



SPEAKING RIGHTS TO POWER

CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL WILL

ALISON BRYSK

SPEAKING RIGHTS TO
POWER

This page intentionally left blank

SPEAKING RIGHTS TO
POWER

Constructing Political Will

Alison Brysk

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

© Oxford University Press 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior
permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law,
by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization.
Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights
Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Brysk, Alison, 1960–

Speaking rights to power : constructing political will / Alison Brysk.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978–0–19–998266–0 (hardback : alk. paper)—ISBN 978–0–19–998267–7
(pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Human rights. 2. Communication in politics. I. Title.

JC571.B758 2013

323—dc23

2013001329

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To wit: history admits no rules; only outcomes.

What precipitates outcomes? Vicious acts & virtuous acts.

What precipitates acts? Belief.

Belief is both prize & battlefield, within the mind & in the mind's mirror, the world. If we *believe* humanity is a ladder of tribes, a colosseum of confrontation, exploitation & bestiality, such a humanity is surely brought into being. . . .

If we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* diverse races & creeds can share this world as peaceably as the orphans share the candlenut tree, if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass. I am not deceived. It is the hardest of worlds to make real. . . .

Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?

—David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, Sceptre/Random House (2004), 528–529

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

List of Tables ix

Preface xi

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction: Rhetoric for Rights 1

1. Speaking Rights 15
2. Historical Repertoires: Attention Must Be Paid 41
3. Voices: Heroes, Martyrs, Witnesses, and Experts 55
4. The Message Matters: Framing the Claim 78
5. Plotting Rights: The Power of Performance 107
6. Mobilizing Media: Is There an App for That? 132
7. Audiences: Constructing Cosmopolitans 163
8. Constructing Political Will: Another World is Possible 197

Notes 213

References 216

Index 245

This page intentionally left blank

LIST OF TABLES

Table I.1 Human Rights Campaigns and Communication Politics	14
Table 3.1 Human Rights Campaigns: Voice	77
Table 4.1 Human Rights Campaigns: Frames	106
Table 5.1 Human Rights Campaigns: Performance	130
Table 6.1 Human Rights Campaigns: Media	161
Table 7.1 Human Rights Campaigns: Audience	194
Table 8.1 Constructing Political Will	206

This page intentionally left blank

PREFACE

Like all of my research, this book was catalyzed by a moment of connection that forced me to think more deeply about issues of chronic concern: a conversation with representatives of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), exiled in South Africa. I was in South Africa in October 2006 to research an earlier project on the changes in South Africa's foreign policy since its liberation from apartheid. In this process, I met several South African academics and displaced African activists who were trying to find a constructive role for the new South Africa in neighboring wars, dictatorships, and refugee crises.

The Southern Sudanese SPLM exiles I met, through a South African academic who had been helping with practical governance training, were internationally educated survivors of the civil war that had killed millions of their fellow Southerners. They had been appealing to the international community for over a decade and had just begun to gain some recognition. Through this experience, they were already as familiar as I with international human rights standards, institutions, and donors. What they wanted to know from me was how to connect with American and international publics and policy makers, and the lessons of my previous decade of work with relatively successful Latin American human rights movements.

For the first time, I saw that my retrospective analyses of symbolic politics could shift a struggle still unfolding, and that the victims and advocates wanted conceptual strategic guidance as much as practical solidarity. We talked about how to frame rights claims within the canon, about imagery of Africa, discussed bridging narratives of genocide with other communities, and analyzed the different transnational identities of human rights defenders. But I felt that my answers and my own understanding were scattered. As is fitting for a book about the power of communication, this book constitutes an extended reply to their questions. Their own struggle has abated with the achievement of independence, though conflict and violence continue. But I hope that the next time someone wants to know how to reach hearts and minds to stop and heal massive suffering, we will have a better answer in these pages.

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book stands upon the shoulders of a veritable human tower of power, to whom I am immensely grateful. Their collective academic, material, and moral support made it possible to survey this inspiring territory from a great height, although of course none are responsible for the content of my reports.

