Migrant and refugee activists as security agents:

Openings in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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Abstract

This article examines how refugee and other migrant women resettled in Europe influence security governance and knowledge in European governments and at the United Nations. We document migrant women's activism and collaboration with policymakers in relation to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, a global assemblage of policy, legislation, and advocacy grown out of women's activism at the United Nations Security Council. We argue that this framework offers both opportunities and constraints for migration activism. Refugee and migrant women successfully use the agenda to unsettle stereotypes of passivity and voicelessness, while navigating expectations of peacefulness, consensual dialogue, and heteronormative femininity.

Keywords: refugees; migration; activism; Women, Peace and Security; displacement; Europe; borders

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Introduction

On 15 May 2017, Mina Jaf, founder and director of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Women Refugee Route, addressed the United Nations (UN) Security Council in New York City. Facing a distinguished assembly of diplomats, international civil servants and civil society representatives, Jaf shared her experience of growing up as a refugee. Jaf was born during a chemical attack on the city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1988, at the end of the Iraq-Iran war. Fleeing the violence, her mother escaped to Iran with her infant daughter. After a decade of itinerance on the mountainous Iraq-Iran border, the family found asylum in Denmark via Turkey and Germany. During fifteen years spent in refugee camps and asylum centers, Jaf met women who had escaped conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia, and Rwanda, and who had experienced rape and domestic violence experienced during war and flight. Their stories stayed with Jaf, who founded Women Refuge Route in 2015 to support, empower, and work alongside displaced women. Leveraging this experience, she called on UN member states and agencies to better consult with and protect all refugees, particularly women and girls (NGO Working Group 2017).

Jaf's testimony at the Security Council, the first highlighting the experiences of a refugee woman resettled in Europe, was enabled by a policy framework known as Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This framework emerged from lobbying by women's organizations at the Security Council, which led in 2000 to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS. Resolution 1325 marked the Security Council's first acknowledgment of women's experiences of and contribution to peace and security. Innovatively, it mandated UN agencies, parties to armed conflict, and national governments to integrate a gender perspective in all security initiatives. With support from the likes of Hillary Clinton, Michelle Bachelet, and Angelina Jolie,

WPS grew into a transnational ecosystem of policy initiatives, funding streams, legislation, research centers, educational programs, and organizing (Basu et al. 2020). This framework, commonly known as the WPS agenda, has established itself as a cornerstone of the fight for global gender justice (Olonisakin et al. 2012; Kirby & Shepherd 2016; Davies & True 2019; Newby & O'Malley 2021).

This article documents the activities of women like Jaf who, after migrating from the Global South to Europe, use WPS as a platform to influence high-level security discourse and policy toward women fleeing conflict. The analysis contributes to, and builds bridges between, scholarship on security assemblages; WPS; and migration studies. We ask: How and to what extent has WPS enabled refugee and other migrant activists to intervene in and shape security discourses in national and international security fora? We find that, while conventional migration and security policy discourse does not typically attend to the perspectives of women displaced by conflict, the WPS framework has provided migrant and women activists with opportunities to reconfigure prevailing knowledge about refugee and other migrant women's rights and needs. By speaking as embodied representatives of women displaced by conflict to institutions of state power in Europe and at the UN, refugee and migrant women activists unsettle stereotypical portrayals of refugee women as voiceless or passive and open space for more progressive policy aimed at women migrants and refugees. Simultaneously, the WPS agenda constrains which activists may speak for displaced women and how, and redeploys conventional portrayals of refugee women as peaceful and collaborative.

Our article unfolds in four sections. First, we conceptualize the WPS agenda as a security assemblage within which refugee and other migrant women express agency, and we introduce our methodology. The second section considers how displaced women advise and collaborate

with national governments to craft security policy in Europe. The third section analyzes how refugee women advocate better protection and inclusion of displaced women in international security forums, especially the UN Security Council. The fourth section concludes on the opportunities and constraints inherent to the WPS agenda for migration activism.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda: An emerging platform for migrant and refugee activism

The adoption of Resolution 1325 precipitated the construction of new alliances between local, national, and international women's civil society organizations on the one hand, and state institutions like the UN, the European Union, and national governments on the other hand (Pratt 2013, 779). WPS is therefore usefully understood as a transnational security assemblage: a constellation of 'global and local, public and private security agents and normativities' that 'interact, cooperate and compete to produce new institutions, practices, and forms of security governance' (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009, 3; see also Lopez and Martin de Almagro, this issue). The concept of assemblage emphasizes how, thanks to the effects of globalization and neoliberal policies, 'security governance is increasingly beyond the state' and 'entwined with a broader rearticulation of public-private and global-local relations' (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009, 3). WPS exemplifies this well, as local and transnational women's organizations were instrumental in shaping and implementing the agenda alongside states and international organizations.

