating, she jumped into community struggles in Chicago. As a social worker and counselor, she worked with women and people of color, including Hispanic migrant workers, residents of Chicago's public housing in Robert Taylor Homes, and Asian immigrants in Chicago's Uptown area through her affiliation with Asian Human Services. She observed that conditions for women in the Cook County Hospital were atrocious in 1967, and set up demonstrations to protest the hospital's maltreatment of pregnant women. Kanta became a national leader, both in the South Asian community and in the mainstream women's movement because of her tireless activism. In addition, she worked for Planned Parenthood in its infancy and was in charge of the organization's professional training program for international students where she taught other women how to spread awareness of family planning in their communities.

The Civil Rights movement was an important influence on many first-generation activists and also served as an arena for their work. Kanta Khipple named Martin Luther King Jr. as one of the people who had influenced her ideas; conversely, she influenced civil rights leaders' ideas about reproductive rights. She told me the story of her discussions with Jesse Jackson:

Jesse Jackson was a young man when he came to visit me at Planned Parenthood Association ... [h]e came to ask me ... [t]hey thought if we are focusing on the Black population to prevent further babies, their population will go down. They wanted to have an increasing population. We had a long discussion. I told Jesse Jackson I believed

... family planning means plan your family. Plan reproduction, not just one or two. If your means allow you to have three children, you can have three children. If you don't have a child, I would even help sterile couples to have children, to adopt children. So it has to be a balance. Where a movement fails it is because you don't create a balance. I told Jesse Jackson I want whatever colors, white, or Asian children, they should be healthy. Parents should be able to send them to school. Parents should be able to educate them properly and to feed them. And also, to reduce the infant mortality, because if there is one after the other, they will die, some of the children will die. And he was very much impressed ... [h]e would come to talk to me when he used to work in Woodlawn. It's the [civil rights movement] leadership with whom I have worked very closely.

The engagement of South Asian activists in the Civil Rights movement and the mainstream women's movement was similar: the activists influenced these movements, and in turn, were influenced by them. Many first-generation activists attended lectures on their college campuses on feminist struggles, and some participated actively in feminist groups. International attention was focused on the political struggles in the United States during this volatile time. As Shamita Das Dasgupta said,

I came here in 1968. It was the time of the Vietnam War, the feminist movement, and the Civil Rights movement. I knew about some of that while I was in India. I became very interested and especially thought that the way I could engage in the social change that was going on around me was to get involved in the feminist movement.

Shamita returned to school in 1974, where she got involved with campus feminism groups. She participated in consciousness-raising groups. She said, "Because I happened to be at that time one of the very small handful of people of color, women of color who was engaged, I ended up rising through the ranks very quickly." Although Shamita held leadership positions at a national level in the mainstream women's movement, she had an ambivalent relationship with this movement. Shamita said, "I questioned at that time the way the movement was structured and who was involved in it and what issues were being addressed ... I started thinking about women of color and immigrant women and what was our space in there, what was our role." Thus, while the "[mainstream] feminist movement was a big part of our conscious influences," as Shamita said, first-generation South Asian women felt that this movement did not fully address issues faced by South Asian women, or immigrant women more generally.

Radha Hegde, who cofounded Manavi (an antiviolence organization for South Asian women in New Jersey) with Shamita in 1985, eloquently described the disconnect between the immigrant experience and the language used by the mainstream women's movement:

This whole idea in the 1970s, many of us were so moved by the women's movement here, the personal is political and so on. We led this divided existence where you're out listening to the personal is the political, you're listening to Gloria Steinem and reading Germaine Greer and so on. And then you come to the immigrant front where it's the personal is the private is the cultural, it's not the political. So then you're faced ... everything is cultural. Wife-beating is cultural, docility is cultural, everything is cultural. It's the reign of cultural, and nothing is political. The idea to reinstate our immigrant lives and to see the "cultural" through a more organized lens ... to see the political complexity within our lives ... was, I think, very exhilarating.

Radha's story demonstrated the complex interaction between political, personal, and professional factors that motivated many South Asian women to found SAWOs. She immigrated to the United States in her early twenties as a graduate student in journalism. As a South Asian immigrant, she faced prejudice in graduate school, including racial slurs and anxious inquiries as to when she would return to India. Her exposure to women's issues during graduate school, both in and out of the classroom, strongly influenced her decision to concentrate her research on reproductive rights in India. As she said, "This country provided me with a new context" with which to view India. Her scholarly work on women's issues in India and her personal experiences as an immigrant woman in the United States both eventually led to her to cofound Manavi.