First and foremost, a series of extraordinary research collaborators contributed to the content. My graduate research assistant at UC Irvine, Madeline Baer (now faculty at San Diego State), was a critical partner for the work on trafficking, Colombia, norm entrepreneurs, and a co-author on FGM. My current doctoral student Natasha Bennett at UC Santa Barbara has done stellar research on the performance cases, political theory, the Arab Spring, campaigns against the death penalty—and she brilliantly organized the manuscript both conceptually and logistically. While an undergrad at UCSB, Antonio Gonzalez ably prepared an enormous range of case studies on the Dreyfus Affair, Spanish Civil War, Darfur, Congo, and male feminists. My studies of interethnic solidarity began with a coauthored project with UC Irvine doctoral student Daniel Wehrenfennig (now director of the Olive Tree Project). Research on the use of new media in Iran drew upon the research and activism of UCI doctoral student Eric Mosinger. My interest in the US use of political parody was sparked by the insightful senior thesis of UCI undergraduate James Kuo (now staff at the Colbert Report). UCI undergrad Sherry Park did tremendous primary research on Japanese American politics, while Aran Aghapour prepared an incisive analysis of dueling Diasporas on the UCI campus. Eileen Filmus of UCSB thoughtfully researched essential background on altruism, humanitarian movements, and social psychology. Another talented UCSB undergrad, Emily Michaels, prepared thorough case studies on Kony 2012 and US civil liberties campaigns. UCSB student Sarkis Yacoubian offered important information and perspectives on the Armenian community. My work on human trafficking developed in collaboration with co-editor Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick (University of Notre Dame and Central European University). My thinking on norm entrepreneurs, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Médecins Sans Frontières were shaped by co-author Claude Denis (University of Ottawa).

I am grateful for the insight provided by interviews with Floyd Mori of the Japanese-American Citizens' League, Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch,

Tenzin Tethong of the International Campaign for Tibet, and for their permission to publish them. Several colleagues provided insightful readings that immeasurably improved the manuscript, including Wayne Sandholtz (USC) and Gershon Shafir (UCSD).

Portions of the project were developed and sometimes published in previous forms with the much-appreciated sponsorship of several universities, journals, and presses. A previous version of “Why We Care” was published in Mark Goodale’s edited collection, *Human Rights at the Crossroads* (Oxford University Press, 2012). A comparative case study of FGM and gender-based asylum appears in “Changing Hearts and Minds: Sexual Politics and Human Rights,” in Thomas Risse, Steve Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Persistent Power of Human Rights: From Commitment to Compliance* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). It was based on workshops sponsored by the University of Wyoming in 2009 and the Free University of Berlin in 2010. The analysis of frame shift in FGM draws upon “New Rights for Private Wrongs: Female Genital Mutilation and Global Framing Dialogues,” with Madeline Baer, in Clifford Bob (ed.), *The International Struggle for New Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Prior versions of the analysis of trafficking were presented in “Beyond Framing and Shaming: Human Trafficking, Human Security, and the International Human Rights Regime,” *Journal of Human Security*, Fall 2009, as well as my co-edited volume with Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick, *From Human Trafficking to Human Rights: Reframing Contemporary Slavery* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Analysis of interethnic solidarity, and the studies of African American and Jewish Americans derive from “My Brother’s Keeper? Inter-Ethnic Solidarity and Human Rights,” with Daniel Wehrenfennig, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Spring 2010. Related work on interethnic solidarity was prepared for a 2009 workshop organized by Michael Goodhart and Anja Mihr and funded by the University of Pittsburgh. The case study of Colombia originally appeared as “When Words Fail: Communicative Action and Human Rights in Colombia,” *Colombia Internacional*, No. 69, Spring 2009, based on a generous invitation from the Universidad de los Andes, Bogota in 2008. The initial analysis of the use of new media in Iran and China was presented at the 2010 conference, “Global Citizenship,” at the invitation of Michele Micheletti and the University of Stockholm. The paper “Human Rights as Global Social Imagination” was prepared under the auspices of the 2010 MacKay Lecture at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia.

Since 2010, my scholarship has been generously funded by the Duncan and Suzanne Mellichamp Chair in Global Governance at UCSB, and this project would not have been possible without their vision and support. My 2011 fieldwork in India was supported by the Fulbright Senior Specialist program at Ravenshaw University, Orissa. I am also grateful for the collegial support of

Professors Mano and Bidyut Mohanty (India Institute for Social Studies) and Matt Schutzer (New York University) throughout my time in India.

