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Title: Saving the Women of Congo: The Intersection of Neoliberal Helping and Gendered Security

Coffee, handbags, luxury clothing and walk/run-a-thons. In the field of gender and security, advocacy for survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict now extends to "helping" actions as part of a growing repertoire for transnational advocacy. This paper takes up different modes of "helping" around the issue of SGBV to show how these initiatives impart ideas about women, empowerment, and violence. The questions we pose are: To what extent do neoliberal practices of "helping" transform the issue of SGBV in Congo into a politicized space for transnational advocacy? In the Northern context, how are female consumers targeted and empowered to take on a role in addressing security in Congo? In the Southern context, which beneficiaries are helped and with what interventions to address SGBV? We argue that the application of a gendered security lens to both Northern and Southern contexts represented in "helping" initiatives will reveal limits and opportunities of gender roles, political opportunities, and protection. Using three case studies, we investigate the intended benefactors, the beneficiaries, and proposed solution. While we find that for the most part, these modes of "helping" women in Congo reinforce gender stereotypes, dehistorise violence in both North and South contexts, and valorize individualized and private solutions to conflict, some move beyond superficial engagement to challenge our assumptions around depolitisation, collective action, and possibilities for affecting structural changes. These findings deepen our understanding of the nature (and limits) of transnational advocacy by showing how, in the absence of political opportunities, "helping" initiatives become vehicles for NGOs and well-meaning individuals to mobilize issue publics, generate funds, and grow programming in new ways. It is important to keep in mind that such initiatives may impart problematic representations of the Global South and embody neoliberal trends in peace and conflict.