Second generation women also felt a dissonance between the discourse of the mainstream women's movement and their experiences as South Asian women. Soniya Munshi, who was the program director at Manavi when I interviewed her, began organizing against domestic violence in the mainstream women's movement in Minnesota as an undergraduate student. She later moved to Manavi because she felt "a lack in the women's movement of immigrant rights' issues." Tanmeet Sethi, a founding member of Chaya, felt similarly about the lack of attention to immigrant issues in the mainstream women's movement:

In just becoming more aware of the women's movement and "feminism" in America in college ... I definitely identified with it because I grew up here, but I also felt very much apart from it because I felt like it really focused on the Western white woman. So for me, I felt it was a necessary and great, empowering movement, but in many ways I felt it was really not about me. It affected me in ways, but in other ways I almost rebelled against it.

South Asian women are not alone in their dissatisfaction with the mainstream women's movement—they are part of a larger movement of women of color creating their own spaces for dialogue.

Although the mainstream women's movement was a key motivating influence for many first- and second-generation activists, there have also been other

political factors that have inspired second-generation women to become involved with SAWOs. South Asians, along with other Asians, have been stereotyped in America as a "model minority"—highly educated, professionally successful, quiet, obedient, politically apathetic, and quickly assimilated into the American mainstream. Personal experience with the model minority myth moved some second-generation women toward activism. As is evident in the stories of these activists, South Asians have been far from politically indifferent! However, South Asian communities in the United States have attempted to adhere to the seemingly positive aspects of the model minority stereotype, particularly by encouraging children to be highly educated and choose "safe" professions. These pressures from within her community motivated Shaila Bheda, a second-generation woman in Atlanta, to become involved with youth outreach activities. At the time I interviewed her, Shaila was the program coordinator for youth activities at Raksha. She said that although her own parents did not pressure her to choose a specific career, many of her peers did feel that their families were pushing them into medicine or engineering. Shaila said that if she is able to help other young South Asians discover their own aptitudes and dreams, as her parents did for her, she will have a fulfilling career:

I talk to a lot of people my age when I'm doing this youth program now, and they say, "Oh my gosh, if I had this when I was a kid!" And that's exactly one of the reasons why I wanted to do something for South Asian youth in particular in the same way I wanted to do this for South Asian women when we first started is because there are specific challenges that South Asian youth face because they are South Asian. Adolescence is difficult for everybody, you know, it's just a hard, ugly time for most kids ... But for South Asian youth, you have the added challenges of a different skin color, language barriers, you have religious differences, potentially, you have a different name, you have, once again, that whole myth of the model minority concept to be living up to, a lot of community pressure. Just a lot of things that a lot of people face, but there's a cultural variable there. I felt it would be important to have programs that specifically dealt with those issues ... that were run by other South Asian people. South Asian people still think there's three professions you can have: physician, engineer, lawyer ... those are great professions, but there are many other options out there as well.

In sum, several important social movements influenced first-generation South Asian immigrants to become activists in their communities, including the Indian independence movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the mainstream women's movement in the United States. For second generation activists, both the mainstream women's movement and frustration with the model minority myth were motivating factors. The stories of these activists help to explain how they became politicized and why they decided to form groups focused on the needs of South Asian women.

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Organizing Against Domestic Violence

While these women had diverse backgrounds and reasons for becoming involved in activism, they all chose to focus on the same cause: domestic violence. They noticed that there was a strong need in their communities for resources to address the specific needs of South Asian women facing violence. Mainstream battered women's shelters were unable to adequately serve the needs of South Asian women. These facilities did not have translation services for women who did not speak English, lacked dietary accommodations for vegetarians, and were not always tolerant of South Asian cultures. Some South Asian women even left mainstream shelters to return to their abusers because of the isolation and discrimination they experienced. SAWOs attempt to provide services tailored to the needs of South Asian immigrant women.

Manka Dhingra said that she trains volunteers to treat South Asian women with extra sensitivity because of their increased need for social support. Manka is a second-generation activist who set up the advocacy program at Chaya in Seattle. Before designing Chaya's programs, Manka had volunteered with a mainstream domestic violence organization and with Narika, a crisis hotline for South Asian women in California. She drew on the philosophies of both when she designed Chaya's programs. She said:

I liked the professionalism that existed in the mainstream domestic violence (DV) shelters. There were very clear lines on what was whose role. I liked the fact in Narika that you did develop more of a personal relationship [with clients], but there were a lot of complications that occurred because of that. A lot of the volunteers got very personally involved, more so than they should have. There was a lot of relaxation around rules of safety for the volunteers. So when I was setting up the program for Chaya, I wanted to make sure that the volunteers would be very clear as to what their role would be or should be. That they're not the client's best friend, but that they are an advocate. On the other hand, they needed to understand that they were probably this person's only social support. There had to be some balance where you can provide the client with what they want, which was someone who they could talk to, who they could open up to, and in the South Asian culture that meant you had to share a little bit of your own life with them. But it was important to me that all the volunteers understood there had to be that line where it's OK to say, "Let's not talk about my background, let's go back to talking about you."

