

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Local Voices in Transnational Spaces

Diaspora Activists and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the status of women diaspora activists in transnational advocacy working to advance the WPS Agenda. Despite calls for solidarity, even “feminist” spaces face challenges for linking the Global North and South to advance advocacy efforts, challenges that are magnified when dealing with the issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). We focus on the stories of women diaspora activists working on active conflicts in the Global South and the ways these activists sought to embed themselves discursively in the WPS framework. We adopt an insider-outsider perspective to study their participation and draw insights on gender-related aspects of diaspora inclusion. We argue that the constraints on including local voices and perspectives in WPS advocacy is certainly contributing to some of the cracks in implementation. However, the construction of transnational solidarity by women for women’s security issues is improving the possibilities for meaningful participation.

Keywords: Diaspora; Transnational advocacy; Sexual violence; Conflict; Gender

Introduction

Following the adoption in 2000 of UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), there appeared to be greater possibilities for addressing the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and promoting their rights in terms of protection and participation in peace and security. However, immediately after the adoption, there was relative silence and inaction on the policy and principles it set forth, particularly the international norm prohibiting sexual violence in conflict. The slowness of translating WPS into actual practice is striking given that specific cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) were being documented around the world, particularly in Darfur (Sudan) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo, henceforth). To generate the political will for implementation in key member states and at the UN, various transnational advocacy networks began CRSV campaigns while others sought to direct attention to the plight of women and children as part of larger campaigns confronting conflict in Darfur and the Congo (Hudson & Budabin 2019). Cracks in implementation in the WPS agenda can be, in part, traced to the lack of meaningful inclusion of local voices and perspectives.

This is due to the fact that a key part of addressing and advocating on behalf of CRSV is the availability of timely information and credible data (Kuehnast et al, 2011, p.6). Yet,

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transnational advocacy networks often face blockages in gathering reliable information during conflict and crisis when international and grassroots NGOs risk repression (Keck & Sikkink 1998). In these cases, diaspora activists in host countries could provide insight to local circumstances or have alternate means for gathering information (Budabin 2014). The extent to which transnational advocacy networks included diaspora activists in addressing gender security is not clear. Therefore, in this contribution, we seek to fill these gaps in our knowledge by looking at two of the first test cases of the WPS Agenda: Darfur and the Congo. We ask, what opportunities or constraints existed for women diaspora activists working on the issue of CRSV? In what ways were diaspora activists able to discursively link local voices and perspectives directly or indirectly to UNSCR 1325?

As part of this special issue on the WPS Agenda, this contribution adopts an insider/outsider lens to illuminate the extent to which Darfuri and Congolese women activists in the US diaspora were able to participate in transnational advocacy on CRSV for their respective conflict situations. Further, we elucidate the ways in which diaspora activists engaged with and leveraged the discursive framework of the WPS Agenda. We argue that diaspora women activists gained “insider” standing and access to advocate on behalf of CRSV, wielding the WPS framework to great advantage. However, they continued to face unique and gendered challenges in reframing the relevance of the WPS agenda on CRSV with ongoing crises for an “outsider” audience thus hampering ongoing efforts in host countries.

This work shines a light on women diaspora activists following the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 to expand the roster of grassroots actors participating in transnational advocacy. While the role of women activists and feminist organizations in the Global North in lobbying for UNSCR 1325 and then seeking its implementation is well documented, the role of grassroots activists from the Global South has been less visible and understudied (Basu 2016). As bridging figures, diaspora activists have been of great interest for their political mobilization in host countries on behalf of their home countries; we build on recent work that looks specifically at transnational women’s activism conducted by diaspora women’s groups (Voller 2014). Though extensive scholarship has shown diaspora activism’s mixed impact on conflict resolution (see Østergaard 2006), research has only just begun to look at political mobilization in the host or residence country around gender security issues in conflict in the home country (see Coffie 2020 for exception).

Here we introduce two diaspora women from Darfur and the Congo who were actively engaged on CRSV in the US (their host country) and UN circles. This scholarship on women diaspora activists engages new ways of studying informal modes of micro-political participation as part of encounters with international institutions (see Holmes et al 2019). Moreover, this research illustrates the limits of the WPS Agenda as a global policy structure to engage and make visible certain voices and stories of insecurity in the context of transnational advocacy (see Shepherd 2021). Finally, this study contributes to the understanding of transnational advocacy on Darfur by focusing on CRSV (Hamilton 2011; Budabin 2014; Lanz 2019) and deepens scholarship on why greater attention has come to focus on the Congo above other CRSV cases (Baaz & Stern 2013; Meger 2016).

The article takes the following form. First, we introduce how we study women’s diaspora activism on CRSV in Darfur and Congo by blending approaches from the study of transnational advocacy campaigns (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Brysk 2013), diaspora activism (Smith & Stares 2007; Godin 2016), and UNSC WPS advocacy (Tickner & True 2018; Shepherd 2021). We put forward an analytical framework using an insider/outsider lens for assessing the status of diaspora activists in terms of their political opportunities, specifically access to resources and organizational platforms (de Waal 2015). Drawing on narrative analysis, we propose to study the security elements of the discourses of the diaspora women activists as they link either directly or indirectly to WPS and UNSCR 1325 (Hudson & Budabin 2019).