The WPS agenda distinguishes itself from other well-known security assemblages in that it allows *women* to inform and re-construct local, national, and transnational security knowledge (McLeod 2012; Lopidia & Hall 2020). Prior to Resolution 1325, transnational legal and policy

frameworks on women and conflict framed women as vulnerable victims of war. When addressing the plight of women during and after war, the UN, nation-states, and humanitarian actors commonly used the phrase 'women and children', suggesting that women are as vulnerable and helpless as children (Enloe 2014, 1). This remains particularly common for women from the Global South whom colonial administrations and development agencies have often (albeit selectively) constructed as in need of saving (Mohanty 1988). By contrast, the WPS agenda promotes a more complex understanding of conflict-affected women, commonly articulated around different 'pillars': 1) the *participation* of women in all security initiatives, 2) the *protection* of women's rights during and after conflict, 3) the gender-sensitive *prevention* of armed conflict, and 4) gender-responsive *relief and recovery* efforts (Kirby and Shepherd 2016, 249). The emphasis on women's participation has offered women's organizations worldwide a resource to leverage their way to the tables where decisions on security, peace, and armed conflict are taken. In this process, their knowledge, objectives, and normativities have often clashed, but also merged, with those of traditional security governance institutions (Otto 2012; Reeves 2012).

One under-documented impact of this evolution is the rising influence of women refugee and migrant activists in high-level security forums. Resolution 1325 and related advocacy and scholarship converge on the recommendation that women civil society representatives should be involved in the development and implementation of policy related to gender and security. In Europe, this created opportunities for migrant and refugee associations to shape and implement WPS policy at the national level (Kühhas and Möller 2020). For instance, the Dutch organization Globally Connected, which supports resettled Syrians, and the Austria-based Afghan cultural association *Afghanische Kultur, Integration und Solidarität* have both participated in the

implementation WPS policy in Europe (The Netherlands, 2011, 37; Kühhas and Moehler 2020). This development is significant because legal norms, government policy, and media narratives have long portrayed refugee women as passive, voiceless, and lacking agency (Freedman 2008; Hall 2018, 4; Gray & Frank 2019, 283; Holvikivi & Reeves 2020). The more complex understanding of conflict-affected women popularized by WPS, as deserving of participation in the democratic process, created an opening for women migrant and refugee activists to cast themselves as worthy participants in policy-making and holders of valuable security knowledge.

In examining the influence of refugee and migrant women on security governance, we contribute to a body of scholarship that examines refugee and migrant women's creativity, agency, and activism (Rygiel 2011; Bilgic & Gkouti 2021). Although displaced women experience violence and hardship, limiting attention to the trauma that predates or follows displacement essentializes displaced people as passive and in need of paternalistic attention (Randall et al. 2020). We favor instead an approach that highlights women who flee violence by migrating as agentic actors. By definition, refugee women challenge oppressive structures through bodily performance. The act of fleeing or migrating is itself agentic. It is also political, as Nadine El-Enany (2020, 225) has shown, insofar as flight is a refusal of the untenable circumstances that the refugee faced in the country they departed. In the case of refugees who flee to Europe, migration is also a form of resistance against the coloniality of Europe's bordering practices. It manifests a 'politics of migration' against a 'politics of control' (Squire 2011, 9-13).

We conceptualize agency as the capacity to reflect on and respond to one's circumstances under oppressive conditions. We do not suggest a romanticized notion of free will or a liberal fantasy of refugee and other migrant women as atomistic individuals exercising rational choice unencumbered by circumstance. Instead, we understand women's agency as a response to

structures and practices of oppression, exclusion, or marginalization that make activism necessary in the first place and constrain it (Mahmood 2005; Madhok 2013). From these starting points, we broaden existing understandings of the agency and political impact of migrant women activists by exploring their influence on official security knowledge in their host societies and international forums.

Since some WPS activists identify as migrants and others as refugees, we strive to be faithful to those modes of self-presentation. In policy and media discourse, these labels sometimes serve to cast refugees as more deserving than 'economic' migrants. However, treating refugees and migrants as a hierarchical binary disregards how migration, even when it does not meet the legal criteria for asylum, often results from colonialism, economic dispossession, environmental degradation, and/or wars and covert operations initiated by Western states. Upholding a strict distinction between migrant and refugee therefore 'reinforc[es] rather than challeng[es] the legitimacy of the colonial state' (El-Enany 2020, 223; see also Green & Grewcock 2002, 88). For this reason, we trace the work of migrant and refugee activists as a collective.

Much like refugee/migrant, 'woman' is a contested and shifting category that nonetheless remains politically significant for migration activists concerned with how displaced persons who are identified as women and girls experience gendered threats to their security. Women and girls are at higher risk to suffer sexual exploitation, assault, and harassment at the hands of smugglers, border guards, reception center volunteers, and fellow displaced people (Freedman 2016). Partly owing to this gendered violence, displaced women are also more likely to require specific forms of care, such as access to abortion and contraception. In response to these gender-mediated violations and needs, some refugee and migrant women activists organize *as women* into

associations through which they educate, sensitize, and advise officials on ways to prevent and respond to gender-based violence experienced before, during, and after displacement.

Gender-based insecurities and obstacles are also significant for trans* refugees (Luibhéid, Eithne and Karma 2020). For instance, trans* women experience distinctive threats when border guards fail to recognize their legal gender identity and segregate them in spaces reserved for men (Tondo 2022). Displaced trans* people are similarly at risk of struggling to access appropriate healthcare during their displacement journeys. While the organizations that achieved prominence within WPS typically center their advocacy around the rights and needs of cis-women, maintaining an open approach to the category 'women' that is inclusive of the concerns of trans* women is politically and analytically important. After all, a common factor producing all of these insecurities is the normative regulation of masculinities and femininities.

