



Mobilising for gender equality in (post)conflict Democratic Republic of Congo

The case of the Rien Sans Les Femmes movement.

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Abstract

Over the last few years, there has been a proliferation of different kinds of movements across the globe as citizens agitate for economic, socio-political and environmental change. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the country has been involved in a series of wars, attention has rather been eschewed towards the rape and sexual violence of women and girls. Using post-colonialism and social movement theories, this research aimed to contribute towards a nuanced understanding of how these Congolese women, who have been disproportionately affected by war, directly or indirectly, are exercising their agency and challenging gender inequality. The research interrogated and explored the efforts of the Rien Sans Les Femmes (RSLF) movement in response to the inequality faced by women in DRC. Through a qualitative case study approach, based on online interviews with seven female activists who are part of the Rien Sans Les Femmes movement, an ally of the movement and a representative from the partner organisations supporting the movement, the research looked at how the RSLF movement is mobilizing for gender equality in the DRC. Findings revealed that despite limited funding and backlash, activists are using their collective experience of war to push for women's political participation in decision making positions. The research recommended that the movement should explore opportunities that contribute towards the wellness and security of activists in light of the repressive environment, and also, that more scholarly work should be done on the contribution of activists in the diaspora to the work of their home movements.

Key words: DRC, post-colonial feminism, social movement, RSLF, mobilizing.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and to all women's human rights activists at the frontlines.

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I would like to extend my gratitude to the nine participants who dedicated their time to share their knowledge, experiences and ideas towards this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

AFEM	Association des Femmes des Medias
BBC	The British Broadcasting Corporation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COMEN	Congolese Men Engage
CSW	Commission of the Status of Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DYJEF	Dynamique de la Jeunesse Féminine
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LWI	Liberian Women's initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSM	New Social Movements
RSLF	Rien Sans Les Femmes
RMT	Resource Mobilization Theory
SADC	The Southern Development Community
SOFEPADI	Female Solidarity for Integrated Peace and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defenders

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a proliferation of different kinds of movements across the globe as citizens agitate for economic, socio-political and environmental change. From the global #metoo movement to #endrapeculture in South Africa, women have also claimed and maintained political spaces. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congolese women¹ activists met in 2015 to start the movement Rien Sans Les Femmes (RSLF) [Nothing without Women]. The movement has positioned itself to advance the rights of women and girls, in a country that has been described as the “most dangerous place to be as a woman” (Wallström, 2011), and named “rape capital of the world” (Kristof, 2008).

The situation of women and girls in DRC can be linked to the country’s colonial history. Ndaliko (2016) traces the history of Congo² from 1884 when the country was seized by King Leopold II of Belgium through to colonisation by Belgium, to the dictatorial regime under Mobutu Sese Seko to present-day Congo. King Leopold II established the most profitable colony on the African continent based on a militarized system through the exploitation of the Congolese population and the country’s vast resources, then rubber and ivory. This exploitation cost Congo the lives of more than ten million people, leaving a legacy of terror and social fragmentation that still lingers in present-day DRC (Ndaliko, 2016, p. 13).

Although Congo became independent from Belgium in 1960, this was followed by thirty-two years of dictatorship by President Mobutu Sese Seko, then subsequent wars which then led to the collapse of the economy, service provision and administration. The genocide in neighbouring country Rwanda, in 1994, also had an impact on the conflict in Congo. Martens (2019) states that the wars that followed the genocide, known as the First (1996-1997) and Second Congo War (1998-2002) caused massive displacement and included brutal rapes committed by all parties involved. Many foreign players took part in the civil wars and Congo’s neighbouring countries funded or sent armed factions to take up control of some of those mineral resources to sell to European, Americans, and Chinese companies. In turn, these

¹ Following the work of Mohanty (2003) who warns against homogenizing Third-world women, I draw on Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) concept of strategic essentialism to emphasize on their (Congolese women’s) collective history and experiences.

² This thesis uses the terms Congo and DRC interchangeably to refer to the location of this study, as these are acceptable terms for naming the country currently. However, it is important to note that the names were used separately during the political eras.

minerals would be used for gadgets such as smartphones, laptops among other things (Lwambo, 2013).

Millions of Congolese died and thousands of women and girls were raped with impunity (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2013; Baaz & Stern, 2013). Although the war was officially declared over in 2003, the situation is described as neither peace nor war (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2017). Global Fund for Women (n.d) asserts that sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war³ to control, humiliate, and intimidate⁴ millions of women and girls. In addition to the sexual violence committed by armed groups, the prevalence of civilian perpetrated rape is also high (Kvinna till Kvinna, *ibid*).

As a result of the conflict, gender inequality persists in DRC. Congo has a constitution supporting gender equality yet the current statistics from UNDP (2019) on gender inequality in DRC show that the Gender Development Index is 0.844, which means that women's human development is about 84% of that of men. According to traditional gender norms, men must have power to subject others and are regarded as *de facto* heads of households. Politically, women occupy 7.2% of positions at the highest level of decision making at a national level in the parliament and government (UNWomen, 2012) due to the belief that politics is for men. Yet, the constitution of Congo, through articles 5, 14 and 15, provides a legal basis for equality and equity policies. DRC has also signed and ratified different regional and international protocols promoting gender equality. Among these are the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Maputo Protocol (2003), SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008, 2013), and the country is currently working towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

1.1 Research Problem and Research Aims

As a result of the war, much of the existing research on DRC has largely focused on rape and sexual violence and general effects of the conflict (Ohambe et al 2004, BBC, 2013; Baaz & Stern, 2013). Documentaries and news reports alike have focused on the most sensational

³ Based on interviews with victims and perpetrators and an analysis of 3000 files relating to cases of rape and sexual violence in the eastern region of Congo Ohambe et al. (2004), identified four types of rape; individual rape, gang rape, rape where victims were forced to rape each other, and rape involving the inserting of objects into the women's genitals. See also Baaz et al. (2010); Baaz and Stern (2011).

⁴ Although I have already outlined in the introduction, the horrific characteristics and the impact of the war that has taken place in the eastern part of DRC, I reference it here to make it clear how it has affected the economic and socio-political lives of the Congolese people and interventions thereafter.

aspects of the conflict, such as victims and perpetrators of rape, forced conscription of child soldiers, and the greater ethos of terror (Ndaliko, 2016). In the same vein, Martens (2019) also critiques the use of propaganda statistics to ‘convince the international community, like a merchant trying to sell his products (merchandise)... ‘15,000 women raped per month!’, ‘every hour 48 women are raped!’.

Scholars like Ndaliko (2016) have argued that such a narrative of rape has relegated the Congolese into a state of victimhood. Instead, Ndaliko (2016, p. 245) contends that “it is high time to balance labels of magnitude ‘the rape capital of the world’ with concrete snapshots of what local populations are doing about their situations”. In the same vein, without denying the occurrence of rape and sexual violence, Congolese women activists do not see themselves as victims, rather they argue that they are risking their lives by trying to change the country from within (Bihamba in *The Guardian*, October 2017). In light of this, they have organized themselves under the RSLF movement, a movement comprising women human rights defenders and activists from different parts of Congo to challenge the status quo.

Hence, the overarching goal of this research is to contribute towards a nuanced understanding of how these women, who have been disproportionately affected by war directly or indirectly are exercising their agency and challenging gender inequality, through the use of feminist post-colonialism and social movement lenses.

Through a qualitative case study approach based on online interviews with seven female activists who are part of the RSLF movement, an ally of the movement and a representative from the partner organisations supporting the movement, this research aims to interrogate and explore the efforts of the RSLF movement in response to the inequality faced by women in DRC.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

With the above aims in mind, this research asks the overarching research question;

How is the RSLF movement mobilising to redress gender inequality in (post)conflict DRC?

To operationalise mobilization, the following sub-questions were addressed:

- i. Why was the RSLF movement formed and what led Congolese activists to join the RSLF movement?

- ii. What resources does the movement have access to, and how do they contribute to the movement's mobilization efforts?
- iii. What opportunities exist to (en)/(dis)able the movement to carry out its mandate?

Delimitations

The scope of the study was confined to the mobilization efforts of the RSLF movement to challenge gender inequalities in DRC. The study was not intended to study the impact of the movement as this would require a different research aim.