We present our case study, concentrating on the period following the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 through 2010. We review the nature of the conflicts and the state of advocacy around Darfur and the Congo highlighting the extent to which attention was paid to CRSV and the activities of diaspora groups. We introduce two diaspora women activists from Darfur and the Congo and review and contrast their experiences. Such analysis allows us to 'gild the cracks' of the WPS Agenda by better accounting for the diversity of women activists and deeper appreciation for the opportunities and limits of their role in the implementation of WPS.

Gender Dynamics of Diaspora Activism and Advocacy

Our research on transnational networks and campaigns draws from both political science and sociology to track and evaluate the inclusion of different actors and the ethical dimensions of advocacy practices (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Brysk 2013; de Waal 2015). Diaspora activists can play a critical role in transnational campaigns working with advocates, particularly on issues of international concern such as conflict and women's rights (Voller 2014). The dynamic between activist and advocate is key here; as Pruce argues, "activism is distinct from advocacy in that, as a practice, it articulates charges against an instrument of power directly by those affected, without proxy" (2017, p.63). Diaspora activists can provide an authentic link to advocacy campaigns as individuals who more closely identify with those affected as well as provide perspectives on the situation on the ground. And while these activists demonstrate agency and strategic choices as perceived insiders, often their participation and status will depend on inclusive practices and support from host country sources and advocates. This inclusion often relies on some level of insider status, but also enables certain types of outsider engagement.

Diaspora Activism and Transnational Advocacy

Diasporas are defined as groups of migrants or with migrant origins who maintain "strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin" (Sheffer 1986, p.3). While much attention has been on material support, diaspora groups often engage in political mobilization on behalf of their homelands, lobbying the host state or international governmental organizations. The ability for diasporas to engage in political mobilization will depend on their access to power (Smith 2007, p.5). In this regard, an organizational platform, an NGO or a network of individuals and organizations with a shared policy goal, can provide an important means by which activists can gain this access to political spheres and propel their ideas to higher visibility (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998). There are established diaspora groups with longer histories, such as the Jewish and Armenian groups in the USA, that are able to sustain their own lobbying through the creation of their own advocacy NGOs (Balakian 2004). However, other diaspora activists and groups may need to seek out coalitions within the host state or transnationally, perhaps joining other organizations or linking their causes to transnational advocacy campaigns.

Diaspora activism is by its very definition a transnational activity, one that is often supported by a constellation of actors and organizations as part of a global advocacy network. Diaspora groups are similar to stakeholders in oppressed states who seek out and connect with allies connect with external allies who could bring pressure on the international community and other states (Keck & Sikkink 1998). The conceptualization of transnational advocacy networks has only recently come to include diaspora groups as one of the network nodes. In cases where local groups cannot connect transnationally due to conflict or repression from the state, diaspora groups can provide a "local" link: furnishing information, testimony, and grassroots connections (Budabin 2014). In turn, diaspora groups can gain access to organizational platforms that are already nodes of power in the network.

Special attention has been paid to diaspora groups who are concerned with conflicts and crises in their homelands. Debates have discussed the promises and pitfalls of their engagement wherein diasporas may be “both peace-wreckers and peace-makers” (Smith & Stares, 2007, p.viii). Generally, diaspora groups in advocacy suffer from low visibility, but shifts in transnational advocacy around conflict have made them more visible – and controversial (see de Waal 2015). As key nodes within transnational networks, advocacy organizations may form and perform – on behalf of distant others – in a different location than the human rights claim or humanitarian crisis (Budabin & Pruce 2018); consider, for example, US and UK NGOs like Invisible Children¹ and ONE². While eager to address far away conflicts and crises, de Waal (2015) has pointed out that such advocacy organizations in the Global North have been reluctant to get involved heavily in home country political movements and prefer political mobilization in the host country. The inclusion of diaspora groups in transnational advocacy networks thus provides a local link that offers credibility to such efforts but may run up against elite and privileged management of direction and messaging (Budabin 2014). These tensions are also present in the universe of transnational advocacy around CRSV, which, as we will show, takes place inside and outside official structures with varying degrees of inclusion and access for Global South voices.

Transnational Advocacy on 1325

The original success of passing UNSCR 1325 had been the result of intensive transnational advocacy efforts by human rights, peacebuilding and women’s NGOs centered on the international community and policy-making in the United Nations (Hill et al. 2003; Cohn 2008). Hudson (2009) argues that this resolution 1325 was a critical first step in framing women’s rights as essential to the maintenance of international peace and security, laying the foundation for securitizing sexual violence. The resolution invested states as the securitizing actors with the responsibility to protect the vulnerable population of women and girls. Though passed as a bold normative agenda, UNSCR 1325 and all the others included in the WPS Agenda have not been enough to translate international policy into practice and provide the needed protection in situations of armed conflict (True 2016)³. Thus, additional pressure was needed to ensure implementation.