Our analysis focuses on women activists who have migrated from the Middle East or Africa to resettle in Europe and use WPS as an advocacy platform in Europe and at the UN. Our focus on women from the South and resettled in the North aims to highlight how 'Global North/Global South categories are also made and reconfigured through [transnational security] assemblages' (Lopez and Martin de Almagro, this issue). We trouble the tendency, in WPS policy, to figure the Global North as the producer and exporter of peace and gender equality, and the Global South as the locus of conflict and the target of intervention (Pratt 2013; Shepherd 2016). Focusing on refugee and migrant women's activism from *within* and *targeted at* European states renders visible the long-standing presence of conflict-affected women in Europe, and displaces the established notion that beneficiaries of WPS policy are always in the Global South (Holvikivi & Reeves 2020).

Our analysis draws from the public record of migrant and refugee women's organizations based in Europe who have used WPS to promote the protection and democratic inclusion of refugees and other migrants. Methodologically, we focus on two organizations: AkiDwA and Women Refugee Route. We selected these NGOs for closer examination due to their high visibility at the intersection of migrant and refugee rights and WPS, as well as their differing strategies. AkiDwA is active at the national level in Ireland, where it successfully influenced the government's policy on WPS. Women Refugee Route is headquartered in Denmark, but 'advocate[s] for the rights and the voices of refugee and forcibly displaced women across regional, national and international forums' (2021). In both cases, a considerable record of documentation is available in English, the largest we could find among migrant activist organizations related to the WPS agenda and based in Europe. As we examined these two organizations, we remained attentive to migration activism in WPS in Europe writ large and found interesting comparative examples in Finland, the UK, and Germany. We briefly discuss these examples to explain how and to what extent the two NGOs discussed here inscribe themselves in broader trends of WPS advocacy. Our primary sources include NGOs' websites and social media profiles; media articles on activists; government sources (especially national WPS policies); UN documents; and first-hand accounts of WPS advocacy, including those recounted in the scholarly literature.

As we examine this record, we first pay attention to the links between activism and policy discourse transformation. We document NGOs' recommendations, their interactions with government and UN officials, and subsequent governmental policy and statements in order to establish whether and how security elites take onboard the activists' recommendations. Second, we analyze the terms on which these women make themselves legible to structures of power and the constraints that inform their formulation of political demands. We consider the self-

presentation of leading activists and compare this to failed, dissonant, or unruly WPS and migration activism which we trace in WPS scholarship and social media activism. Comparing the two, we analyze how governmental and UN frameworks enable *some* displaced women and *some* advocacy priorities to influence security policy, while excluding others.

Influencing national policy on WPS

The association AkiDwA, based in Ireland, boasts a uniquely long and successful record of migration activism through WPS policy in Europe. AkiDwA, which means sisterhood in Swahili, was founded by Salome Mbugua who remains at the helm of the organization to this day. Born in Kenya, Mbugua worked from 1992 to 1996 as a social worker for the Undugu Society of Kenya, a non-profit organization through which she worked with homeless girls and sex workers (Mbugua 2022). Over the same period, she completed a diploma in Development Studies at Kimmage Manor in Ireland, where she eventually resettled permanently, obtaining an MA in Equality Studies at University City Dublin in 2001. The same year, Mbugua established AkiDwA to 'promote equality and justice for all migrant women living in Ireland' (AkiDwA 2022). In 2010, she and fellow AkiDwA member Ncube Nobuhle joined the group of civil society representatives assembled to inform the development of Ireland's first National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS (Republic of Ireland 2011, 30). Mbugua continued to advise the government as it formulated its second NAP (Republic of Ireland 2015, 22). In 2018, the parliament of Ireland nominated Mbugua as the independent chair of the Working Group for the Development of the third NAP. In this capacity, she presided over the work of government officials, civil society representatives, and independent experts (Republic of Ireland 2019, 47) - an unusually high position of influence in security policymaking for a migrant woman in Europe.

AkiDwA's first and foremost impact on WPS policy in Ireland is the conceptualization of WPS as relevant to women affected by conflict *in* Ireland, not only overseas. AkiDwA's role in instigating a domestically-oriented WPS policy goes back to 2008, when its members attended a conference organized by the Irish Joint Consortium on Gender-Based Violence. The conference report recommended that Ireland's first NAP on WPS 'should be applied domestically in Ireland as well as overseas' (Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence 2008, 7-8). Elaborating on this point, it referenced gendered insecurities faced by women refugees in Ireland. For instance, the report asked whether Ireland is 'comfortable with deporting refugees even if the women are vulnerable to FGM [female genital mutilation]' (Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence 2008, 8). Two years later, AkiDwA co-signed another report, which similarly enjoined the Irish government to address the needs of migrant women from conflict-affected countries living in Ireland as part of its emerging WPS policy.

These appeals around FGM and other insecurities faced by refugee women and girls in Europe were long-standing campaign themes for AkiDwA, but innovations for WPS advocacy. At the time, UN-level discussions had not stretched to refugee rights in Europe. The UN Security Council resolutions on WPS held stipulations regarding refugee women living in camps adjacent to active conflict zones, but not regarding women relocated in countries nominally at peace. By contrast, the NGO report co-signed by AkiDwA encouraged the Irish government to advocate nationally and internationally for Resolution 1325 to be 'operationalised to benefit women asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from countries affected by conflict *in whatever jurisdiction they reside*' (AkiDwA et al. 2010, 12, emphasis added). The mention of refugee women's rights away from conflict zones in these early advocacy efforts, and particularly references to FGM, testifies of AkiDwA's early influence on WPS advocacy in Ireland.