1.3 Motivation of Study (Relevance)

This research finds inspiration from an encounter with the documentary film “Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo”⁵ (2008) which I watched in 2008 and used as an advocacy tool against sexual abuse of women in my country Zimbabwe. Since this encounter a decade ago, one of the questions that has plagued my mind is, “what are the women doing about their situation?” I imagined how the women could move on with their lives after such horrific experiences. The interest grew even stronger after watching the film “City of Joy”⁶ in Lund, Sweden, during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in 2018. An encounter with “City of Joy” in 2018, gave me a glimpse of the women's agency. The film enlightened me on how the women are reshaping their trajectory, contrary to the single story or narrative of them being seemingly ‘docile and hopeless’ rape survivors. Thus, I decided to undertake research on the RSLF movement.

This study is located within the fields of Gender and Sociology. By situating the collective action and experiences of Congolese women at the centre of analysis, the research adds a gender dimension, and Global South perspective to the study of social movements.

⁵ “Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo” is a documentary film produced in 2008 by American Filmmaker Lisa Jackson that portrays the lived experiences of Congolese women in the eastern part of Congo between the 1996 and the time the film was produced. The film portrays the devastating effects of war on the bodies of women and girls, the damage to families, to their communities.

⁶ “City of Joy” is a film centred around the experiences of Congolese women as they turn their pain into power and find healing from the experiences. Produced in 2016, it premiered on Netflix in September 2018.

1.4 Definition of Terms

- **Mobilization**

Borrowing from Tilly and Tarrow (2004), throughout this thesis the term “mobilization” is used to refer to the process by which a movement uses available resources to make its claims. The resources are diverse and include “energy, ideas, practices and material objects” (p. 24). On the other hand, when such resources are not available, “demobilization” (Tilly and Tarrow, 2004) becomes almost inevitable.

- **Women’s movement**

Women’s movement is defined by Gaidzanwa (2006) as “a social movement⁷ constituting women who collectively decide to further interests specific to women, using perspectives that draw from and highlight their lived experiences” (p. 8). From this definition, women’s movements are rooted in collective agency and driven by a passion to challenge inequalities the women have experienced or could still be exposed to.

- **Gender equality**

Equal access to equal opportunities and equal rights, regardless of gender, is at the heart of efforts to bring about gender equality in communities and society broadly. According to the United Nations (2020), gender equality is not a women's issue, but is a societal concern that should fully engage all genders.

Disposition

This thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter one outlines the introduction to the study, the research problem, relevance of the study as well as the aim of the study, research questions and historical background of DRC. Chapter two gives a presentation of previous research focusing on social movements in Africa, women’s movements in Africa and ends by looking at relevant research on DRC specifically. Chapter three introduces the theoretical framework which is a combination of social movement theories and the feminist post-colonial perspectives, while chapter four discusses the material and methods used in this study. Chapters five through to seven present the findings and discussion of the study. Chapter five begins by describing the movement then analyses the frames through which the movement mobilizes and lastly collective identity. Chapter six

⁷ A definition of social movement is found in the theoretical section of this thesis.

analyses how the movement mobilizes resources to drive its agenda forward while chapter seven looks at what opportunities the movement perceives and the challenges thereof in carrying out its mandate. Finally, in chapter eight concluding remarks are made.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents the previous literature that laid the foundation for this research. It reviews the already existing literature that I found to be of relevance in terms of context, target group, methodology, and theoretical approaches applicable to this thesis. The literature was found via Lund University Library, Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO, Feminist Africa, using the key words, “Post-conflict social movements”, “African (women’s) movements”, “gender movements”, “women’s movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo”. I further narrowed my search by looking for “Rien sans les Femmes” and “Nothing without women movement”.

2.1 Social Movements in Africa

The last few years have witnessed burgeoning scholarly works on social movements in the global South and in particular Africa (van Kessel, 2009b; Larmer 2010; de Waal & Ibreck, 2013; Mueller 2018; Engels & Müller 2019). Some of these studies focus on the applicability of social movement theory on movements in the global South. In their article, “Northern Theories, Southern Movements? Contentious politics in Africa through the lens of Social Movement Theory”, Engels & Müller (2019) examine the applicability of social movement theories by analysing movements in sub-Saharan Africa. They do this by examining the social movement theories of resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, framing, and collective identity, to find out how suitable these are for explaining empirical phenomena in Africa. While they conclude that movements in Africa are not different from those in the Global North, they note the importance of analysing the influences of international organisations on local movements. They use the case study of Burkina Faso to argue this to be a characteristic feature of movements in Africa.

Miles Larmer (2010), in his article “Social Movement Struggles in Africa” states that movements should be studied within their context paying attention to nuances within the movement, and the connection between the movement and the broader political and historical context. He argues that social movements in Africa are inevitably hybrid in nature, meaning that the movements utilise and adapt Western ideas, funding, forms of organising and methods of activism. As such, the study concluded that when analysing social movements in Africa, studies should examine inequalities and power relations between Western agencies and African social movements as there is financial dependence on donors. Ellis and van Kessel (2009b) also emphasise that financial dependence on external donors whether directly or indirectly via

local Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), is a characteristic feature of many social movements in Africa.

Related to the notion of African movements being hybrid in nature, Alex de Waal and Rachel Ibreck (2013) in “Hybrid Social Movements in Africa”, also focused on the character of organisations and their hybrid nature. Drawing upon examples from sub-Saharan Africa and the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, they documented that most movements are a blend of formal and informal institutions and that mostly depend on external support and interventions, and above all, they are prone to political violence. Hence, they argue for the need to contextualize the meaning of social movements in Africa. The article concludes by recommending movement leaders to understand and analyse the peculiarities of their context and not just import models for mobilization from other contexts. Another recommendation made in the article is that in the African context, political action should be understood as encompassing a plethora of actions, from uprisings to non-violent acts such as decision making.

Although none of the studies discussed above focus on the DRC in particular, the studies offer useful insights on how to approach research on social movements in Africa. They emphasize on the need to pay attention to the particularities of the context in which the movement is mobilizing in, the power relations as a result of external support, the political climate which can hinder or rather mute dissenting voices, and the need for movement leaders to use models that work in their context.

2.2 Women’s movements in Africa

Scholarship on women’s movements in Africa has in the last two decades focused on contributions, achievements and failures of the movements (Gouws and Coetzee, 2019). In their book “African Women’s Movements: Changing Political Landscapes” (2009), activist scholars Aili Mari Tripp, Isabel Casimiro, Joy C. Kwesiga and Alice Mungwa examine the significant role of African women in politics before and during colonialism, and after independence. Using a mix of tools such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus groups, media reports and pamphlets, they study the rise of “new women’s movements” that differ from the early period of postcolonial women’s organising. The authors show that the early movements were closely associated with the State and the ruling party while the new

movements have their own agendas, leadership and funding. These new movements focus on campaigns for women's leadership skills, involvement in policy making and women's political participation through demands for quotas.

In "Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa", Kathleen Fallon (2008) analyses the role played by women's advocacy groups in championing the transition to democracy in formerly autocratic states. Using Ghana as a case study, she investigated the specific processes used by women to bring about political change. She found that the strength of the movements stems from long-standing histories of their political activism. Women brought in their past experiences of organizing into current activism. However, Fallon also outlines two main obstacles to women's mobilization for democracy in the African context. These are the exclusion of women from political institutions which is a result of their exclusion during the colonial times, and second, most movements are co-opted by the state.

Press (2010) has examined the case of the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) which was founded in response to the delay of peace negotiations in Liberia in 1994. She discusses some of the repertoires of action that the movement used such as rallies, protests, vigils and sit-ins. Their strategies included impromptu meetings with delegates who were in most cases men in hallways, using the media for visibility and on one occasion blocking them into a room to encourage them to reach an agreement. Whilst the movement was started by urban women, it expanded to include women from different socio-economic backgrounds. As a result of this inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds, Press (ibid) argues that the Liberian women were able to influence the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003. Kaufman (2011), in her study of the West Point women's group in Liberia, also concurs that it was through a shared identity of direct and indirect experience of war that this particular group of women was able to mobilize support.

Clare Castillejo who has researched extensively on women's activism in post-conflict Sierra Leone observes that the voice of the rural women is important in mobilising against injustice (Castillejo, 2008). Documenting the experiences of rural women who were displaced from their rural homes to the Liberian capital, Freetown, she highlights that once the women became aware of their rights, they became aware of their autonomy and began to talk about gender equality in their home communities. She argues that without awareness of rights, women in the rural areas will not be able to perceive injustice, hence, they will not be able to join collective action.