Many thanks to my editor Angela Chnapko and Oxford University Press for once again providing a helping and a guiding hand for my research. I would like to thank Peter Mavrikis from Newgen, the anonymous peer reviewers for notably thorough and constructive suggestions, and the editorial staff for swift, professional, and sympathetic editing. Many thanks to Random House for permission for the opening epigram from *Cloud Atlas*, and to Shobha Das of the Minority Rights Group for the cover photograph. Ruben Dominguez, doctoral student at the University of Salamanca and visiting fellow at UCSB, has provided much-appreciated social media management.

I have been blessed and sustained for half a century by a rich network of family and friends, who have all contributed in diverse ways to this book. Among my friends, I must highlight a few who have taught me the meaning of care so profoundly they have become fictive kin: my godfather Robert Bettinger, soul sister Carol Wise, and big brother Gershon Shafrir. My parents, neighbors and friends in a dozen cities where I have lived, dozens of colleagues throughout the republic of letters, and fellow travelers in the global village have nourished, supported, and inspired me. But it would take another book to recount their wonders and my love for them.

So I will simply follow the golden thread through this tapestry of four generations of mothers and daughters. My daughter, Ana Brysk Freeman, has inspired me to think deeply about the power of social media, human rights campaigns for sexual and gender equality, and the ethics of recognition. My older daughter, Miriam Brysk Freeman, has walked her own path of scholarship as she led her graduating class at George Washington University, and invited me to share her work at the Villa Grimaldi Human Rights Memorial in Santiago, Chile. During the course of writing this book, my family lost two mothers and gained two daughters. On December 28th, 2011, my daughters' grandmother Therese Donath passed away—and on the same day, my sister's daughter, Isadora Brysk Cohen, was born. Six months later, in May 2012, we lost my own grandmother Rhea Tauber, at the age of 104. She migrated from Odessa to Ellis Island in 1912, to found a veritable dynasty, and became a teacher, writer, and world citizen whose footsteps I hope to follow. In September 2012, we gained a new life, my brother's daughter Lara Ani Rebecca Brysk. She is the descendant of refugees from both the Armenian and the Jewish Holocausts—and also, on both sides, physicians and musicians who try to heal the world's pain.

With this book, I try to honor the contributions and aspirations of all of these members of my personal, academic, and global communities. Here it is; everything I know so far.

A.B.

This page intentionally left blank

SPEAKING RIGHTS TO
POWER

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric for Rights

If I am not for myself, who will be?
But if I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?

—Rabbi Hillel,
first-century Jewish sage

How do we come to care about the suffering of strangers, and how can that care construct a world that protects human dignity? The struggle for human rights depends on recognizing suffering, connecting to its victims, and mobilizing political will to transform the power structures that are the source of abuse or neglect. We are defined as humans when we stand for something beyond ourselves, stand together with others, and—as Hannah Arendt put it in the face of the radical dehumanization of the Holocaust—“act in concert in the public sphere” (Arendt 1972: 143). In a previous era, this project seemed to depend mostly on mobilizing direct grassroots challenges to state power—in Alinsky’s phrase, “reveille for radicals” (1969). But in our times, the struggle for human rights depends increasingly on mobilizing persuasive rhetoric to garner global solidarity—speaking rights to power.

Yet we do not fully understand how to speak rights to power. Sometimes “naming and shaming” brings down dictatorships; at other times, an enlightened world community ignores well-documented genocides. We need to know when speaking up for rights matters; we need to analyze the successful strategies and appeals that have defied the odds and brought attention and action to far-flung human rights struggles. Although this power of speech has its limits, it is a universal human capacity, a long-standing concern of political theorists from Aristotle to Habermas—and speaking rights is often the only power available to the dispossessed. This book will try to show how far speaking rights can go in securing them, and how certain forms of communicative appeals can foster greater recognition of wrongs—and build political will to address them.

Human rights are both a motive and a means for constructing cosmopolitan compassion. Human rights propose universal and equal freedom, protection, and empowerment—making the world safe for an ethic of care. Care is the opposite of domination; it is speaking love to power. We manifest care in individual actions, social attitudes, transformations of communities, and political campaigns for human rights: at home, abroad, and across borders. A growing body of treaties, laws, institutions, and movements seeks to safeguard our universal human dignity—a secure base of protection and freedom that culminates in the capacity to care. The meaning of human rights is limned in the destruction of care by every form of oppression. At the climax of Orwell's *1984*, the protagonist's loss of humanity is signaled when he loses the capacity for solidarity and urges his tormentors to turn upon his beloved (Orwell 1950). Ultimately, the struggle for human rights seeks self-determination to realize our full capacities: for sustenance, public action, expression, and compassion alike (Nussbaum 1997).