The government of Ireland heeded these recommendations by framing WPS as applicable to the country's domestic affairs, including policy affecting migrant women from conflict-affected areas. This stance is unusual for a Global North country, where governments typically see WPS as a foreign aid framework designed to protect and empower women affected by conflict overseas (Shepherd 2016; Holvikivi and Reeves 2020). Ireland's three NAPs do not quite escape this tendency, as they emphasize Ireland's commitment to international security and development. Simultaneously, Irish officials positioned their WPS policy as 'advanc[ing] understanding of the obligations of UNSCR 1325 and other UN resolutions on WPS, to include references to migrant women and girls, including asylum seekers, affected by conflict', including those residing in Ireland (Republic of Ireland 2011, 14). The NAP affirmed that the WPS framework 'involves a duty of care towards migrant women and children, including refugees, affected by conflict *wherever they may reside*' (2011, 5, emphasis added). These statements redeployed, almost word for word, recommendations made by AkiDwA and others the previous year.

All three NAPs primarily frame this duty of care as a responsibility for the Irish state to *protect* migrant women affected by conflict and residing in Ireland. Commitments include making services available to women experiencing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland, including FGM, better known and more accessible to migrant communities; fostering best policing practices toward migrant women; supporting NGOs such as AkiDwA who document the experiences of displaced women and girls in Ireland; and streamlining application procedures for settlement in Ireland (Republic of Ireland 2011, 11-12; 2015, 11). These policy measures bear the mark of AkiDwA's advocacy, delivered through Mbugua's continued involvement on the

civil society consultative group, and AkiDwA members' attendance of a workshop at the Department of Foreign Affairs during which they advised officials (AkiDwA 2014).

Another effect of AkiDwA's influence concerns the reframing of migrant women as deserving of democratic *participation*. In 2010, AkiDwA and others called attention to the right of 'women refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who have come to Ireland from conflict-affected countries … to inform and shape an effective National Action Plan' (AkiDwA et al 2010, 5). The government answered this call by inviting AkiDwA members on its consultative group. However, the reframing of refugee and migrant women as political actors in WPS policy only occurred in Ireland's third NAP (Republic of Ireland 2019). During the months leading up to its adoption, AkiDwA made Ireland's WPS policy a strategic priority (AkiDwA 2019, 8). In a document submitted to the government, the NGO reiterated:

> The social, cultural, economic, civic and political prosperity of migrant women in Ireland is intrinsically linked to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda of *empowering women as full societal participants, leaders and decision-makers*. Therefore, empowering migrant women within these spheres at a domestic level and addressing the barriers they face ought to be prioritised within Ireland's third National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (AkiDwA 2018, 1, emphasis added).

Alongside war-related trauma, economic insecurity due to racism, and gender-based violence, AkiDwA identified a lack of civic representation as a security concern for migrant women. Relatedly, it recommended increasing empowerment opportunities for women refugees and supporting women's organizations who engage in peace and security initiatives in both Ireland and conflict zones overseas.

Encouragingly, the third Irish NAP reflects these recommendations. More specifically, it pledges to support the empowerment of refugee and other migrant women living in Ireland and their meaningful participation in decision-making (2019, 17, 34). In this document, Ireland innovated (in Europe) by casting refugee and other migrant women affected by conflict as deserving of political inclusion and consultation. At the time, the eight other European states who addressed domestic refugees in their WPS policy framed them as objects of state protection, and not participation (Holvikivi and Reeves 2020). By contrast, Ireland's third NAP recognizes that conflict-affected women living in Ireland are 'agents of change' and 'a key source of knowledge in understanding conflict prevention and fragile states' (2019, 17). The same page of the document features a photo of Mbugua speaking at a Public Consultation Workshop at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2019, 17). This juxtaposition underscores, in visual terms, AkiDwA's role in recasting refugee and migrant women as deserving participants in security governance.

Hegemonic listening and the shape of engagement around national WPS policy

The progressive integration of migrant and refugee women's rights in Ireland's WPS policy has not yet been matched in most European countries, which raises the question of why Ireland stands out in this respect. On the one hand, the strength and vigor of AkiDwA as an organization partly explains its unusual success. After all, it is 'one of only a few such networks in Europe' (AkiDwA 2019, 4). On the other hand, even where other strong networks exist, the integration of refugee and migrant women's rights in WPS policy has been inconsistent. Germany provides a good example. Its second NAP on WPS reflected a close engagement with DaMigra, a dynamic organization for women with migrant and refugee backgrounds with a prominent record of activism at the federal level. Like AkiDwA, DaMigra (2022) 'deliberately distances itself from

the one-sided portrait of migrant and refugee women as victims in the media' and insists on its members' capacity to influence political and legal structures. Relatedly, Germany's second NAP committed to 'strengthening female migrants and displaced women' and ensuring 'the visibility of women migrants' concerns in policy and the public sphere' (2016, 17). Unfortunately, Germany did not renew this commitment in its latest NAP, which covers the period 2021-24. The latter only mentions women refugees as objects of protection (2021, 46). The German example suggests that strong migration activism does not, alone, lead to the mainstreaming of migration concerns in WPS policy. State agents must also be receptive to the activists' intervention. Policymakers can ignore activists' requests if state priorities dictate otherwise, despite the existence of strong migrant networks.