In line with Fallon (2008), Joyce Kaufman and Kristen Williams (2010) in “Women and War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict”, observed that the entrenched patriarchal nature of political systems can prevent women from engaging in formal political processes. Writing from a feminist international relations perspective, they explore the roles that women play before, during, and after a conflict. With South Africa as one of their case study countries, they note that when women emphasise their traditional roles of motherhood during the conflict, society is not threatened. However, they also show that once the conflict is over, patriarchal societies may not be willing to accept changing gender roles. Similarly, Castillejo (2009) observes a similar trend in Sierra Leone where it is acceptable for women to carry out their activism within the civil society spaces but once they venture into state politics, they face repression.

2.2.1 Mapping the challenges faced by women’s movements in Africa

In “Post-conflict Women’s Movements in Turmoil: The Challenges of Success in Liberia in the 2005-aftermath”, Debusscher and Martin de Almagro (2016) study the fall of the once successful movement in Liberia which led to the signing of peace agreements and the election of Africa's first female president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (during the years 2006-2018). In this article, they make four claims as part of their enquiry. First, they argue that there is lack of unity among the women’s organisations; second, they argue that the national government has tried to co-opt the movement into its structures; third, lack of funding and support from international partners; and fourth, the failure of the movement to redefine itself by sticking to peacemaking yet there are new issues that confront the country and women’s agency.

Activist scholars Awino Okech, Hope Chigudu, Katrina Anderson, Soledad Quintana are more concerned about how most governments in Africa have increasingly become repressive so as to silence any dissenting voices. In “Feminist Resistance and Resilience: Reflections on Closing Civic Space” (2017), they illuminate the challenges that women human rights defenders are facing in these states. They state, for example, self-censorship due to fear, loss of leadership as some activists might be forced into exile, decrease in financial support due to funding restrictions from the government, decreased space for strategizing and, trauma and burnout (Okech et al, *ibid*). Similarly, in “Gender, Protests and Political Change in Africa” edited by Awino Okech (2020), focusing on six countries, the authors also show how the state counteracts dissenting voices. Using an interdisciplinary approach, they draw on specific political moments in their respective countries to also show that citizens are coming up with

innovative ways of contesting the state such as online activism, artivism (use of art as a form of activism). The contributors show that as much as social movements know what they are making claims against, it is equally important for the movements to centre demands around the change they want to see. Okech (2020) concludes by saying that failure to have such clear demands by movements has led to failure of movements in some countries.

In a recent study, “Assessment of the Women’s Movement in Africa (1980-2018)” Brian Kagoro and Lucia Makamure (2019) analysed 26 country reports covering the five regions of Africa namely, Central, Eastern, North, Southern and West. Using a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data, from scholarly articles to in-depth interviews to focus group discussions with over 200 women, they found similar challenges to the ones covered by all the studies above. However, they went on to recommend that movements need to mentor young activists as a matter of urgency. Using the case of Sierra Leone in particular, they showed that young women activists are sometimes inclusively excluded by the very movements in which they belong to. They also recommended for movements to thrive, they need to be sustainable and avoid “NGOization” which is when a movement pays allegiance to donors and loses connection with its constituency.

Two important themes emerge from these studies discussed so far on women’s movements within the African context. The first theme is the repressive nature of the state and the second is women’s political agency. These studies show that no matter how repressive governments maybe, activists will always find a way of bolstering their activism and emboldening their voices. These studies mostly use case studies of women’s movements and although multi-disciplinary in approach, they put the experiences of women activists at the centre.

2.3 Women’s movements in DRC

There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with the women’s movement in DRC and RSLF in particular. Most studies on DRC have focused on rape and sexual violence (Ohambe et al, 2004; Snow, 2013; Baaz & Stern, 2013). It is only recently that a few studies are emerging on what locals are doing to challenge the status quo. In *Necessary Noise, Music, Film, and Charitable Imperialism in the East of Congo* (2016), scholar and activist Cherie Rivers Ndaliko, examines the uneasy balance of accomplishing change through art against the

unsteady background of civil war. While the book is an ethnography of Yole! Africa, a Congolese arts organisation, the author intentionally dedicates the chapter “Jazz Mamas” to illustrate that despite experiences of war, Congolese women are raising awareness against injustices they face through the use of music and film. Although these women were not organised as a movement, the value of Ndaliko’s work to this present thesis is its applied postcolonial lens that locates the agency of local women in confronting the challenges they face. These local women are from the eastern Congo, the very location where RSLF was formed.

In her pioneering study of the RSLF movement in DRC, Mario Martin de Almagro (2018), documents that although women in the DRC have experienced rampant abuse and violence, they are creatively and innovatively working on promoting women’s participation in the country’s elections. Drawing on previous research and interviews with 13 women and observation of an advocacy campaign in electoral law conducted by the movement in May 2017 in Kinshasa (DRC), she illustrates that Congolese women have participated in peace negotiations and have managed to secure constitutional change. Through the concept of “hybrid clubs”, Martin de Almagro (2018) demonstrates how coalitions between locals and international partners can lead to meaningful peacebuilding initiatives. While Martin de Almagro’s (2018) work focuses specifically on the campaign in 2017, the present study seeks to understand the movement’s mobilization efforts, challenges and opportunities since its formation in 2015.

From the above, it can be noted that very little research has been directed towards the RSLF movement in particular and Congolese women’s agency in general, which therefore justifies the need for this study. This thesis, therefore, addresses the experiences of Congolese women activists and their efforts in trying to change the status quo, so far lacking in the scientific literature. The succeeding chapter discusses the theory and conceptual framework of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As indicated earlier, the overarching question for this study is, “How is the RSLF movement mobilising to redress gender inequality in (post)conflict DRC?” To address this question, this study is guided by two theoretical frameworks, the social movement theory and post-colonial feminism. Social movement theory provides an insight into the mechanisms and the processes the RSLF movement uses for collective action, while post-colonial feminism helps in understanding the significance of their activism within their context.

3.1. Social Movement Theory

3.1.1 Defining social movements

In order to situate this thesis within the social movement theoretical framework, it is important to first define what a social movement is. According to Della Porta and Diani (1999, p. 14-15), “social movements may be defined as informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest”. When looking at informal networks, Della Porta and Diani (2006) stress that social movements are fluid and any individual can join regardless of whether they belong to an organization or not. On shared beliefs and solidarity, a social movement exists when participants perceive a shared sense of collective identity. Within the context of social movements, collective identity refers to a shared sense of ‘we-ness’ that is characterised by common traits and shared solidarity and is negotiated over time (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Another aspect of Della Porta and Diani’s (ibid) definition is mobilization around conflictual issues, wherein a movement defines an ‘other’ to whom they will make their claims to or make their demand for rights. Furthermore, once the activists have come together, located the issues they want to mobilize around, they engage in protests which can either be violent or non-violent. Therefore, social movements have different “repertoires of action”, a term coined by one of the doyens of social movements, American Sociologist Charles Tilly (1986) which refers to a “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals” (Tilly cited in Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 168). Examples of “repertoires of action” include but are not limited to petitions, marches, sit-ins and boycotts.

Another simple definition which summarises the above is that proffered by Tilly and Tarrow (2015), which sees social movements as “sustained campaigns of claim-making, using repeated

performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities” (p.237).

Having defined social movements, this research falls within the framework of “new social movements” (NSM) which emerged after the 1960s addressing issues such as women’s liberation and environmental protection (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 6). NSM promote the rights of groups that have been historically excluded from social participation. The RSLF movement is located within this definition, as the movement is making claims to address inequalities faced by women in DRC. Mostly, what is new about new social movements is that the notion of social movement is being applied to identities that have until now been unrepresented in social movement studies. Unlike traditional movements, the NSMs tend to coalesce around identity, not social class. Accordingly, the identity is not necessarily based on traits such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, but it is rather about shared orientations, values, attitudes, world views, lifestyles, as well as a shared experience of action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). While the current study is located within the NSM paradigm, I draw my analysis from a combination of theories that belong to traditional movements and those belonging to the NSM tradition. Hence, in the following sections, I discuss resource mobilization, attribution of opportunity, framing and collective identity and their relevance to the current study.

3.1.2 Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization theory (RMT) developed from studies of collective action in the 1960s and gained prominence during the 1970s and 1980s. While it is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the history and development of RMT, it is important to highlight that the theory was introduced at a time when social movements were conceptualized as irrational and reactive to social happenings (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Proponents of RMT such as McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) viewed movement actors as rational and movements were seen as part of the normal political process (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 14).