Thus, Manka attempts to combine South Asian and mainstream American approaches into a better whole. She values the warmth of extended familial relationships in South Asian cultures as well as the professionalism of American clinical relationships.

Despite a clear need for culturally sensitive services for South Asian women, many SAWOs were not welcome in their communities at first. Founding members

of Manavi commented that they were accused of being "home wreckers" when they began doing domestic violence work. Sakhi was excluded from cultural celebrations by larger pan-India organizations in New York City. Many of the activists I interviewed found that it was challenging to work in a community where there was complete silence around issues of domestic violence. This silence was often attributed to the model minority myth. As Sujan Dasgupta, who is Shamira's husband and an active volunteer with Manavi, said:

In 1985, Manavi was founded. Before that, when we started hearing things [about domestic violence] no one would believe we had a problem. The model minority makes South Asians feel they are different from Blacks and Latino/as. It puts them into a good book of white society, law-abiding society. They think they can work here, earn a living and then die. It is very difficult to accept that there is domestic violence ... They don't want to talk about it and don't want to discuss it with outsiders.

Although Sujan and other activists did describe a silence around domestic violence, they also expressed optimism. Several activists told me that the silence has decreased somewhat because the South Asian community now has a higher level of awareness about domestic violence than when they first founded their organizations.

Activists also face different challenges based on the region of the United States in which their organization is located. South Asian communities in the South are smaller than those in the Northeast and were established later, as Aparna Bhat-tacharyya commented. Aparna is a second-generation activist and the executive director of Raksha in Atlanta. She said:

We are a newer immigrant base. We haven't been in the South as long as we have been in New York and California and Chicago ... When I see South Asians from New York and Chicago, the comfort with their sexuality, the comfort with a lot of things is really different than from the South. I think we're still trying to be the middle ground ... [W]e have to take a different approach because of the community we are dealing with ... [T]he Northeast, Midwest and West are more progressive anyway than the South, the South is still kind of coming along ... We meet the community where it's at. It's a ... subtle kind of activism. We can't be shoving things down their throats when they're not ready to deal with it because it's going to alienate [them from] us more and when people need us ... the last thing we want to do is alienate our community from seeking help from us.

Activists in each SAWO have made careful choices in how they have represented their organizations and in their programmatic structures based on the community in which they work. They have had incredible insight into the most effective

ways to work with different South Asian communities in different regions of the country. In Raksha's case, the activists developed savvy strategies for effectively working in the conservative southeastern United States. First, they broadened the scope of their programs: they have a peer support program for domestic violence survivors, but they also have a youth outreach program, community education resources, and an HIV program, among many other activities. Through addressing a wide variety of issues, not just domestic violence, they have been able to serve a larger number of people.

Second, Raksha joined forces with other immigrant groups in the Atlanta area. Aparna forged strong ties with other immigrant advocacy organizations such as Refugee Family Violence Prevention and Caminar Latino. She and a few other Atlanta-area immigrant leaders founded International Women's House, a domestic violence shelter for refugee and immigrant women. Eventually, several immigrant advocacy organizations united to form *Tapestri*, an umbrella organization that promotes the interests of immigrants and refugees in Atlanta. Individual immigrant advocacy organizations found strength by working together. As Aparna said:

We [the immigrant organizations] were all really small. Raksha had no staff at that time. Refugee Family Violence Prevention had maybe four staff. Caminar Latino had like three to four staff. [There was one woman who] was doing the only domestic violence work in the Korean community ... Since we were all really small organizations, we provided some support for each other, and we were also working a lot on our philosophy ... We used to meet like every two weeks at the time ... We all started working together [on domestic violence issues], and what we realized was that a lot of these issues were similar, and it makes a much bigger difference if we all work together as a team ... [If we stayed in our own communities] there's no way we could do it. Plus we loved working together! We had so much fun hanging out. We learned from each other continually.

The founders of Apna Ghar of Chicago also formed coalitions with other immigrant groups and broadened the population they serve. As the organization's Web site states:

Apna Ghar ... was originally founded to meet the expressed need for appropriate cultural social services for women and children victims of domestic violence who came from the Asian Subcontinent countries of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Today, all services are free and open to families irrespective of ethnic origins, socio-economic status, and racial identity.

Thus, both Apna Ghar and Raksha, which are located in regions with smaller South Asian populations, adapted to their communities through building partnerships with other immigrant groups.

Second-Generation Activists and the Future of SAWOs

Second-generation women have enriched the South Asian women's movement, bringing their experiences and perspectives from growing up in America to their activism with SAWOs. These women have added new programming to SAWOs that were founded by first-generation activists, and some second-generation women have also founded new SAWOs, including Raksha and Chaya. One of the most important new dimensions to SAWOs that second-generation women have added is a focus on youth programming. They have expanded the services provided by SAWOs to include issues faced by young second generation South Asians such as formation of cultural identity and questions about how to bridge the gap between South Asian and American cultures. Second-generation activists have also brought attention to the needs of young South Asians struggling with problems around dating, sexual behavior, and drug use.