Advocacy to implement the WPS Agenda has had both transnational and national dimensions, targeting both individual states and international organizations like the UN (Olonisakin et al. 2011). It was incumbent upon advocates to branch out from the UN and also target states in their campaigns and lobbying. Parallel to the NGOs operating in and around the United Nations, a grassroots effort to mobilize (mainly) women has cropped up to ensure the security of women in conflict (Björkdahl & Selimovic 2019; Kreft 2019). The NGOs and individuals involved in WPS advocacy amount to a network of diverse voices that has been characterized by tensions around not only discourse and framing but in representation; as Taylor describes, the question comes down to “whose goals count in advocacy” (2019).

The intersectional dimensions of transnational advocacy have thus come under scrutiny for reifying and reinforcing power relations across advocates and claimants. Tension around “white men saving brown women from brown men” also extends to white female advocates acting on behalf of transnational feminist causes (Spivak 1985). This critique is salient for considering the efforts of Northern female advocacy, often related to CRSV, on behalf of the Global South (see Chiwengo 2008; Repo & Yrjölä 2011; Bystrom 2013). Representation in

¹ <https://invisiblechildren.com/>

² <https://www.one.org/international/>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>

transnational advocacy takes on new meaning when we consider the dynamics of women diaspora activists from the Global South engaging in women's rights and security in conflict.

Women, Gender and Diaspora Activism

Diasporas have rarely been theorized through a gender or feminist lens but this is changing (see Al-Ali 2007; Campt & Thomas 2008). More recent diasporic politics literature is questioning assumptions about diaspora members being homogenous in their identities and how varying political identities can create new political and discursive opportunities. Al-Ali (2007) argues that existing gender relations and ideologies in the home and host countries will shape women's political involvement and their relation to violence and peace. In her work on women's diaspora activism on behalf of gender-based violence in Kurdistan, Voller has shown how transnational advocacy offers activists "better access to education and communication technologies [...] greater freedom of action, organization, and mobilization" (2014, p.356). This was critical because the home state was hostile toward advocacy around sexual violence. And what happens at the international level on gender issues also matters for local activism (Lake 2018). International commitments around gender-based violence benefited transnational advocacy campaigns by offering diaspora activists "new capacities in promoting international norms and monitoring their implementation" (Voller, 2014, p.355).

Recent research suggests that the majority of the African Diaspora is composed of persons who "were direct victims or had experienced the cause of their dispersal" rather than descendants (Coffie, 2020, p.9-10). This means that "the African Diaspora has implicitly and explicitly served as relevant sources of first-hand knowledge that support the information politics of the women organizations and individual women in Africa" (2020, p.1). And even though gendered engagement on women's struggles has been "limited", Coffie also finds this activism to be "dynamic and beneficial" (2020, p.1).

African Diaspora activism can be understood within broader struggles for democracy, respect for human rights, and post-conflict peacebuilding. Addressing women's rights, specifically CRSV, is a critical component of this activism across the continent. For example, Godin (2018) finds that the CRSV activism of Congolese women in diasporas in UK and Belgium uses a frame in which "women activists mobilise women's rights to emphasise their identity as 'women'. In doing so, they connect all women to a particular grievance arising from sexual violence in the Congo. At the same time, they challenge the ethnic/racial and particularistic bias in the international community's application of universal human rights" (1401). This scholarship builds upon early studies that pointed to the role of social media for Congolese diaspora activism for women's rights (Garbin & Godin 2013) and the creative use of protest art as a political tool to address CRSV for Congolese women in the Belgium diaspora (Godin 2016). In this way, the gendered dimensions of diaspora activism intentionally connect democratizing efforts and human rights to women's experiences in conflict.

Applying an Insider-Outsider Lens to Activists and their Security Narratives

In our case study, we aim to trace how women diaspora activists garner access and resources to enter political spaces, engage in transnational advocacy, and promote locally grounded narratives. We explore their activism around gender security by paying close attention to the site of advocacy as it relates to resources, status and positionality as well as the discursive content. We draw on interest group research by adopting the labels of insider and outsider, but expand these categories to consider positionality within transnational advocacy networks and how this shapes narratives. As a practice, insider lobbying refers to how pressure groups such as advocacy NGOs persuade governments or

international organisations to adopt particular norms in charters, constitutions, and other documents through direct interaction with political officials and decision-makers (Dellmuth & Tallberg 2017). Activists with insider status will enjoy a high degree of access that may include the ability to meet directly with policy and decision makers in a host country to present information about their home countries. However, without direct access to policy and decision makers, it may be necessary to look to the court of public opinion, in what is called outsider lobbying, to build support (Dellmuth & Tallberg 2017). Through outsider lobbying, advocacy organizations draw on grassroots mobilization to gain the attention of the media and then state actors and policy-makers; taking place in public, outsider tactics might include petitions, boycotting, protesting, social media campaigns, and demonstrations (Budabin & Pruce 2018). Activists with outsider status will present claims to a broader public with the hope of mobilizing supporters and finding allies in order to raise their status and potentially gain access to policy making spheres. Women diaspora activists may make use of both insider and outsider lobbying as part of political mobilization in the host country although we propose this will depend on collaboration with an organizational platform.