The theory argues that the success of social movements depends on resources such as time, money, skills, and the ability of the movement to use these resources. According to Edwards and McCarthy (2004), there are five types of resources that are available to social movement organisations. These are moral (such as solidarity support), cultural, socio-organisational, material (includes both financial and physical) as well as human. Diani (2000, p. 392) also

distinguishes between organizations mobilising mostly “participatory resources” (activists’ time, commitment and creativity) and those mobilising mainly “professional resources” (predominantly donations of money from supporters, used to enact campaigns). In the current study, a focus on resources helps in establishing what kind of resources the RSLF movement possesses and how the movement is utilizing these resources to advance the status of Congolese women in DRC. Given that RMT also locates resources for mobilization within the larger society, including governmental and religious institutions, the analysis section will try to make sense of how this kind of support enables or disables the work of RSLF.

While resources are in and of themselves important to movements, McCarthy and Zald (1977) also emphasize the importance of a mastermind who can put the resources into efficient use. In addition, while earlier theories of collective action paid attention to grievances as the main motivation behind the growth and mobilization of movements, RMT posits that no matter how strong shared beliefs for grievances are, movements cannot grow on these beliefs alone.

3.1.3 Attribution of opportunity and threats

As a critique to the “resource mobilization theory”, movement scholars argued that resources alone cannot explain political protest (Elsinger; 1973, Tilly 1978; McAdam, 1982; Meyer, 2004, Tarrow, 1983). Rather, they proposed the term “political opportunities” (to generally refer to the world outside a social movement, and used the concept to examine how that context influences the politics within a movement and the interaction of a movement within the world around it (Meyer 2004). This approach argues that social movement actors look to the political climate for a cue on when to mobilize, and on what issues (Tarrow, 1998).

According to McAdam et al (2001), “no opportunity, however, objectively open, will invite mobilization unless (a) it is visible to potential challengers and (b) perceived as opportunity” (p.23). Hence, “attribution of opportunity and threats” focuses on the agency and the capacity of the movement rather than the structural factors. This approach helps in understanding, on one hand, the opportunities that exist to enable the movement to mobilize for social change, while on the other hand, it brings to bear the threats activists encounter in their mobilization efforts. The approach also helps in understanding why the movement is mobilizing at the time it has chosen, what opportunities the movement actors have perceived and/ or what threats they have identified that act as a hindrance to their mobilization.

Hence, for this study, while it is important to consider the political context in which the RSLF movement is operating in, and also trying to influence, it is equally important to understand what the activists themselves perceive to be opportunities and threats. This will assist in understanding how the movement forms strategic alliances, and how it also deals with backlash and repression.

3.1.4 Framing Processes

While theories stated above focus on the means by which social movements mobilize, the framing perspective pays attention to the meaning which social movement actors attach to their mobilization efforts. Hence, framing entails agency in the sense that it helps us in understanding how the movement actors make sense of their social world. The framing perspective borrows from Erving Goffman's (1974) book "Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience" and has been fundamentally shaped by contributions of David Snow, Robert Benford et al (1986), and Snow and Benford (1988, 1992). Snow and Benford (1988) analyse mobilization as a three-step process that involves "diagnostic framing", "prognostic framing" and "motivational framing". "Diagnostic framing" identifies the problem that the movement wants to respond to. For collective action to occur, movement actors must first perceive an injustice. "Prognostic framing", offers a solution to the identified problem and states how this solution will be implemented. Lastly, "motivational framing", is a call to action for new actors to join the movement. Hence, in this thesis, framing allows us to see what the RSLF movement actors perceive as injustice, the solutions they propose and how the movement is mobilising to recruit new members and allies.

3.1.5 Collective identity

In order to understand what brings the activists together in the first place, this thesis will also draw on the analytical approach of collective identity. Sociologists Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as "...an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation" (285). Furthermore, they aver that identities do not "form fixed categories like race, class, gender, or nation, but form common positions in networks," (2001, p. 288). Another important dimension of collective identity is through a definition proffered by Feminist

Sociologists Whittier and Taylor, who define it as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences and solidarity” (1992, p. 105). It does not depend on location.

Collective identity helps in understanding the internal processes that define the RSLF movement, as it “determines the criteria by which members recognize themselves and are recognized” Melucci (1996, p.32). There needs to be a sense of “we” which is characterised by similar traits and a shared solidarity (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 94).

Through the above definitions, collective identity is seen as both a process that leads to the formation of a movement, and an outcome of the movement. Thus, for this thesis, collective identity will provide a lens through which to look at the trajectories that bring activists to the movement and what they construct as their mobilizing identities.

3.2 Post-colonialism

Post-colonial theory broadly explores the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. Post-colonial feminism, in particular, explores in different contexts, women’s lives, work, identity, sexuality, and rights in the light of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities (Lewis & Mills, 2003). Post-colonial feminist theory conceptualises the struggle of ‘third world women’ in terms of firstly, the exploitation they endure at the hands of the colonial system, secondly the oppression they endure at the hands of patriarchy, and thirdly the misrepresentations they are subjected to by Western feminists who purport to speak on their behalf. A post-colonial feminist perspective in this thesis helps in attaching meaning to the frames that RSLF uses, the relationship the movement has with its donors, and how the movement actors navigate political opportunities within the context of DRC.

3.2.1 Spivak and the politics of representation

In her seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988), Gayatri Spivak distinguishes between two kinds of representation, “*vertretung*” where women are being “spoken for”, from “*darstellung*” which refers to how the women are portrayed. Through the “*vertreten-darstellen*” kinds of representation, Spivak argues that the subaltern, in this case, the Congolese

women cannot speak as their voices have been silenced by the twin legacies of colonialism/imperialism and patriarchy. Thus, Spivak's lens of representation helps in laying the background to the formation of the movement and what frames RSLF uses to mobilize and why.

3.2.2 Mohanty and the homogenous third world woman

In her article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1986, 2003), Mohanty opposes how Western feminism wrote about Third World women as a singular monolithic subject. She criticizes "Eurocentric" feminism for homogenizing and systematizing the experiences of different groups of women in other cultures, which she believes erases all marginal and resistant modes of experiences. She claims that "Third World women" are defined as victims of male violence, women as universal dependents, victims of the colonial process, victims of the familial systems, victims of development processes, and victims of religious ideologies (Mohanty, 2003). The analysis section of this thesis highlights some of these claims and shows how the activists are working to deconstruct the stereotypes.

3.2.3 Nego-feminism

Propounded by Obioma Nnaemeka (1999, 2004), nego-feminism defined as negotiated feminism or "no ego" feminism, holds the view that women negotiate their position in society. Nnaemeka (1999) argues that feminist engagement in Africa focuses on collaboration, negotiation, and compromise which is at odds with Western feminism which seeks to challenge, disrupt, and deconstruct. While it could easily be argued that this approach endorses male hegemony and fails to dismantle patriarchy, nego-feminism also allows for a possibility to see how women can overturn male dominance (through listening to their experiences) in their quest to achieving gender equality (Onabolu, n.d).

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodological choices of this thesis, including the research epistemological foundation, research design, data sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as my position as a researcher and limitations to the study.

4.1 Epistemological foundation

This study makes use of the social constructivist worldview. The epistemological foundation informing this study is feminist epistemology. The feminist epistemology is grounded on the notion that “knowledge is situated” (Haraway, 1988) and that research should start from the lived experiences of the marginalised. Haraway stresses that partial and embodied vision is the way forward for feminist scholars as she states that, “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge ...” (Haraway 1988, p.583). Her argument is that feminist accounts of the world should come from a specific place, from a specific body that sees something and not everything. Contrary to the ‘universal’ depiction (Mohanty, 2003) of Congolese women as ‘passive’ and ‘docile bodies’, standpoint calls for the inclusion of the marginalised women’s voices and lived experiences, in the narratives about DRC.