The broad spectrum of services offered by Raksha illustrates the vision of its second-generation founders. While domestic violence work is an important part of Raksha's mission, the organization also provides services to South Asians who are HIV positive and has a strong youth outreach program. Activists working in the youth outreach program have worked hard to raise awareness about the destructive effects of the model minority myth in their community. Raksha holds a bimonthly "Chai House" (a South Asian play on having a "coffee house" event), where they invite young South Asians to come together to discuss a wide variety of issues, including gender roles and their experiences growing up stereotyped as a "model minority." In February 2002, Raksha held a Chai House where young South Asians that did not fit the model minority stereotype each told their stories. According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* coverage of this event, of the four young South Asians, "One had married an African American man. Another chose the wrong career. One is openly gay. The fourth, well, she just isn't submissive enough." An explicit focus on the model minority myth is one important contribution second-generation activists have made to the larger South Asian women's movement. While first-generation activists recognized the model minority myth as a problem, second-generation activists have gone one step further by criticizing the myth and creating a forum for young South Asians to openly discuss it.

Second-generation women have also become a part of SAWOs that were founded by first-generation women. In doing so, second generation activists have expanded the focus of these groups. Monika Sharma's work at Apna Ghar is one example. She founded the Junior Board of Apna Ghar to create a space within the organization to address a wide variety of second generation concerns, including date rape and alcohol abuse. The Junior Board is made up of young South Asian men and women who organize community outreach events and an annual fundraiser aimed at young professionals and college students. Monika commented that the work of the Junior Board might help to raise awareness and prevent abusive relationships among young South Asians, which is part of Apna Ghar's broader mission of organizing against domestic violence. The Junior Board has become a successful part of Apna Ghar, and has raised thousands of dollars at its fundraisers. Today, Apna Ghar has a three-tiered board structure that fosters intergenerational communication. First-generation founders, including Kanta Khipple and

Prem Sharma, are members of the Alumni Board which serves in an advisory capacity to the organization. There is a board of directors that is responsible for direct oversight of Apna Ghar, and, finally, the Junior Board focuses on programming for second generation South Asian youth.

Conclusion

The activists that work to end violence in their communities have touched many lives. These organizations have provided a muchneeded space for South Asians of diverse backgrounds to discuss important social issues, including gender roles, the model minority myth, and the needs of second-generation youth, to name just a few. South Asian communities have been strengthened by the presence of these organizations. SAWOs have also been impressively flexible over the last two decades since the first ones were founded. Activists have carefully adapted their programming in order to tailor it to the needs of their communities. The future of these organizations is strong—South Asian women across generations are working together to address needs that might otherwise not be met. SAWOs provide a successful example of how women of color have organized against domestic violence in their communities. The story of South Asian activists is part of a larger emerging movement—that of women of color united against violence in all its forms.

An Antiracist Christian Ethical Approach to Violence Resistance

Traci C. West

As Black women initiate resistance on their own behalf and, in so doing, advance the broader interests of a civil society, it is incumbent upon their communities to continue that momentum. Of course, sustaining a deliberate commitment to end violence in women's lives represents a formidable challenge. We need agreement on certain elements that might comprise the kind of ethical analysis and practice we desire.

In this essay, I suggest that we must embrace and envision not only inclusive, truth telling, moral communities which resist violence against women; we must also help build social movements that could bring such communities into existence. These priorities have specific implications for crafting a community-based Christian social ethic that are considered here, along with concrete strategies for community action that emphasize how local churches might become involved in this effort.

Rationale for Christian Involvement

A primary task of Christian communities is to provide leadership in the midst of a desperate and urgent crisis; this would certainly include the crisis created by social and intimate assaults on women.¹ Engagement in practices that uphold women's genuine moral worth can be called "truth-work." Truth-work exemplifies an important aspect of Christian faith.² It involves reaching outside oneself and growing toward an embodiment of justice, and reaching within oneself to tap inner resources of courage and passion. To recognize what is truly just, Christians rely upon their ability to access power from God, their communities of accountability, and resources within themselves. They can live out this realization of truth by creating conditions in the world that reflect it; this requires engagement with distorting human realities such as violence, white supremacy, and male dominance.

Churches can play a critical role in organizing, sponsoring, and engaging in truth-work, because it is possible for them to possess an independence from corporate and state control. If they choose to exercise this autonomy, they can play a unique advocacy role in community life. Churches can function as effective and vital organs of the Christian faith by offering victim-survivors needed confirmation of the death-dealing realities that threaten their lives, and by opposing those realities. They have the chance to act compassionately by offering support to those