How, then, do we explain that some governments, like Ireland, are more receptive to the integration of migrant and refugee women living in Europe in their WPS policy? In the case of Ireland, policymakers' understanding of the island of Ireland as a conflict-affected space, in relation to the history of conflict in Northern Ireland, played a role. When Ireland's WPS policy was still emergent, Irish NGOs argued that 'women's diverse experiences of conflict in Northern Ireland' made it imperative that Resolution 1325 be implemented in Ireland itself and not only overseas (AkiDwA et al. 2010, 5). The government embraced this approach in its first NAP. This willingness to openly recognize the continuing effects of violent conflict within Ireland and at its borders was instrumental in challenging the notion that WPS should only be directed at interventions in the Global South. This recognition that 'indigenous' conflict-affected women existed in Ireland and were legitimate beneficiaries of WPS policy created discursive space to also consider refugee and other migrant women who had experienced conflict abroad and were now living in Ireland.

By contrast, the UK government has been consistently reluctant to address the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland in WPS policy. UK-based civil society organizations repeatedly face the objection, on the part of the government, that the UK's WPS policy is focused overseas (UK Academic consultation 2017; Holvikivi & Reeves 2020, 143). The UK's refusal to acknowledge recent instances of armed conflict within its own borders has correlated with a reluctance to integrate questions of forced migration to and in the UK in its WPS policy. The UK government did consult with advocates of refugee rights among other civil society representatives in the formulation of its latest NAP. However, the NAP remains silent on the violence faced by conflict-affected women living at and within the UK's borders (Kirby et al. 2022, 25-7). This suggests that the UK activists' requests were not taken into account.

Even states that are open to addressing refugee rights in their WPS policy engage selectively with civil society actors, and limit the forms and content of engagement. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the case of Finland. In 2016-17, during the consultative meetings on the development of Finland's third NAP, the consultants hired by the government to lead the meetings were uninterested in discussing the political visions underlying the country's WPS policy, including those surrounding migration and racial equality. Instead, they asked participants to develop activities and outputs for WPS policy objectives deemed more consensual. After initial consultations, government officials engaged only a small group of civil society representatives, excluding those who had raised critical voices in the early meetings (Lyytikäinen & Jauhola 2020). The Finnish case illustrates how WPS national policy-making is selective. In this case, consideration for 'injustices that cannot be framed in the language of consensus and results' were left out (Lyytikäinen & Jauhola 2022, 89). Thus, even when migration-related requests make it in WPS policy, they are framed in policy language acceptable

to the state. Typically, this entails the declination of technocratic, state-centered objectives (such as the streamlining of asylum application procedures, successfully advocated by AkiDwA in Ireland) as opposed to structural critiques of broader problems like institutional racism.

In sum, the contrasts between the Irish, German, UK and Finnish examples illustrate that states integrate migration and refugee activism in national WPS policy to various extents based on states' evolving priorities and understanding of appropriate modes of dialogue with non-state actors. Relatedly, although AkiDwA's skilled advocacy work succeeded in getting the Irish state to take responsibility for domestic obligations in its WPS policy, civil society representatives in other countries achieved more uneven results. The struggles faced by these other activists remind us that when migrant activists attempt to influence established security institutions, their speech is constrained by what hegemonic actors are willing to hear, and who they are willing to recognise as having knowledge relevant to their vision of WPS. These conditions align with what Nikita Dhawan (2012) characterizes as 'hegemonic listening'. The conditions of hegemonic listening vary from state to state, affecting how and to what extent migrant women's advocacy vis-à-vis state institutions is integrated in WPS policy and state priorities.

Advocacy in international security forums

Refugee women achieved recognition as subjects of security policy at the UN, the bedrock of WPS, when Mina Jaf offered her perspective as a refugee activist resettled in Denmark to the Security Council in 2017. This opportunity arose as transnational WPS activism at the UN momentarily coincided with the global 'refugee crisis' provoked by the intensification of wars in Syria and other parts of the Middle East and Africa, forcing many to seek refuge in Europe. Jaf had founded Women Refugee Route in Denmark in 2015, and extended its services to hotspots

of the European refugee route in Belgium and Greece. Meanwhile, the refugee crisis was widely considered an ongoing security emergency in Europe, but governments had yet to recognize women refugees as authoritative figures who could help devise solutions to this emergency. The Security Council debate enabled Jaf to cast herself and other refugee women as authoritative holders of security knowledge in front of diplomats, UN officials, and transnational civil society advocates.

Jaf was well-placed to break stereotypes of refugee women as helpless victims, having built Women Refugee Route around the commitment to promote refugee women as political actors entitled to participate in democratic processes. The organization's motto, 'from displacement to decision-making', encapsulates this objective. Its goal is to 'change the system of decision-making policies for migration laws through the inclusion of women in displacement themselves' (Women Refugee Route 2021). To this effect, the organization offers training programs for displaced women and workshops for practitioners of refugee reception and protection. Its aim is to 'start a positive cycle in which women in displacement are no longer simply considered recipients of support but actors of change' (Women Refuge Route 2021).