4.2 Research Design

This research is a qualitative case study based on a total of nine online⁸ in-depth interviews. The interview participants are broken down as follows, seven are female activists of the RSLF movement, one participant is an ally of the movement, and another interviewee is a consultant who represents the two International organisations (INGOs) who are partners of the movement. According to Snow and Trom (2002, p. 150), the case study research aims to produce “a holistic, that is, a richly or thickly contextualized and embedded understanding of the phenomenon or system under investigation”. Furthermore, they note that the case study allows for analysing the activities of a movement at the microlevel, meso level and at macroscopic level. In this research, the case study approach helps in analysing how at micro level the movement recruits its members, the relationship between movement organisations at meso-level and at macro level, the movement within the political and social structures. Moreover, as the overarching aim of this study is to understand how the RSLF movement is mobilising to

⁸ Ideally, going to DRC would have been the best option but given security issues, what seemed feasible was conducting online interviews with activists who are part of the RSLF movement.

challenge gender inequality in DRC, a case study allows us to understand what messages and claims they formulate, what strategies they formulate, what repertoires of action they use and why these are important in their specific context. Hence, a case study design was chosen as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the experiences that these activists have gone through and the meanings they attach to them.

4.3 Sampling

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling. According to O'Reilly (2008), purposive sampling also known as judgmental sampling, relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units. Purposive sampling allowed me to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest to the study. Participants of this study are collective actors of the RSLF movement who identify as women human rights defenders, gender activists, peace activists as well as INGO funding partners. All participants have been part of the movement in one way or the other.

4.4 Data Collection

I used both primary and secondary sources to collect data. Primary data was collected through in-depth qualitative interviews with participants in line with the research aims and questions. Drawing on the works of Becker (1998, p. 91) who warns against the 'hierarchy of credibility' and argues for the need to 'doubt everything anyone in power tells us', I triangulated interview data with documentary sources. Using documents as secondary sources was essential for corroborating and augmenting evidence from the interviews (Yin, 2014).

4.4.1 Interviews

As Della Porta (2014) states in her book on research methods for social movements, "Qualitative in-depth interviews have been very often used in social movement studies, where they not only provide a way of overcoming the limited information contained in written sources but, especially, answer central questions on the microdynamics of alternative forms of political participation." (p. 32). Following this tradition, I conducted a total of nine interviews, seven of the interviewees were female activists, while one was an ally of the movement and another a partner of the movement. The "ally" is a male activist whose organization is part of the movement while the "partner" represents an international organization that considers itself a partner to the movement.

I contacted potential participants via email after locating their contact details on their organization's website or social media sites and other publicly available information. With some participants where there was no contact information on their website, I was required to leave a comment hence I sent my request in this manner although none of this yielded any results.

For those that responded, I emailed them a short description of the research with the ethics consent form as suggested by Hopkins (2008, p. 40). Participants were informed that interviews would be online via Skype or WhatsApp or any application they are comfortable with. In inviting participants to participate in the study, I informed them and emphasized that they have the right to refuse to participate, withdraw or stop the interview at any point during the interview. Upon consent to be in the study, I also asked for their permission to record the interviews (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018; O'Reilly, 2009). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The initial scheduled time was up to 60 minutes, however, the nature of some interviews necessitated more time such as those with activists who are at the core of the movement in terms of the role they play. Hence, the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes.

4.4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

I used a semi-structured interview technique to establish trust between the interviewees and I, and to make them feel comfortable. Questions from my interview guide were asked in such a way that enabled the respondents to speak at length, however, I paid particular attention making sure the interviewees stayed on track and asked followed up questions when necessary (Hessebiber 2014, p. 186). Electronic interviews enabled me to have extended access to my participants and this proved to be beneficial for follow-up questioning and clarification.

I tweaked my questions according to each participant's involvement with the movement. The information sheet and interview guide are in the appendix section

Criteria for selection of participants

First, I started by conducting a background search on activists in the field and put this information together. I reviewed the RSLF website and visited websites of different movement organisations listed on the page. I checked profiles online, Facebook, websites and their speeches on YouTube. Using this information, I was able to identify those at the core of the

movement in terms of the position they hold or they have held. As a result, I had four participants fitting into this category.

Given that the movement has a national focus, participants were drawn from the eastern part of DRC (North Kivu and South Kivu provinces) and the capital city Kinshasa. Having activists from diverse backgrounds in terms of organisational focus helped not only in understanding why the participants joined the movement but how they also contribute to the movement.

Below is a list of organisations represented by my participants.

- Female Solidarity for Integrated Peace and Development (SOFEPADI)
- South Kivu Media Association (AFEM)
- Congolese Men Engage (COMEN)
- Dynamique de la jeunesse feminine (DYJEF)
- Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual
- Caucus des femmes congolaises du Sud-Kivu pour la paix (South Kivu Congolese Women's Caucus for Peace)
- Uwezo Africa Initiative
- Gender and Women's Rights Network “GEDROFE
- International Alert and Kvinna till Kvinna (*INGOs*)

To ensure confidentiality to my participants who belong to the above-mentioned organisations, I developed the codes below to identify them.

Table 1: Code names for participants.

Participants Code	Years of Activism	Area of focus	Years in the movement
Core-group, Leader 1	17	Media and advocacy on women’s rights and gender issues	Since inception
Core-group, Leader 2	20	Women’s rights and political participation in decision making	Since inception
Core-group, Leader 3	30+	Women’s rights and peace building	Since inception
Core-group, Leader 4	25	Sexual and Gender Based Violence	Since inception

Periphery, Member 1	10	Sexual and reproductive health and rights for young women and adolescent girls.	Since 2016
Periphery, Member 2	14	Women's economic justice and	Since inception
Periphery, Member 3	8	law and women's human rights	Since inception
Movement Ally	20+	Gender Justice and Peace building	Since inception, currently based outside the country
Partner	n/a		Since inception

4.4.2 Secondary Sources

Considering that case studies allow for the use of multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007; Snow & Trom, 2002, Yin, 2014), I triangulated my data with secondary sources in the form of documents about the movement, the movement's website and Facebook page. According to Snow and Trom (2002, p.151), the value of these kinds of sources is that they are based on real life settings and situations which allows for a rich and holistic understanding of the case.

Also, in order to gain insight into the context of DRC and social movements locally, regionally and globally, I started by examining grey literature. The sampled grey literature includes academic research papers, research reports, NGO publications as well as films (such as Greatest Silence Rape in the Congo, 2008; City of Joy, 2016), YouTube videos, and donor publications, websites, newspaper articles.

4.5 Data analysis

At the data analysis stage, it is important to return to the aims of the research, the research questions and the theoretical framework to better define what a researcher is hoping to find in the material and to acquire some sense of direction (Bazeley, 2013). I analysed and interpreted the generated data using a thematic analysis approach. Following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), first I familiarized myself with data, second, I generated codes [from my

research questions], third I searched for themes, reviewed the themes, defined and named the themes, and finally produced this analysis. Thus, using a deductive approach to thematic analysis, I determined anchor codes from my interview questions. I used my theoretical framework to define themes and as a guidance to make a connection between theory and data. The following themes emerged, “framing of the movement”, “collective identity”, “mobilization of resources” and “attribution of opportunities and threats”.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Diener and Grandall (1978 cited in Bryman 2016, p. 125) divide ethical principles into four main areas namely; checking whether there is “harm to participants”, “lack of informed consent”, “invasion of privacy” and “whether deception is involved”.

With this in mind, I embarked on this study quite aware that first and foremost my research could be sensitive to some participants given the context of war and rape in DRC. It was imperative for me to consider how I would frame some of my research questions before even approaching the participants. For example, to determine the motivation behind activists joining the movement, I could have simply asked participants directly if they had experienced any rape or sexual violence given the background of DRC and the narratives of rape and sexual violence. However, I instead asked them a rather open question on what led them to become activists. I found this ethically correct and in trying not to cause any harm to my interviewees, I also avoided stereotyping Congolese women as victims (Mohanty, 2003).

Given that interviews were held between March and April when the covid-19 pandemic had already started spreading in many countries, I refer to an encounter with a potential participant who works for one of the international organisations that support the movement who had initially agreed to take part in the study. When I then emailed her to confirm the interview date, she asked to have more time to make sense of what was happening and promised to call once she was ready. The call never came but I found it ethically correct to give her the time that she had asked for to deal with the situation. I also understood at that moment, that her country of origin was one of those greatly affected by the pandemic. I avoided causing emotional stress and harm to the participant. As a result of this encounter, I ensured that I started each of my interviews with check-ins just to establish that participants were in a good space to talk.

Maintaining confidentiality is another way of ensuring that there is no harm to participants (Bryman, 2012). After recording and transcribing interviews, I ensured that transcripts do not include the real names of participants. I gave each participant a pseudonym which I then changed to a code (to suit the nature of my research) during the final write up of the thesis. The copies of transcripts have been kept away in a safe place. Audio files were also saved with different names and were stored away safely.