Even with access to organizational platforms, not all diaspora activists will gain a decent status to craft their own narratives and share local perspectives. Therefore, to further nuance the status of women diaspora activists, we adopt Jauk's use of insider/outsider distinction to discuss how activists navigate within advocacy networks (2014). This attention to status within enables us to recognize how and when diaspora figures are afforded different degrees of access and involvement based on geopolitical background, language, social networks, and knowledge about host country political processes. Since this "situated accessibility" is dependent on the advocacy environment as well as on the agency and status of individual activists, such a view will offer further insights into the transnational advocacy landscape around WPS implementation.

Finally, it is important to consider the discourses of the narratives used by diaspora activists as part of advocacy campaigns. Advocacy narratives are shaped according to audience and context; here, the insider and outsider lens will be important to consider the particular constraints on an activist. Meanwhile, studies have shown that narratives used by advocates are often simplified, stripped of context, and vague on accountability, and this is often connected to lack of input from grassroots activists with in-country experience (Autesserre 2012; de Waal 2015; Budabin 2020). When considering the narratives of activists, it will still be important to see how they engage with security discourses while presenting local perspectives; this balance may determine the effectiveness of diaspora activism. We track this directly, in terms of references to UNSCR 1325 and its components, as well as indirectly, in terms of discourses related to CRSV, particularly the rape-as-weapon-of-war narrative (Hudson & Budabin 2019).

Data for our analysis is drawn from publicly available material from various organizations in the US and UN advocacy spheres. Further, speech texts were located in databases for the US Congress and the UN. Finally, this piece draws on qualitative interviews conducted with advocates and observers by the authors as part of a larger project on transnational advocacy around the WPS Agenda.

Diaspora Activism to Confront CRSV in Darfur and Congo

Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the scourge of CRSV was documented in various conflicts. Two major test cases were Darfur and the Congo. The high incidence of CRSV in the Congo can be traced back to the 1990s to various cycles of violence and was attributed to armed forces, both regular and irregular, and compounded by a culture of impunity (Berwouts 2017). In 2002, Human Rights Watch released a report on what they

called “The War within the War”, focusing on sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern Congo⁴. Most observers agree that the report failed to impel a response and assure effective protection (ENOUGH report cited in Zilberg, 2010, p.116). Whereas the situation of CRSV was considered to be graver in the Congo than in Darfur, attention to the Congo would not become robust for many years (Zilberg, 2010, p.116). As one aid worker for MSF described, “The two places don’t compare. There [in Darfur] you have a lot of people in camps but here [in the Congo] the insecurity is so much worse”⁵.

In Sudan, CRSV was connected to a new pattern of violence in 2003 that flared between rebel groups in the region of Darfur and the government based in Khartoum along with paramilitary troops (see Flint & de Waal 2005; Prunier 2007). Amidst the fighting and scorched earth policy, nearly two million Darfuris became IDPs in camps while 150,000 refugees poured over the border to Eastern Chad. Soon, it was clear that the violence perpetrated in Darfur against non-Arabs included mass rape and other forms of sexual violence that targeted men and women across the landscape of Darfur and Chad. In 2004, Amnesty International released a report entitled “Sudan, Darfur: Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence and Its Consequences” and Physicians for Human Rights issued its own report on “The Use of Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur”⁶. For a number of these early reports, rape was folded into larger investigations of the nature and extent of the widespread and systematic violence that was considered genocidal or ethnic cleansing. In both Darfur and the Congo, however, the prevalence and existence of CRSV was well documented by the early 2000s.

Diaspora Representation in Transnational Advocacy for Darfur and Congo

Despite the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and the global commitment to ensure protection against CRSV, Darfur and the Congo remained low in status at the international level. In the US, the possibilities for diaspora activism were limited because of the relatively small populations of these communities. By 2000, the US Census 2000 counted 881,300 Americans who were African born, marking the increase of the community over the course of the 1990s⁷. But neither the Congo nor Sudan were big sending countries: the US Census only counted four thousand Congolese and twenty thousand Sudanese (many of whom came as refugees from the Sudanese Civil War).