WPS provided an institutional framework for Jaf to enact and affirm the authority of refugee women as capable security agents before high-level state representatives from around the world. This opportunity arose when Jaf was selected to speak at the Security Council by the NGO Working Group on WPS. This collective of transnational civil society organizations has been instrumental in devising Resolution 1325 and establishing annual debates on WPS-related themes at the Security Council where prominent women activists address the Council, thus providing diplomats and UN leaders with perspectives from women's rights advocates (Allen

2018). In this context, Jaf addressed the world's most high-profile multilateral security forum, speaking for herself and the communities she represented.

Jaf's speech presented her simultaneously as a victim displaced by war *and* a knowledgeable authority on security, forced migration, and gender. She introduced herself as a refugee born during chemical attacks in Kurdistan, but also as the feminist founder and director of Women Refugee Route. Jaf's display of security expertise entailed detailed testimonies of her recent and extensive interactions with women displaced by wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq who have suffered rape, domestic violence, or forced marriage during the conflict or in displacement, and/or have been forced to trade sex for passage or essential goods. Jaf presented herself as a direct eye-witness to refugee reception structures that fail these women by denying reliable access to reproductive healthcare, secure sleeping and sanitary facilities, and women support workers. By relaying these stories, Jaf established herself, a former refugee girl, as an authority on displacement, gender, and security.

From this authoritative stance, Jaf argued for policies that better address the concerns of women and girls displaced by conflict. First, under the participation pillar of WPS, she argued that refugee women should 'be part of the decision making on providing safe environments and work opportunities' for displaced people (NGO Working Group 2017). She asked government representatives and UN agencies to design refugee frameworks that 'promote gender equality and women and girls' empowerment … and support women's organizations working on the front lines' (NGO Working Group 2017). Second, with regard to protection, she requested improved access to asylum for all refugees, and a gender-responsive approach to refugee reception (NGO Working Group 2017). Finally, in relation to prevention, she emphasized the need for gender-

sensitive training and programming and implementation of regulations to curb the transnational flow of small arms that fuels armed conflict worldwide (NGO Working Group 2017).

Jaf's address at the Security Council constituted a political intervention, in that her statement normalized the consultation of women refugees in international debate and policy-making around security. Jaf's presence at the Security Council built on the efforts that the NGO Working Group had deployed since the 1990s to include conflict-affected women in high-security forums (Allen 2018), particularly the Security Council. Of the women activists invited to address the Council on behalf of the NGO Working Group, Jaf was the first to introduce herself *as a refugee*. The norm, up to this point, had been to highlight the activists' ongoing attachment to their country of origin. By contrast, Jaf explicitly embodied refugeeness, thus providing tangible proof that women displaced by conflict hold complex knowledge of their own situation, use this knowledge to alleviate some of the violence wrought by displacement, and are worthy of inclusion in high-level security forums.

In addition, Jaf's speech supported the integration of conflict-induced migration *to the Global North* as a legitimate concern of WPS activism and policy. Forced displacement had typically not been prominently featured in NGO Working Group statements at the Security Council. A first step in this sense occurred in 2014 when Iraqi activist Suaad Allami addressed the Council on conflict-related displacement (Holvikivi & Reeves 2020). However, Allami primarily drew on her work with women displaced within and around Iraq. By contrast, Jaf 'sp[oke] for and represent[ed] those currently finding themselves on the same refugee route [she] once experienced' (Women Refugee Route 2021) - a route to Europe. In so doing, she altered established notions of where conflict-affected women are located and, relatedly, where WPS policies should be directed.

Jaf's address at the Security Council propelled her to an unprecedented level of international visibility. She later intervened at public meetings organized by the International Organization for Migration in New York (United Nations 2017; Nikolau 2017); the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva (UNHCR 2018); and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development annual forum in Paris (OECD 2018). She also received the Women of Europe and Voice of Courage awards in 2017. In 2018, Forbes named her 'one of the most influential European activists under 30' (2018).

This international influence facilitated by the WPS assemblage is noteworthy because, like many refugee women and girls, Jaf's life started in the position of the subaltern. Both Mbugua and Jaf are subaltern in that their roots in the Global South, racialized identities, and gender cast them as the Other, the one 'whose identity is its difference', and whose knowledge, voice, and worldview are silenced and erased, if not vilified by those in centers of power, including high-ranking government and UN officials (Spivak 1999, 40). For such subaltern women, their influence on hegemonic security knowledge is unlikely if not impossible, to the extent that Gayatri Spivak famously questioned: 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1999, 37). However, to the extent that the subaltern refers to 'men and women among the illiterate peasantry, Aboriginals, and the lowest strata of the urban proletariat' relegated to the periphery of the international system (Spivak 2010 [1999], 37), Mbugua less easily qualifies, given her relatively privileged position and access to formal education that set her up to complete a PhD in Ireland. Jaf, by contrast, grew up in itinerance and did not access formal education before age 14 (Young Feminist Europe 2019).