With regards to informed consent, as already mentioned earlier, I informed my participants what my research is about and that I was carrying it out in partial fulfillment of my studies. I got verbal consent which was recorded during the interviews. I also told them that there was no funding for this study, and that participation in the study was voluntary.

4.7 Reflexivity and Positionality

O'Reilly (2009, p. 189), defines reflexivity as thinking about “what we write and how, and acknowledging that we are part of the world which we study”. Carstensen-Egwuom (2011) further emphasizes that reflexivity provides important insights into questions of positionality, identity, difference, power and inequality.

4.7.1 Insider/ Outsider status

In conducting this research, I was both an insider and outsider. My disclosed identity as a black African woman from Zimbabwe who has worked with women human rights defenders on the African continent facilitated smooth interactions with my participants. Throughout the interviews, most of my participants would refer to me as sister or “my sister” or some would say “my sister, you know” which is a shared sense of solidarity common among Africans. Being called “sister” has cultural implications, as Oyewumi (2003) illuminates, it creates a sense of community. Furthermore, from a feminist lens, it denotes a shared experience of shared oppression and common victimization (Oyewumi 2003). Given the contextual similarities and speaking the same language of activism allowed me ease of access to my participants and it was easy to establish rapport with them.

However, while on one hand this disclosure facilitated for me to easily access some participants, it equally worked to my disadvantage. For instance, I reached out to one activist through her organisational website and Facebook page. I never got any response from her, not even to acknowledge receipt of my correspondence. I then found out through a documentary they produced that they are tired of western donors and scholars who come to Congo, make

promises which they never fulfill after getting what they want. I imagined that my identity as a Lund University student could perhaps be a better explanation for this lack of feedback.

4.8 Research Validity and Reliability

As articulated by Cresswell and Cresswell (2018), validity in qualitative research is when a researcher follows certain procedures to ensure accuracy of the findings. When looking at reliability, qualitative research needs to be repeatable (Bryman, 2016, p.41). Given the limitation of qualitative research such as lack of external validity, I triangulated my research tools of interviews with secondary sources of data related to this study. I also had interactions with some of the members of the core-group where I needed clarity on certain information regarding the movement.

4.9 Limitations and weaknesses

As a researcher not speaking the local language well enough to use it in research, the interviews had to be held in English. Although English proficiency of my participants was more than sufficient, however, there could have been a language barrier in some cases, which could have affected the answers. I was able to access documents about the movement as these have been translated to English, however, for the actual website and Facebook pages of the movement, I relied on the translate functions. This conundrum was solved by having interviews as this ensured that the translated information on their websites and Facebook pages matched their narratives.

This research was carried out online due to financial and time constraints. While this turned out to be an advantage due to the covid-19 outbreak, being on the ground would have facilitated for more interviews with activists in DRC, and also doing participant observation which would have brought about some nuances which online interviews alone and online sources cannot make. However, I am also quite aware that being on the ground especially in eastern DRC where the majority of the activists interviewees are based, would not have been possible due to security reasons. This would have been possible with financial support for security.

In addition, in carrying out interviews online, some of my participants had challenges with internet connection. The first interview was held via Skype but three minutes into the interview,

we lost connection. We tried to change from video settings to audio but the connection was still poor prompting us to shift to WhatsApp. WhatsApp audio calling worked well and the ensuing interviews were done via Whatsapp.

CHAPTER 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The chapter focuses on why the movement was formed and the reasons behind the activists joining the movement. In order to understand what led activists to join the movement, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes the movement itself while the second section discusses the movement through the lens of framing and the third section analyses how RSLF mobilizes through collective identity.

5.2 Descriptive Analysis of the movement

Following the postcolonial tradition, Lamer (2010), and De Waal and Ibreck (2013) emphasize the need to understand social movements from their respective historical, cultural, and socio-political context. Thus, I begin this section by briefly outlining the history of the RSLF⁹ movement in DRC. RSLF is a movement of Congolese activists who are defending the rights of women and are advocating for their equal representation with men in decision-making bodies at all levels in the country (RSLF website, n.d). The movement was born in the eastern part of the country which is considered the hotspot of conflict, in March 2015 when leaders of 15 activist organisations met with international NGOs, Kvinna till Kvinna (a Swedish organisation) and International Alert (a British organisation). Currently, the movement has over 160 member organisations as well as individual members. Although the movement has over 160 members, it is important to highlight that some of the organizations are umbrella organizations. From the interviews, it was noted that some of the organizations are coalitions with 20 and some 43 organizations. The movement has since spread to other parts of the country as shown in figures 1 and 2.

In 2015, the movement actors were activists from two out of 26 provinces in DRC. The two provinces, North Kivu and South Kivu were the most affected by the war. When looking at the map in 2020, the movement has diffused¹⁰ to other areas. The movement is now active in 6 provinces namely Hauti- Katanga, Kasanga, the capital city Kinshasa, North Kivu, South

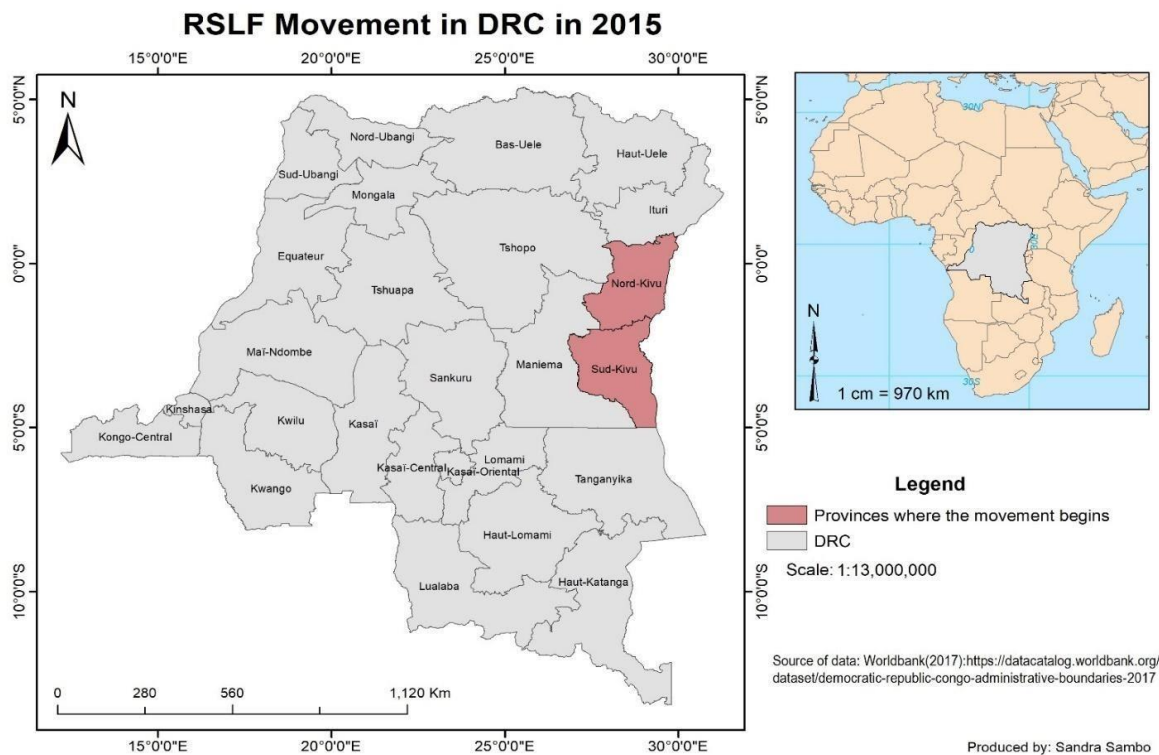
⁹ I use the abbreviation RSLF (Rien San Les Femmes) to refer to the movement, while I use the full English translation Nothing Without Women to refer to the campaign and the campaign slogan.

¹⁰ Diffusion refers to how an issue or an action spreads from one site or location to another (Tilly & Tarrow, 2005).

Kivu and Tshopo. Taken collectively, the population in these provinces adds to over 15 million of Congolese (Core-group, Leader 1).

The five provinces highlighted in yellow are new movement sites where the movement has started recruiting. Each province has a focal person who coordinates meetings with activists in her province. The movement has no leader, however, there is a spokesperson and committees focusing on fundraising, media and visibility, membership building.