For the Congolese in the US, the cycle of violence and humanitarian crises they left behind did not initially spark a large-scale movement in the US. But the diaspora had been active elsewhere, sometimes with a gender angle: in the UK and Belgium for example, the Congolese diaspora supported Congolese Women in the field of women’s rights advocacy, opening up “new paths of political action for the women” (Coffie, 2020, p.10). In the US, the Congolese diaspora did form a handful of organizations engaging in advocacy and awareness raising. The most prominent of these is Friends of Congo⁸, which was founded in 2004. They facilitated a “Break the Silence Speakers Tour” in 2009 (Zilberg, 2010, p.115). But overall, compared to other Congolese led or Congo-related organizations founded by celebrities or related to environmental causes, these diaspora organizations operated with limited funds and less visibility (Budabin & Richey, 2021, p.67). A short-lived movement

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/12/congo.international>

⁶ For example, a 2003 MSF report of the conflict and the refugee situation stated that MSF had heard militia groups were raping and kidnapping women. A 2003 report published by Amnesty International also documented allegations of abduction and rape by Arab militias.

⁷ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/african-born-residents-united-states-2000>

⁸ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/>

called Congo Global Action tried to coalesce a coalition that included other Congolese diaspora organizations to engage in Congo-related advocacy in Washington⁹.

The Congolese diaspora in the U.S. did include women's issues as part of its efforts. Friends of the Congo included a position of Women's Coordinator and had "Women" as one of its project areas. Here, they shared information on grassroots organizations in the Congo and the situation regarding women¹⁰. One Congolese activist, Nita Evele, member of the diaspora organization Coalition of Pluralists and Congolese Patriots, is featured in the media speaking about women in politics¹¹. There were attempts to present the issue of CRSV to a global audience. For an event on Congo in 2007, a representative from a UN organization spoke about gender security issues¹².

Sudan and its civil war had already been the focus of attention for US advocates and diaspora members (see Hertzke 2004). News and concern for the mass atrocities undertaken in Darfur led to the largest mobilization seen since the heyday of the anti-apartheid campaigns. The violence was quickly labeled by the US government as the 21st century's first case of genocide, and this label not only captured the attention of a number of charismatic leaders and high-profile international NGOs, but it shook the international community as well (Hamilton 2011). As the center of a national and global movement, the NGO Save Darfur Coalition based itself in Washington, DC to run campaigns and lobby the US government and the UN. An NGO within the Save Darfur Coalition, the ENOUGH Project¹³ conducted advocacy campaigns around conflict in both Darfur and Congo as part of its portfolio; however, this was a classic Northern advocacy organization that engaged in insider lobbying led by US advocates and celebrities with some engagement from diaspora activists on occasion for high-profile events and protests¹⁴ (Budabin & Pruce 2018). Overall, inclusion of the Darfuri diaspora was slow and, in the early years of this campaign, the messaging did not include many references to the situation of women.

The difference between the two US movements advocating on behalf of conflicts in Africa is certainly striking. Coley (2013) showed how factors of issue framing, political opportunities, and organizational resources explain why Darfur received attention while the Congo lingered in the shadows; he explains this through the use of the term genocide in the Darfur case, the high status of Sudan for the Bush Administration, and the remarkable funds available for Darfur advocacy. But even with these gross differences, both causes were primarily represented by advocates from the Global North. Moreover, it meant that issues like CRSV, when discussed, were also communicated by professionalized advocates rather than persons with local knowledge. These power dynamics between diaspora activists and transnational advocates are evident in reviewing all congressional hearings for the US Congress that were related to women and the humanitarian situation. Of 17 hearings held between 2002 and 2010, only five included diaspora activists; and within this sample, only a single woman diaspora activist appeared.

On issues related to gender security, there was the 2008 appearance of Dr. Denis Mukwege, on behalf of Congolese women. In this testimony, Dr. Mukwege described in gripping detail the physical, psychological and social consequences of rape as a weapon of war on women, families and societies. He referred to this violence as "sexual terrorism" as the "word rape or sexual violence cannot fully translate the horror that hundreds of thousands of women

⁹ <http://drccoalition.blogspot.com/search/label/About%20Congo%20Global%20Action>

¹⁰ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/women/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z-NYhNfMpl>

¹² <https://afjn.org/congo-voices/>

¹³ <https://enoughproject.org/>

¹⁴ <https://enoughproject.org/blog/congo-activists-deliver-petition-us-presidential-envoy-white-house>

are living” in the Congo¹⁵. His testimony did include three testimonies recounted in the first person of Congolese women who had survived this violence as well as five stories of women and girls treated at Panzi Hospital. Dr. Mukwege has had tremendous influence and access in bringing the experiences of CRSV to the attention of the Global North; his success as an advocate for women was even recognized in 2018 by the Nobel Peace Prize. But the story is incomplete since there were women diaspora activists who were making valiant efforts to fight CRSV in their home countries who weren't afforded such a platform. This crack in the implementation of 1325 and protection against CRSV pushes us to consider the work of two individual diaspora activists who were able to emerge as both insiders and outsiders of transnational advocacy.