The communication strategy of human rights claims can greatly influence which forms of suffering receive attention, recognition, solidarity, and response. Although the geopolitics, economic exploitation, power elites, and cultural prejudices that cause human rights abuse can also easily block response, sometimes a powerful message will break through and inspire mobilization. The purpose of this book is to increase our understanding of how to strengthen these messages.

Twenty years of research on six continents have shown me the power of ideas, identities, symbols, and beliefs to articulate the right to protection from coercive power and claim a right to constructive power. In Argentina during the 1980s, I saw how the charismatic voices and culturally resonant appeals of the Mothers of the Disappeared brought a measure of truth and justice in the wake of a brutal dictatorship. A decade later, my work with the indigenous peoples' rights movement in Latin America showed how scripts and symbols of indigenous identity forged a transnational network and secured lands, protection, cultural recognition, and political representation for some of the region's most marginalized citizens. In *Human Rights and Private Wrongs*, I traced the emergence of accountability for transnational violations by non-state authorities in areas like human trafficking, corporate social responsibility, and health rights. In each area, successful information campaigns promoted new norms of who is included in human rights, states' responsibility to protect non-citizens and restrain private actors, and the legitimacy of social and corporate authority. These global campaigns gained policy changes from the US Trafficking Victims' Protection Act to better rules for access to AIDS drugs in the developing world. Turning to the "supply side" of human rights promoters, my study

of half a dozen *Global Good Samaritans* states showed that developed democratic countries were pulled toward global good citizenship—above the level of their more passive peers—by an ethics of recognition. Persuasive leaders linked cosmopolitan ideology to national values, and deeply democratic civil societies identified with an ethos of global connection. These global good citizen societies have provided critical resources to the international human rights regime, like crafting treaties, funding and staffing international institutions, providing humanitarian foreign aid, promoting peacekeeping, and advancing refugee protection.

This study will try to extract the lessons of the politics of persuasion from these extraordinary experiences of solidarity and social change and compare them to a variety of contemporary campaigns, to understand how we can expand the resonance of human rights in troubled times. The kinds of communication that garner political will are not just information about problems or exhortations of moral principle—though these are important—because unstructured facts and free-floating norms can be and often are ignored. Human rights campaigns succeed when they follow the same rhetorical strategies of successful political campaigns: employing charismatic or authoritative speakers, compelling narratives, plots performed in public space, well-framed messages, skillful use of appropriate media, and targeting audiences. Although not every successful campaign will have all of these elements, under comparable conditions those appeals that embody more of these qualities, will secure greater recognition of human rights.¹

One of the more successful campaigns of the past decade, the struggle to secure access to life-saving anti-retroviral medications for HIV infection, combined several forms of communication politics. The campaign constructed political will to assist previously invisible or stigmatized victims through charismatic voice by public figures like celebrities, empathetic representation of suffering victims, information politics around the incidence and treatment of AIDS in the developing world by medical professionals, reframing of health rights as human rights by advocacy movements, international legal argumentation on intellectual property rights, protest performance, and outreach to cross-cutting attentive audiences of gays, development professionals, and women's groups (Brysk 2005).

The pathways for the impact of communication politics follow closely the dynamics laid out by Keck and Sikkink (1998), Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999), and deepened by this study: consciousness-raising through symbolism and information politics, shaming, leverage, and institutional legalization. These dynamics are often intertwined or overlapping; the point is that there are patterns and channels for how speaking rights gains attention and transforms policy.

Naming, Framing, and Shaming: Human Rights Watch

Of the global human rights organizations, Human Rights Watch illustrates best the sheer power of information politics and the development of expert organizational voice. The central activity of the organization is monitoring and reporting. As Peter Bouckaert, Director of Emergency Response for Human Rights Watch put it, reflecting on decades of work in Kosovo, Darfur, and Burma, “it all comes down to notebook, pen and camera” (Remarks at UC Santa Barbara, November 5, 2011). Moreover, the organization’s “brand” and effectiveness are based on the collection and projection of impartial, direct information.