Figure 1: Map showing the movement in 2015



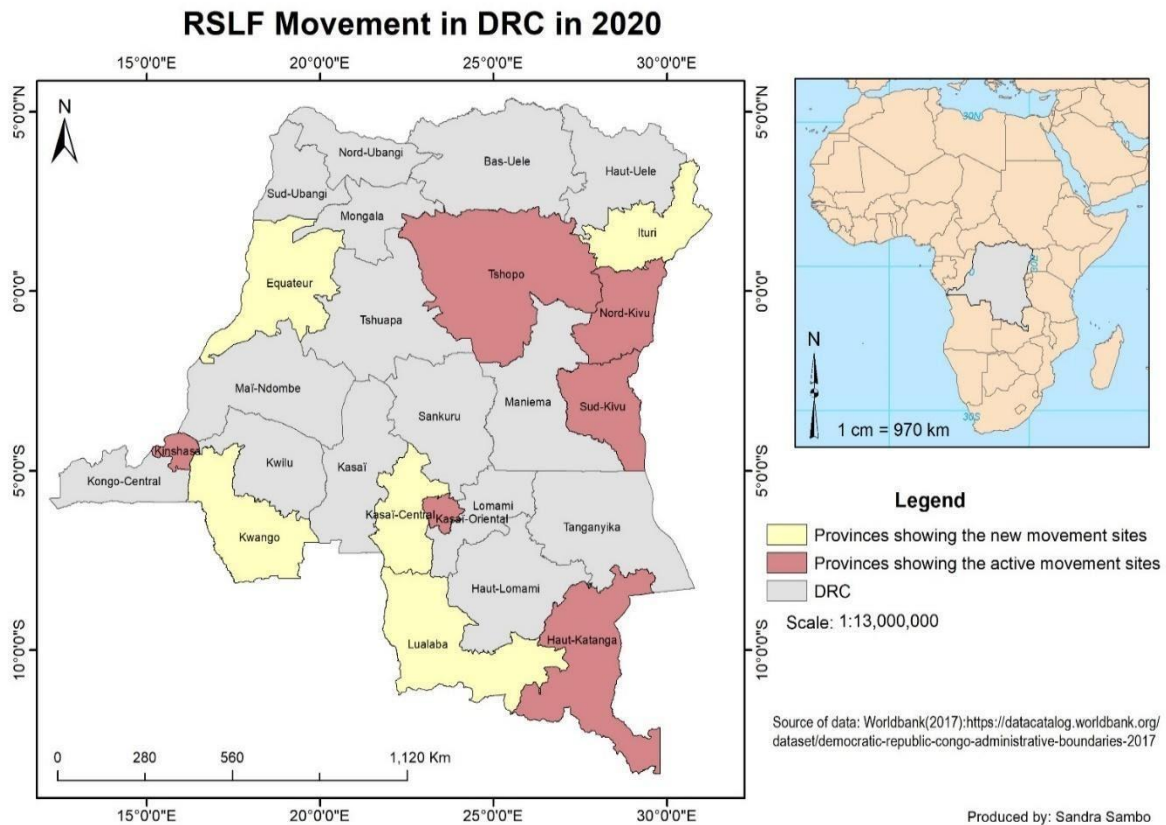


Figure 2: Map showing the movement in 2020 with new movement sites.

The movement sprung at a momentous time when the country was preparing for its third presidential elections¹¹. One of the participants who occupies a leadership position within the movement and belongs to the core group said activists perceived and leveraged on the elections to mobilize around electoral reform with the goal of pushing for parity. Hence, the movement started the RSLF campaign in 2015. RSLF primarily focuses on three areas namely, analysing laws and policies affecting women and advocating for reforms, working with political parties and decision-making structures in pushing for the appointment of women at decision making level, and expanding the movement to other parts of the country.

Thus, in order to push forward their agenda of changing the situation of women in the DRC, the movement strategically employs a wide range of tactics, which in the social movement field Charles Tilly (1986) calls “repertoires of contention”. These “repertoires of contention” include petitions, marches, media advocacy, football matches, distribution of loincloths and t-shirts, community mobilization and advocacy (RSLF website, n.d). As Rochon (1998, p. 199) in della

¹¹ The elections were scheduled to take place in December 2016, but were then postponed to December 2017. However, they were finally held in December 2018 ushering in a new President.

Porta & Diani (2006) notes, movement strategists devise tactics to exert influence on the politically elite but also those that enable them to attract more activists and create solidarities.

Table 2: Key Activities of the movement

Date	Activity
March 2015	Movement formed
May 2015	Petition to National Assembly
May 2015	March in Kinshasa
August 2015	Law 15/013
October 2015	UN Resolution 1325 meeting
January 2016	African Union Summit
March 2016	Advocacy Campaign for the signing of 43 Acts of Commitment Peaceful marches in North and South Kivu Football match in Beni
May 2017	Advocacy around electoral law
2018	Election campaigns and training of women to take part in positions of authority.
2019	Advocacy with local leadership structures
2020	Commission on the Status of Women, New York (not attended due to covid-19)

Compiled from the RSLF Website, RSLF Facebook page and interviews.

I discuss some of these activities in the sections that follow.

5.3 Mobilizing through the frame of inclusion and political representation

Having given a description of the movement, in this section, I discuss and analyse how RSLF builds its claims and frames using the master frame of inclusion and political representation.

Core-group leader 2 describes the process of how the movement decided on its mandate,

That day was like rain that people had been waiting for, people felt it was a solution day. It was an opportunity to download all problems, from challenges women in Congo face in education, agriculture, economy, trade etc, from those issues [raised] we tried to see what were the common threads, what is that issue which if addressed will improve the status of women in

Congo. We all agreed on equal participation of women and men at decision making level in all levels in the DRC. (Core-group Leader 2).

This point of view was shared by most participants who indicated that “Nothing Without Women” means that the activists do not want to see a structure, an institution, or an action where women are not present. Echoing the same sentiments, another participant said,

We did a mapping of what issues have been tackled by women’s rights defender organisations, the results, the challenges, main issues that require much mobilization. We saw that women do not have access to decision-making because they are not at decision making positions. So, we decided to take that as the focus of the movement. Decision making is key to the success of other domains. (Core-group, Leader 3).

Another participant also highlighted that before the movement, women in DRC featured in the political spaces only as kingmakers who danced and sung during election campaigns to endorse male candidates. Traditionally, politics and political participation in DRC have been constructed as a male sphere and as such, the political space is occupied by Congolese men. Drawing from Spivak’s (1988, pp.78-81) concept of “vertretung” translated to representation in form of being “spoken for”, I argue that the subaltern, who in this case are Congolese women, have been excluded from making decisions which affect them as decisions are made on their behalf. Hence, the movement is calling for the inclusion of women in DRC’s political space. In the words of one of the movement leaders in the core group,

Our work is based on parity [...] If the country goes on being ruled mostly by men, it means that they are excluding the needs of more than 50% of the population who are women. Whatever will be done without women, the results will not be inclusive and will not benefit the population. So, it was to say that you are forbidden to do something without women, whatever will be decided, make sure women are at the decision-making table and that women’s needs have been taken into account. (Core-group, Leader 1).

All the participants alluded to gender blind policies and a gap between policy and implementation as reasons for the exclusion of women from decision making and political participation. For instance, Article 14¹² of the country’s constitution enshrines parity and mandates the state to take measures to ensure parity, and the Electoral law says each political

¹² The Article 14 of the Congolese Constitution reads, “They take measures to struggle against all forms of violence made against women in public and in private life. Women have the right to an equitable representation within the national, provincial and local institutions”. Furthermore the constitution states, “The State guarantees the implementation of man-woman parity in these said institutions”.

party or group has to set up the electoral list by respecting the representation of men and women on the list. Yet, Article 13, of the Electoral law contains a line that said, “*in case of* a list which does not contain any name of women candidates, the list cannot be rejected” (Core-group, Leader 2). The movement, therefore, decided to build an advocacy action against this contradiction. Hence, the movement actors are demanding that whatever is decided, women’s rights and needs should be taken into account.

Thus, the “Nothing without women” campaign in and of itself can be seen as a “diagnostic frame” in the sense that it identifies grievances and attributes blame to perpetrators (Benford & Snow, 2000). Through the interviews, it can be established that the grievances that led to the formation of RSLF are the non-alignment of laws and the exclusion of women from political participation and decision-making. In the same vein, the state and patriarchal structures become the perpetrators or antagonists whom the movement is mobilising to address to ensure equal representation of women and men in positions of decision making.