Women Diaspora Activists Push Gender Security Issues

Drawing from feminist insights into the problematic hierarchies of knowledge production and the dangers of appropriating the narratives of others, this research considers the importance of two individual stories of women diaspora activists (Agathangelou & Ling 2004). Recognizing that these are just two stories, and that other stories of diaspora women must also be told, we proceed with Lina Tuhiwai Smith's research principle of “getting the story right” and “telling the story well” (2021, p.226). In profiling the work of these two women, we aim to enhance understanding around whose stories count and the political dynamics of insider and outsider narratives in the WPS Agenda (Shepherd 2021).

Bibiane Aningina Tshefu

Bibiane Aningina Tshefu had worked on women's issues in Congo, where she had earned a university degree, worked as an adviser to various government ministers, and co-founded three organizations: the Réseau Action Femmes Kinshasa, the Caucus des Femmes in Nairobi 2002, and the Dynamique des Femmes Politiques. She arrived in the US in 1994 and worked as a consultant for various NGOs, Congolese women's organizations in New York, and the UN. She took part in the larger NGO coalition for the adoption of the UNSCR 1325. She retained a strong link to the Congo, acting as permanent consultant to the UN Gender Office in the Congo and leading a UNDP assignment to evaluate the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in various Great Lakes countries.

In 2002, Tshefu was part of efforts to implement the normative agenda of the WPS Agenda from an organizational platform with extensive “insider” access and a broad “outsider” following. With PeaceWomen, specifically Women's International League for Peace and Freedom¹⁶, Tshefu wrote a brief for the e-newsletter in which she described what was being done in the Congo by women's groups to raise awareness of the WPS Agenda. The brief describes the environment for implementing the Agenda:

The accomplishments of women in the DRC towards implementation of Resolution 1325 have taken place despite huge barriers. Within the government, and among the participants in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, there is still little awareness about Resolution 1325¹⁷.

Early on, Tshefu is focused on the participation pillar of 1325 related to the inclusion of women in peace processes. However, this brief was directed to the organization's followers, not political spheres.

¹⁵ https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/mukwege_testimony_04_01_08.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.wilpf.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/89180>

A few years later, she narrowed in on continuing violence and accountability in the country. In an article on the upcoming elections in Congo in 2006, she stated,

Women are treated like animals in the Congo and many of those responsible for the crimes against them are currently part of the transitional government. As a result, women are involved in this election on a massive scale because they hope it will help remove those responsible for the violent crimes against them. It's been difficult to bring them to justice up until now, but women are really hoping that the elections will lead to justice¹⁸.

She offers a picture of violence and impunity but sees the answer in electoral reform and political empowerment of women. Again, this article was written for a newsletter aimed at outsider audiences.

But the gains were not forthcoming and Tshefu was part of a joint statement that aimed to refocus attention on CRSV. This memo written by the Congolese diaspora women worldwide in 2013 that was explicit about the WPS Agenda:

Recalling the UN SC Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; Diaspora Congolese Women stand in solidarity to express our solidarity and our concern for innocent Congolese populations, particularly women and young girls who are living in human insecurity, poverty, fear, hunger and oppression since 1997 in the D.R. Congo¹⁹.

Again, she appeals to the normative agenda that was failing to have an effect on the ground. This memo was presumably given a wide press release though whether it reached insider spheres is unknown.

Overall, Tshefu represents a well-connected person whose consultative work and activism have crossed both insider and outsider spheres. She writes and speaks in English, and has nearly three decades experience in the US social and political environment, giving her an excellent background for political advocacy in her host country. Her work with the UN gave her official access and a visible transnational platform for her advocacy, often in concert with other organizations. Meanwhile, her work with NGOs and Congolese women allowed her to maintain strong links to her home country and her credibility as a conflict survivor coming from outside the system. However, with local NGOs, her narratives are directed towards outsider audiences even when written with policy specific language. She negotiates identities as both insider and outsider; in fact, in her role as the Women's Coordinator for Friends of the Congo, she is described as "an expert and activist on women's rights with specific focus on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and sexual violence in Africa"²⁰. She continues to work with diaspora organizations in the US, centering on women's issues as part of Congo-related advocacy.

Niemat Ahmadi

Niemat Ahmadi had been helping organize relief efforts and human rights reporting during violent episodes in Darfur²¹. When the conflict escalated in 2003, she faced threats and

¹⁸ <https://www.dd-rd.ca/no-justice-no-democracy/>

¹⁹ http://www.friendsofthecongo.org/images/pdf/diaspora_memorandum.pdf

²⁰ <https://friendsofthecongo.org/leadership/>

²¹ <https://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/founders-story/>

harassment for her work; in 2005 she left Sudan to take refuge in Kenya and then the US²². She was hired by the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) in 2008 to liaise with the Darfur diaspora community in the US and globally²³. She describes herself as a "genocide survivor" and became a spokesperson for the SDC's efforts on sexual- and gender-based violence. Her hiring was also part of a shift happening within the SDC, which was focusing more attention on women's issues. The SDC funded a Refugees International report on "Ending Sexual Violence in Darfur: An Advocacy Agenda" in 2007; however, this report did not mention 1325 or the WPS Agenda²⁴. The SDC created a dedicated women's page in 2009. By then, it was clear that, with the help of diaspora activists and in the context of global policy making affecting institutional practices, attention to women as victims was regarded as a priority²⁵. SDC offered Ahmadi a key organizational platform for outsider lobbying- reaching a larger public with the issue of CRSV. The organization had ample funds – in the tens of millions of dollars – and Ahmadi was an experienced activist who, crucially for the US audience, spoke English.