Through its command of reliable information, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has gained influence on recognition and response to abuse by powerful nations and world public opinion. Human Rights Watch annual and country reports routinely help to shape the aid policies and diplomatic strategies of developed democracies relative to dictatorships and conflict zones. In a concrete example of acute leverage in a critical case, in the early days of the Egyptian Revolution, White House policy makers called HRW to ask for an accurate understanding of the nature of the repression—and what kind of statement would help to stop it. Human Rights Watch highlighted their evidence that Egyptian government security forces were using illicit violence against protesters and asked the president to call for a halt to this state-sponsored violation. Obama’s naming and shaming at a critical moment is credited with saving lives and facilitating an orderly transition to democracy (Talk at UC Santa Barbara, April 27, 2012). In parallel fashion, after a HRW inspection mission revealed the extent and provenance of violations in an isolated area, the president of the Central African Republic was pressed by the French government at a donor conference to withdraw his forces from zones in which HRW had documented abuses under the responsibility of the Central African Republic military.

Naming alone—consciousness-raising and labeling—can produce behavior change if background socialization and cosmopolitan identity linkages are strong. Thus, Bouckaert recounts how a rebel commander who had been a schoolteacher in the Central African Republic demobilized some child soldiers when a Human Rights Watch representative informed him of the ban on the use of child soldiers and told him of the recent human rights prosecution in Congo. Similarly, HRW persuaded the Libyan rebels—some with a prior history as rights advocates—not to use land mines in order to meet international standards in their struggle. Once a written commitment was signed, the insurgents honored it (Peter Bouckaert, UCSB, April 27, 2012).

Framing abuses in established categories and contesting government counter-frames can also mobilize international pressure more readily. In the confusion of a civil war in Nepal, HRW documented a government strategy of forced disappearances and government forces' responsibility for missing persons, leading to the acceptance of a UN Mission that greatly increased monitoring and diminished the practice. At a global level, HRW joined with other human rights organizations to document and label the use of cluster bombs as a threat to civilians analogous to land mines and successfully pushed for a similar treaty. During the 1990s, HRW granted critical support to the international indigenous peoples' movement when it included land rights as a human rights issue. HRW also played a key role in positioning women's rights as human rights and established a thematic division for women's rights—stretching its brand of monitoring public civil liberties and war crimes to demand accountability for non-state crimes like domestic violence and honor killing.

We can look inside the black box of the classic human rights strategy of “naming and shaming” and see that in between lies attention, framing, testimonial performance, and analogy. Facts do not speak for themselves—there is a learned discursive strategy that makes information effective.

Hearts and minds: The International Campaign For Tibet

The Tibetan people have gained worldwide solidarity for an obscure struggle against a global juggernaut by articulating a unique culture. An estimated one million of Tibet's six million residents died during China's 20 years of closed occupation, from 1959–79, as over 100,000 became refugees—including the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. Chinese rule has seen the systematic destruction of Tibetan land and religious institutions, suppression of free speech and assembly resulting in thousands of political prisoners, executions, and extrajudicial killings, and forced settlement of Chinese colonists. In response, Tibetans have engaged in constant waves of civil disobedience, and have appealed to the United Nations, democratic governments, and global civil society.

Tenzin Thethong is the founder of the International Campaign for Tibet and President of the Dalai Lama Foundation, who has served the Tibetan exile government as a Chief of Cabinet and U.S. Representative of the Dalai Lama. He describes the Tibetans' fifty-year struggle for self-determination as above all, “a contest of ideas between the Chinese state and the Tibetan people.” (Talk, UCSB, January 28, 2013) Above all, he highlighted the influence of the charismatic voice of the Dalai Lama, whose universalist projection of Tibetan Buddhism

and aspirations culminated in the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize. Tethong witnessed how the personal diplomacy of the Dalai Lama's visits to the U.S. during the 1980's forged unexpected bipartisan support among key members of Congress for the Tibetan cause, superseding the marginality of the Tibetan constituency and the Cold War logic of allying with China against the Soviets. By the 1990's, key celebrities like Richard Gere and Desmond Tutu also lent their charisma to the Tibetan campaign. (Interview, Jan. 28, 2013)