And yet, through an unlikely path, Jaf accessed resources through which she extracted herself from the subaltern position. As a teenage refugee in the Danish school system, Jaf experienced racism and language barriers, which nourished her passion for sports - the one school subject that

did not require advanced literacy or mastery of Danish (Young Feminist Europe 2019). Jaf pursued a certificate in sports education in 2013-14, hoping to support other refugee girls through sports, while remaining active in civil society networks. In 2014, during an internship with UNICEF as a fieldwork project coordinator in Iraq, Jaf impressed her supervisors by organizing soccer tournaments for refugee girls, and was soon invited to work on women's empowerment programs. When she founded Women Refugee Route in 2015, Jaf became 'a line of communication between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality' (Spivak 1999, 65). Through such lines of communication, 'the subaltern [is] inserted into the long road to hegemony', an outcome which, we agree with Spivak, 'is absolutely to be desired' (1999, 65).

Refugee and migrant women's access to high-level transnational forums that produce security knowledge is normatively desirable because, as feminist security scholars have long argued, an inclusive conception of security should attend to violence against women and counter the stigma imposed around sexual and other gender-based violence by patriarchal structures. Subaltern women marginalized by poverty, structural violence, illiteracy, and forced displacement have often struggled to influence hegemonic understandings of security due to lack of resources and recognition (Hansen 2000). For someone like Jaf to access the Security Council and other high-level international fora is therefore an unlikely event. This evolution creates space for policies and discourses more cognizant of and empathetic towards displaced women's needs and democratic rights.

Appropriate speakers and modes of speech at the UN Security Council

As with WPS consultations held by national governments, institutional norms govern who can speak at the Security Council under the umbrella of WPS, and what activists can say. Jaf's opportunity to express herself was contingent on her willingness to respect established norms of conversation between NGOs, the UN, and Council members. Her intervention reveals how, although progressive, the WPS agenda reinscribes global hierarchies that limit the reach of refugee activism within it.

First, the norms and expectations of the UN Security Council constrain which civil society speakers are invited and what position they speak from. Since 2000, the NGO Working Group has invited women's rights activists who emphasize their origins in Global South countries understood by Council members as conflict-affected. Activists have routinely presented themselves as originally from and continuously attached to a conflict zone, even when they also had lived outside their country of origins (cook 2016; Holvikivi & Reeves 2020, 137). Exclusively choosing women framed as coming from and living in the Global South to embody conflict-affectedness at the Security Council problematically reproduced the understanding that violent conflict only happens in the South (Pratt 2013; Haastrup and Hagen 2021; Henry 2021). Norms surrounding activists' interventions at the Security Council, however, evolve over time. By becoming the first conflict-affected woman to address the Council while emphasizing her location in the North, Jaf marked a productive departure from repeated representations of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as the natural targets of WPS policy.

Second, unwritten rules regulate what activists can say. Activists are expected to retain a hopeful discourse emphasizing the possibility of the UN and member states facilitating peace and solutions to conflict (Gibbings 2011). They must also avoid blaming or shaming particular states,

especially members of the Security Council (Gibbings 2011). These expectations were exposed in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. In a meeting organized by the NGO Working Group in October 2003, two women's rights activists from Iraq, Amal Al-Khedairy and Nermin Al Mufti, addressed Security Council members in a critical manner. They 'voiced their opposition to the [US] occupation [of Iraq…,] spoke in nationalist terms, condemned the invasion by the USA and the UK as imperialist and criticized the UN for its lack of support', thereby upsetting US and other representatives (Gibbings 2011, 524). After the meeting, members of the NGO Working Group concluded that 'next time more briefing and background research were needed before organizing a meeting with officials' or the NGO Working Group would risk 'being dismissed entirely' (Gibbings 2011, 525). Since then, civil society speakers have adopted a mode of engagement that emphasizes personal stories and hopeful dispositions toward member states. The NGO Working Group attempts to contest these norms, not always successfully (Allen 2018).

Jaf's activism on social media suggests that her speech may have been different if it were not for the UN's diplomatic norms. In February 2022, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine which led millions of Ukrainian refugees to flee toward the European Union, Jaf criticized European politicians and journalists for their hateful remarks regarding refugees and migrants from the Global South. On Twitter, Jaf called out the racialized hierarchies that depict Ukrainian asylum seekers as more deserving than refugees from the Global South, particularly Muslims. Her intervention echoed anti-racist critiques of media and state discourse that casts blonde, blue-eyed Ukrainian refugees as deserving more sympathy because 'they look just like us' (Bayoumi 2022). She used the hashtags #WhiteSupremacy, #racism and #HateSpeech, and addressed a direct reproach addressed to European politicians and media figures, departing from the

consensual language of UN diplomacy that carefully avoids assignation of blame on states. The contrast between her tweet and her UN speech reveals that the hegemonic norms of listening that delimit what diplomats are willing to hear at the Security Council also applies to migration-related topics.

Like Jaf, many migrant and refugee activists are more critical of state practices when expressing themselves beyond the remit of WPS. Following Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine, African students who struggled to escape Ukraine denounced on social media the racialized logics of border control in Europe that compounded the insecurity the war brought upon them (Akinyemi 2022). Also in 2022, a journalist exposed the EU border agency Frontex for perpetrating human rights violations against asylum seekers in Greece and Hungary (Rankin 2022). Similarly, critical migration scholars challenge the violent, racializing effects of the current border regime and the fortressing of Europe and highlight global extractivism and imperialist interventions as causal factors in the displacement and insecurity of millions of women (Squire 2011; El-Enany 2020; Bilgic & Gkouti 2021). Such critiques are more contentious, bypassing the cooperative and diplomatic language common in WPS in favor of calling for accountability. They do not currently feature in NGO's public-facing advocacy within the WPS agenda or its take-up by state institutions, as they fall outside the respectability politics of WPS, where instead, migration activism focuses on developing the state's role as protector and encouraging the participation of women in state policymaking.