The SDC organizational capacity to elevate Ahmadi's voice within Darfur related advocacy soon became clear. Ahmadi was one of the main speakers in February 2008 at "One Night, One Voice: Spotlighting Rape as a War Crime" - an event held in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. After viewing a short film called "Ending Violence Against Women in Darfur"²⁶, Ahmadi declared, "The war in Darfur is actually being fought in women's bodies"²⁷. Her work in Darfur is featured prominently in the film as well as the mortal risks she took to help rape victims. The film urges us to "hear their voices" and "add our own". The focus is on the camps and on how women and girls are common targets. While various women are featured, none have names or titles. The video discusses ongoing genocide and the murders, intoning that "women and girls face some of the most widespread and systematic sexual violence the modern world has ever seen." At the end of the film, we are asked to "stand with the women of Darfur."

In addition to public events, Ahmadi also gained access and invitations to provide testimony in political spheres, a form of insider lobbying that was facilitated by the Save Darfur Coalition. In 2009, she addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a hearing on "Confronting Rape and Other Forms of Violence against Women in Conflict Zones Spotlight: DRC and Sudan"²⁸. She spoke on behalf of women she knew personally: "on a daily basis, through my work and my ability to speak out publicly in the United States, I carry with me the plight of my mother, aunts, sisters, and countless other women in Darfur who face brutality and violence as part of their daily life"²⁹. She cites how the IDPs and refugee camps are populated by of women who "face brutal rape, humiliation, beating, starvation and disease on a daily basis." Her description of CRSV is set firmly in the language of the WPS agenda and dominant narratives circulating at the time:

²² <https://www.registercitizen.com/news/article/NIEMAT-AHMADI-Southern-Sudan-s-vote-for-12113696.php>

²³ <https://www.vitalvoices.org/2009/12/save-darfur-coalition-honors-ambassador-at-large-for-global-women%E2%80%B0urs-issues-on-7th-day-of-campaign/>

²⁴ <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/47a6eb950.pdf>

²⁵ It's important to note that the incidence of CRSV during the Darfur conflict was not completely neglected by advocates or the international community even early on. At the international level, the ICC indictment on Bashir was announced in July 2008. He was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in Darfur, and these charges included the subjection of "thousands of civilian women – belonging primarily to [various ethnic] groups – to acts of rape."

²⁶ <https://vimeo.com/26168526>

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rcXfCasNJs>

²⁸ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111shrg53635/html/CHRG-111shrg53635.htm>

²⁹ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AhmadiTestimony090513p1.pdf>

In Darfur, rape is being used as weapon of war. It is a systematic tactic to destroy the very fabric of our community. Rape and sexual violence in Darfur is not the product of chaos or uncontrollable troops during the attacks. It is not an after-effect of war. It is well planned and orchestrated in a calculation to break apart families, tear down leadership structures, and leave long-term social, emotional, and physical scars on an entire community. Abduction and sexual slavery is a tactic used by the Sudanese government and its allied janjaweed militia. This terrorizing of women, families, and communities is not a nightmare – it is the reality of daily life in Darfur.

She goes on to underscore the inadequate security provided by African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) that has led to CRSV. Ahmadi invokes the WPS directly when she states: “All international instruments concerned with violence against women such as Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1820 have not been implemented”³⁰. Certainly, advocacy narratives on CRSV in Darfur were circulating though mainly in the “rape as a weapon of war” framing. While the motives (opportunistic vs. strategic/tactical) seemed to vary, the victims, the perpetrators, and the form of harm were “clear”. Adopting this narrative, Ahmadi is one of the few to directly connect the Darfur situation to the stalled WPS Agenda. For the insider audience of political elites in the US Congress, the mention of this security agenda makes sense. Ahmadi is a savvy activist who appears to know her audience and that in her narrative she must link women’s rights and protection needs to the pursuit of international peace and security as well as to states’ obligation under international law.

Building on her network connections, familiarity with the US political scene and her expertise, Ahmadi was able to create a new organizational platform to pursue a narrower set of goals. In 2009, Ahmadi founded the Darfur Women Action Group (DWAG), though official NGO status was only granted in 2013³¹. From this organizational platform, DWAG became a place to center the leadership of diaspora activists, with an explicit and critical focus on the experiences of women in Darfur and women as activists. While without the resources and connections enjoyed by the SDC, DWAG attracted attention from celebrity supporters like Hollywood actress Mia Farrow, who joined the Board³². A letter written in 2013 on the occasion of the Commission on the Status of Women shows the more concerted nature of connecting advocacy appeals to the international agenda:

Despite the alarming rate at which rape and other forms of sexual violence occur as part of the ongoing genocide in Darfur, little has been done to address this deadly phenomenon. [...] Despite Sudan’s ratification of several international human rights and humanitarian laws that are favorable to women rights, Sudan has no political will to meet its obligation on those terms. Further, Sudan continues to be reluctant to ratify the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). All the international instruments that concern violence against women such as UN Security Council Resolutions UNSCRs 1325, 1820 and 1888 have not been implemented.