Tethong traced the growth in Tibetan solidarity to identity-based circuits of attention, rooted in a "fascination with Tibet in the Western psyche from the turn of the century," with successive waves of mid-century growth of Buddhism in California, 1960's contact between young travelers to India and Tibetan refugees, and subsequent scholarly, craft, and diaspora networks. By the 1980's, young Congressional staffers with histories in these communities readily transmitted appeals for Tibetan visas, Voice of America broadcasts, State Department reports, Fulbright scholarships, and funding for regional refugee reception centers. He concluded that "the power of this connection, is beyond politics—you can't buy or manufacture this." (Interview, Jan. 28, 2013)

Appeals for Tibet transcended the region's physical and political isolation through alternate spaces and repertoires of protest performance. The performance of Buddhist religious ritual resonated within the Tibetan community, but also on the global stage. Tethong served as Principal Advisor to the film *Seven Years in Tibet*. The spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics created an opportunity for counter-hegemonic protest by exiles, inside Tibet, and even within China (by international student activists). Currently, the growing repertoire of self-immolation has become the dominant performance—of martyrdom.

The international campaign has situated Tibet's plight in resonant global frames: human rights, religious freedom, and self-determination. The International Campaign For Tibet has secured United Nations' resolutions, cancellation of a World Bank resettlement project, and worldwide alliances. As Tethong summarized their quest, "What we want is a say in our own narrative." (Talk, UCSB, Jan. 28, 2013)

The Case for Communication Politics

If changing hearts and minds by telling the right stories is the key to the politics of persuasion, each narrative element bears further analysis, voice, message, performance, media, and audience.

Unpacking the rhetorical dynamics of successful human rights appeals has several political implications. First, it can teach us "best practices" for emerging campaigns to draw attention to unrecognized issues, deepening the current form of inductive learning by reactive feedback. But comparative analysis may

also show how the semantic circumstance of prior waves of abuse has sometimes distorted recognition—inflating some struggles while ignoring less picturesque suffering, evoking inappropriate forms of intervention for some real problems because of how they are framed, or pushing movements into resonant but ephemeral campaigns at the expense of more sustainable coalition-building. Strategic analysis of human rights rhetoric should not discredit the use of semantic appeals, which are employed by every genre of political mobilization—but are not often well acknowledged by principled activists and their supporters. Rather, the lessons of past campaigns should inspire human rights campaigns to improve their communicative strategies for effective use of limited resources, and to understand the limitations and trade-offs of short-term appeals that can be better used to catalyze more long-term dialectics. At the same time, a communication politics analysis can help us to understand some of the failures of human rights campaigns and how to improve appeals in hard cases. Thus, this book is intended as both a demonstration and a constructive critique of the power of speaking rights.

When information politics campaigns succeed, they move the world community from attention to recognition to solidarity with human rights struggles and foster political will. Political will means the propensity to mobilize to protect and empower the victims of abuse that overcomes the risks and costs of solidarity. Political will can be measured by a commitment to translate cognitive awareness and normative recognition into action, such as monitoring, lobbying, litigation, people power, institutional reform, and humanitarian or diplomatic intervention. Building political will depends upon a combination of the reception, salience, resonance, and empowering guidance of human rights appeals. Since human rights campaigns operate in a diffuse fashion that creates a new zeitgeist, the signs of political will may manifest as changes in the political consciousness and discourse of individuals, social movements, mass publics, leaders, and global institutions. Thus, there will be times we can track the specific policy impact of a rhetorical appeal through mobilizing a particular decision maker or social sector, but more often an increase in political will to address a human rights problem permeates the policy environment by shifting political discourse, placement on the political agenda, awareness of policy instruments, salience of attentive constituencies, and acceptability of trade-offs, and we can track these broader changes.

Realists and materialists of every ilk scoff at humanitarian solidarity as unlikely, insignificant, or hypocritical. Yet as Margaret Mead suggested, every day a “small committed group of people” do sacrifice their own personal and political interests to speak for strangers—and do occasionally change history, as we will see through the course of this book. If human rights campaigns and appeals were purely symbolic, or meaningless modernist myths, or false consciousness, abusive regimes worldwide would not work so hard to ban, subvert, and contest them. Like all forms of principled political action, human rights appeals may

certainly be contradictory or selective, but that is a reason to improve rather than discard them—since on the whole human rights campaigns achieve more good than domination or inaction, and rights norms establish grounds for their own critique.