Third and finally, the Security Council expects women to become involved in peace and security activities as conventionally feminine agents of peace. Jaf followed this convention by presenting herself and other conflict-affected women and girls as victims of war and/or service providers and support workers. This contrasts with how the UN routinely invites men to peace talks

because they have been involved in the perpetration of violence. In sustaining double standards, the UN and the WPS assemblage cultivate essentialized notions of manhood as naturally and legitimately aggressive, and womanhood as naturally peaceful. We should not be surprised that, as Mina Jaf recounts her story, her persona is the epitome of the peaceful and innocent civilian victim of war: a baby girl fleeing a chemical attack in her mother's arms. Precisely because Jaf is easily portrayed as an innocent victim of war who became a caregiver for fellow women and girls, she can be invited in this high-level security forum.

In sum, at the same time as it challenges the agent/victim binary by showcasing refugee women who are successful activists, the WPS framework limits notions of acceptable agency for displaced women. As Saba Mahmood (2005) notes, feminists in the Global North who strive to enhance women's agency in contexts of oppression often prioritise recognition for women's actions that forward Westernized accounts of agency. And yet, as Mahmood underscores, a recognition of women's agency cannot be restricted to a particular political purpose, such as preventing sexual violence in refugee centers. Rather, women may exercise agency in ways that do not always align with liberal Western feminist political projects. A fuller recognition of displaced women's agency in the WPS agenda would therefore recognize refugee and migrant women who do not fit feminine ideals of peacefulness, but also those who may have been perpetrators of violence or who engage in more combative and militant forms of political action.

Conclusion: (Beyond?) The constraints of WPS

What emerges from our documentation of refugee women's advocacy around the WPS agenda is an account of migrant and refugee agency that operates within constraints. This article has traced the trajectory of women migrant and refugee activists who have become recognized by European

state institutions and international organizations as valuable interlocutors in the field of security governance. WPS, we argue, works as a transnational security assemblage that has enabled these activists to produce security knowledge and influence policy-making, defying stereotypes of refugees as voiceless or passive. This is a positive development.

As we traced the journey through which some migrant and refugee women become recognized by hegemonic institutions and make themselves intelligible to security elites, we interrogated the constraints that frame these journeys. We found that the rules of collaboration with states and the Security Council authorize some forms of migrant activism and security knowledge while precluding others. Consequently, displaced women's organizations' ability and willingness to play by the norms of WPS shape opportunities for access and influence available to them. These rules favor women who embody peaceful femininity as opposed to angry or queer gender performances, and utter positive and hopeful statements as opposed to critical ones. The WPS agenda thus simultaneously (and contradictorily) advocates for gender justice and peace while cultivating conservative assumptions about the nature of women in security governance. The emancipatory potential of the WPS agenda for conflict-affected women in general, and refugees and migrants in particular, is therefore limited.

Our examination of migrant and refugee women activists who re-shape prevailing security regimes through WPS thus called attention to the silences produced within this assemblage. The discursive rules of WPS are complex and punishing to those who do not abide. Therefore, they are most often mastered by well-organized and highly professionalized NGOs. However, many women fleeing war advocate for themselves outside such formal and organized channels, and express themselves in alternative forums, including on social media and scholarly publications.

These less regulated interventions give a sense of what WPS activists might say if the knowledge-producing norms of this security assemblage were more flexible or open-ended.

These critical manifestations of displaced women's advocacy speak directly to gendered experiences of (in)security and are thus relevant to the WPS agenda, even as they are actively silenced by it. This renders the agenda of limited value for many women involved in migration activism. This exclusion is nonetheless not surprising, as it mirrors WPS' generally state-centric framework, already criticized by other scholars. For instance, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (2017) argues that while WPS policy supports women's participation in conflict resolution, it typically only recognizes participation in state-sanctioned formal peace processes. Our analysis points to a related process of exclusion for migration activists. The interests of hegemonic states limit the integration of displaced women's knowledges within the WPS agenda. At the same time, we found examples of activist breakthroughs, as in the case of AkiDwA's successful efforts in Ireland. This suggests that WPS is not a uniform space, but a complex, contested, and fluctuating one that affords openings for migration activism in some places while closing them in others.

This double recognition leaves WPS scholars and advocates committed to taking seriously gendered experiences of displacement and (in)security with a host of questions and dilemmas. As WPS evolves, the hopes we can invest in it are limited by the constant negotiation with state actors and international organizations that constrain activists' agency. At the same time, the agenda offers opportunities for emancipation, and its contours are constantly evolving, which is cause for hope. This is the foundational and structuring tension of the agenda itself.[2] However, there may come a time where disinvestment from this limiting framework is necessary, if its

[2] We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for helping us articulate this conclusion.

constraints cannot be productively challenged in a timely manner. It remains imperative not to limit feminist political imaginaries to the contours of WPS, but rather to keep learning from and with forms of unruly activism that do not fit the mould of the agenda. For those of us invested in this type of advocacy, the way forward lies in ensuring that we continue to interrogate where exclusions lie, and center the experiences of those multiply marginalized by structures of power.

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