The letter is pitched to the community of the UN- states, institutional bodies, and NGOs. Ahmadi’s organization is arguing for the international community to address Sudan’s

³⁰ <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AhmadiTestimony090513p1.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/>

³² <https://web.archive.org/web/20150910093448/http://www.darfurwomenaction.org/about/board/mia-farrow-member-darfur-women-action-group%E2%80%99s-advisory-board>

recalcitrance in addressing CRSV using the normative power of CEDAW and the various WPS resolutions. These agendas and resolutions will be familiar to the readers of this letter since Ahmadi's narratives are crafted and directed toward an insider audience, specifically those engaged in the WPS Agenda.

Discussion

These examples show that diaspora activism was able to provide needed first-hand perspectives to transnational advocacy networks in critical host country settings and the United Nations as well as the public at large. Our findings show that in the Darfur case, women diaspora's groups eventually garnered status and resources to share local knowledge to both insider and outside audiences; in contrast, the case of Congo illustrates how transnational advocacy was largely centered on Northern activists making very little space for Congolese women's diaspora to reach host country contexts. While the two women highlighted in this study had varying degrees of inclusion and resources, both were able to navigate insider status to both home country and to elite governance political structures. Both benefited from "situated accessibility" and both skillfully linked the women's rights concerns to security discourses and dominant narratives about the connection between "women, peace and security".

At some level because both are women and both are from the Global South, their status as non-American and non-UN officials is particularly notable from the beginning. That said, Tshefu did gain insider status into the UN, leading a Gender Office, and through an official appointment with the UN. However, that access did not seem as catalyzing as the material access and resources that Ahmadi had with SDC. Further, Ahmadi's platform enabled her to access a public audience and tap into a particular political and popular culture that was responsive to mass atrocity, especially when such violence was linked to women and CRSV. Both cases of advocacy relied on forging local connections with Global South activists who were able to move fluidly - sometimes insiders, sometimes outsiders, and sometimes both. The status and engagement of the diaspora activists also allowed the larger advocacy network to combine insider access with some outsider credibility.

The case of the Congo followed a different trajectory that stands in contrast to Darfur. While there was significant activism on CRSV in the Congo, there was less connection between Northern advocates and Congolese diaspora activists. Tshefu certainly stands as a critical and important activist in this space, we were surprised not to find more women from the Congolese diaspora engaged in this context, particularly in the US. Ahmadi's activism had a reach and staying power that is particularly noteworthy. In part, we can point to the resources and organizational platform that she was able to access; we also recognize a particular individual capacity that further catalyzed her leadership and "situated accessibility" in linking CRSV to WPS as a global policy framework as well as CEDAW as a legally binding instrument for protecting women even in conflict. Still, both women demonstrate serious constraints around meaningful inclusion and participation in the WPS Agenda.

Conclusion

This research on women diaspora activists offers us new ways of analyzing informal modes of micro-political participation and how these forms of activism engage global policies, international institutions, and national governments. Further, the focus on diaspora activism in the US and its limited engagement with 1325 advocacy, particularly in the early years, demonstrates both new pathways and persisting blockages for implementing the WPS Agenda. This is particularly true as we consider the geography of the WPS Agenda and New York City as the primary (and limiting) space of transnational advocacy. The geographical

and metaphorical is certainly a “crack” that undermines the full conceptualization and implementation of the WPS Agenda.

More research is needed to understand the fluidity and power dynamics at play for diaspora women who gain “insider” status. The inclusion of diaspora women's voices in the advancement of gender security issues is a certainly a step towards "getting the story right" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 266). Intersectional identities of women, particularly those from the Global South, often mean multiple obstacles to meaningful and sustainable insider status. What we see with diaspora women who serve as the credible expert from a distant conflict is that their insider access to UN and other elite governmental circles is often a way of preserving (at least in performative ways) outsider identity for transnational advocacy networks and reinforcing (or fitting into) existing global policy agendas rather reshaping that agenda and the discourse that supports it. Insider value, at least in theory, depends authenticity of experience as being the distant other, the outsider. But we know that many of those who become insiders may not be able to maintain their connections to the outside due to continuing security concerns. This is especially true for diaspora activists who campaign on behalf of women's causes in oppressed or conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and the Central African Republic. That diaspora activists operate removed from their home countries does not negate their previous lived experience, but it does push us to consider intentional and unintentional shifts in their identity, status, and access as women working as activists for women's rights.

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