Communication politics is only one determinant of the success of human rights campaigns—albeit an important and understudied dimension. It does not diminish the importance of understanding the politics of persuasion to remember that in the real world, the success of human rights advocacy will be influenced by a combination of material and moral force. Broad comparative studies show that access, receptivity, or contradictions in dominant forces open a space for speaking rights. These forces include hegemonic states, international institutions, national regimes, and domestic factions that become willing to tolerate challengers, foster freedom, or protect vulnerable populations for their own reasons. Within the limits of these power configurations, civil society is most effective as an agent of human rights promotion when it works in tandem with transnational networks to frame local problems in terms of globally legitimate norms (Cardenas 2007). Human rights campaigns must sometimes triage their efforts in relation to such windows of opportunity—but at times communicative appeals can push those windows open wider.

Another standard challenge to the cosmopolitan agenda of speaking rights—by cynical elites, concerned multiculturalists, and conflicted members of cultures outside the West alike—is the belief that human rights are part of a specific modern, Western, liberal identity that should not be imposed on others. Yet even as biology, culture, and power seem to conspire to draw boundaries around solidarity with “our own kind,” there is a countervailing impulse to bridge every form of difference. Somewhere in every society and every era there is a quest for cosmopolitanism—and an urge to find one’s own voice, from Tiananmen Square to the Arab Spring. Although many specific forms of human rights may be modern and Western, the animating spirit of connection with all that is human is universal, and just as authentic and legitimate as any other element of the world’s range of cultural norms. Far from Western modernity, medieval Persian poet Sa’adi Shirazi wrote: “Human beings are parts of a body, created from the same essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, the other parts remain restless. If the misery of others leaves you indifferent, you cannot be called a human being” (the saying known as “Bani Adam”). Speaking rights means recovering these voices, empowering the cosmopolitans in every culture against those who seek to speak boundaries in their name—and speaking rights to broader participation and broader visions in the global and local construction of human rights mechanisms.

Even all of this does not mean that human rights appeals will always be the best or the only response to every social problem or all the forms of human suffering. Human rights rhetoric may be misleading, misapplied, or hijacked to

serve other ends, as we shall see. The human rights response should be preceded by a careful analysis of the context of abuse, and the motives, consequences, and alternative modes of appeal and intervention. While there are some situations in which an inappropriate human rights strategy distorts response so much that “the medicine is worse than the disease”—notably some cases of humanitarian intervention in complex conflicts—there are other cases where even a misinformed, self-serving, or contradictory humanitarian appeal can still serve as a useful catalyst for recognition and mobilization. Sometimes it is legitimate to strategically launch a lowest common-denominator appeal that has the potential to grow toward a more effective and empowering response—as appears to be the case with human trafficking campaigns as a gateway to broader concern with contemporary slavery. After careful consideration, human rights campaigns are still often the best way to enact care and alleviate suffering—and when this is the case, we must learn how to use them more effectively.

Speaking rights to power is a part of acting globally; securing universal rights in a globalized world. Globalization is a double-edged sword that slices our bonds of servitude to some forms of state power with one side of the blade—and our bonds of solidarity with the other. The need is manifest for a new social imagination to weave a safety net for constant affronts to the human condition, old and new—as one recent book puts it, *Civilising Globalisation* (Kinley 2009).

From the jungles of Ecuador to the halls of Geneva, my research has shown me that the problem is power—and so is the solution. The problem is illegitimate and unjust authority, and the violence that is used to maintain control over the many by the few, to degrade difference, and to exploit vulnerability. And the solution is to construct a different kind of empowerment, available to all: to pursue our lives freely, develop our best selves, and come together to build a caring and just society. We need a social imagination that speaks truth to power, in the famous Quaker phrase—but we also need a social imagination that speaks love to power; that shows us how to replace bonds of domination with bonds of care and connection. Various religions and ideologies that have played that role in prior eras are no longer able to mobilize cosmopolitan political will. This book will show how human rights sometimes can.

Plan of the Book

The next chapter will outline a theory of rhetoric for rights. First, we will trace how the requisites and pathways of solidarity are rooted in the human condition. Then, we will define human rights and assess their special power as a contemporary form of global social imagination that can provide the basis for