Hence, to motivate people to join the movement, RSLF uses the slogans, “Parity is constitutional, let us respect it”, “With women, community wins”, and “Let us train together to make our voices heard better” (RSLF Website, n.d). Press (2010) observes a similar trend in post-conflict Liberia where the exclusion of women from the political arena during conflict, is what led to birth of the women’s movement. The women’s movement demanded for laws to be inclusive and institutional reforms that traditionally excluded women from positions of decision making.

Another participant on the RSLF Facebook page stated,

[...] There will be no peace or sustainable development in the Democratic Republic of Congo without Women. And as the movement says, it is in the decision-making process that we put this accent. These [women] must be there, give their opinion, participate and be taken into account. Not to say that she's there fictitiously where she will only suffer, [while men] execute elaborate orders without her knowledge, as has always been. Nothing without us! (Member, RSLF Facebook, April 26, 2017).

Another activist said,

As a human rights activist in general and women's rights in particular, I am committed and committed to the cause of women's and men's rights with equal opportunities. Also, I have been motivated to integrate the No Without Women movement which is the framework allowing us

to unify and amplify the voices of Congolese women, for the improvement of the impact of interventions for women's political participation, fairness and equal access for women and men to decision-making positions at all levels. This movement provides us with the necessary synergy opportunities for collaboration and work. (RSLF Facebook, February 13, 2017).

The above sentiments illustrate that the activists see women as agents of change capable of changing their position using transforming power. They believe that women are capable of challenging inequalities the Congolese women have faced. They can ameliorate their conditions by having access to political participation.

5.3.1 Shifting from the frame of rape and victimhood to agency

By using the frame of inclusion and political representation, the movement has become a space in which the Congolese women are rewriting their (her)story and redefining their trajectory. Hence, the movement's frame offers new ways of imagining Congolese women who had been framed through the rape frame.

As one participant pointed out,

Moving from the discourse of DRC as the “rape capital of the world” where women are seen as victims, [through the movement] we see women fighting for their rights although there is still a long way in fighting against rape, patriarchal culture and many inequalities. (Partner).

Echoing the same sentiments, a participant from the periphery group stated,

All provinces have recorded rape but in the eastern part of Congo it is extreme as many army groups use women's bodies as politics. We are not happy because the government and politicians are not doing anything to solve the problem, for them its about money and minerals. Through the movement, we are using our agency to advocate for change so that women and girls can fully enjoy their rights. (Periphery, Member 3).

The evidence above challenges the single narrative of victimhood and docility where Congolese women have been framed as “victims of male violence” (Mohanty, 2003). These findings resonate with those of Martin de Almagro (2018) in her analysis of the 2017 advocacy campaign on the electoral law reform by the RSLF movement, where she noted that the bodies of Congolese have been stripped off their political agency and have become associated with the experience of sexual violence during conflict. However, by moving away from the frame of rape, the movement has become one of the most visible counters to the victim narrative, or

the idea that women in the DRC cannot exercise their agency to effect change (Martin de Almagro, August, 2018).

5.4 Mobilizing through collective identity

The foregoing section has highlighted that women are at the margins of political discourse in DRC, and hence through the RSLF movement and the frame of inclusion and political representation, the women are trying to move to the centre. While the participants mentioned that they came together through a meeting convened by two international partners Kvinna till Kvinna and International Alert, they all mentioned that they were activists already working towards changing the status of women and girls affected by war in one way or the other in DRC. In their individual organisations, participants revealed that they are working in the areas of peacebuilding, ending sexual and gender-based violence, working with wartime rape survivors, media advocacy on women's rights while others are training young women and girls on sexual and reproduction health and rights. In this regard, I argue that sharing a history of collective pain and collective experience of war made it possible for Congolese women activists who, although heterogeneous in nature, to become a unified body. This identity of shared experience became the basis upon which they present a unified front to claim their political agency, hence, they embracing "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1988) to challenge the systemic marginalisation of women from the political processes.

A participant who belongs to the core group of the movement shares an experience of what led her to become an activist,

I was shocked by what was happening. Women and girls were violated in my community. Since 1996 the eastern part of Congo has been a theatre of wars [...] People were violated, people were killed and nothing was done. I was shocked by the situation and I decided to put energy and involve myself so that I can contribute to ending the situation [...] There is a lot of social violence, the wars, the norms against women and girls.

Evidence generated from the interviews shows that activists are cognizant of the fact that in order to impact the political sphere, they need to first build a robust network of movement actors that understand the lived experiences of women in DRC. Participants highlighted that

before the movement, they were operating in silos but they saw the need to harness their collective strength and form a movement.

One of the movement leaders who was at the inception of the movement stated,

We realised that Congolese women are engaged and are so dynamic [...] But, there were no synergies, no collaborations so in 2015, we had a meeting with some of our partners and we analysed the situation and we decided to develop a new approach of synergy and collaboration and we decided to create a movement. (Core-group, leader 1).

Furthermore, the participant gave an example of how she mobilized organisations in her constituency, by imploring them to join the movement as a step towards challenging the socio-political marginalization of women from Congolese society. She states,

The movement started in South Kivu and I was the Coordinator of the movement at the beginning so I had to create ties with other organisations inviting them to join the movement, telling them what the value of joining the movement was, how we can work together and harness our skills. [These were] women journalists, women judges at the courts, women teachers, women activists. I told them that we have to put our energy together and have different strategies and we can work at different levels, media, community and when we are together we can apply for funds and look for partners to support our work. (Core-group, leader 1).

Thus, through a sense of collective identity and expression of solidarity, we see movement actors inviting other activists to join the movement and rally behind one cause. These findings resonate with Press (2010) and Kaufman (2011) who in their studies in Liberia established that through a shared identity of direct and indirect experience of war, the women in Liberia were able to mobilize for a change in their living conditions as well as the bad reputation of their community.

Another participant who is also a leader and belongs to the core group added,

We agreed that organizations should focus on their own themes like SGBV, women and media, women's access to resources, women and health, but we said we need an all-encompassing theme that embraces all the themes that members work on (Core-group, leader 2).

From this finding, it can be argued that while the participants are aware of their heterogeneity in terms of what their areas of focus are, they deliberately choose to build solidarity around a shared goal. Hence, this shows that the movement perceived mobilizing towards a shared goal which illustrates another dimension of collective identity (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

All the participants expressed positive feelings about being in the movement and they concurred that they believe by forming strong solidarities, they are amplifying their voices and strengthening their collective power which will one day create a better society for Congolese women and girls. A participant belonging to the periphery group mentioned that before the RSLF movement, there was not enough networking and organisations and activists were working in silos. A participant who is a partner to the movement concurred with the above sentiments and added that a lot of groups with similar objectives operating in the same area were not communicating with each other, hence a lot of opportunities were lost.

Given the power that participants see in mobilizing around collective identity, a partner to the movement gave an example of what she perceived as a lack of coordination within the movement and saw it as having the potential of diluting the movement. As she put it,

There are still many things happening in an uncoordinated way and it is quite frustrating to watch. Like recently in Bukavu a few organizations were creating a different coordination platform called Dynamic and I was like why? It was after the election. They organised an advocacy mission to Kinshasa and they did not contact any organisation in Kinshasa. They went to introduce themselves and have civility with leaders in Kinshasa but [...] I don't know, it did not help the cause. (Partner).

This quote illustrates the importance that the movement attaches to presenting a collective front. This participant further elaborated that while there was nothing wrong with another platform, those whom they are trying to influence or claim power from will not take the movement seriously because they will not be presenting their issues with one voice.

Participants also highlighted what they perceived to be an intra-movement dynamic with regards involving grassroots women in the movement. Some participants stated that the movement is inclusive of grassroots women in the sense that when the movement actors carry out their advocacy activities in their constitutions, others felt it has not reached grassroots people yet.

Movement is very important for the lives of ordinary women. Even at the grassroots level, women need to have their needs met and taken into account. We involve ordinary women in public sensitization to ensure the voice of ordinary women is taken into account. (Core-group, Leader 1).

Conversely, an ally to the movement argued that while the movement is strong and operates mostly in urban areas, there is a gap where rural women feel they have not been part of the process. He alluded the problem partly to the 70% illiteracy level among Congolese women, where rural women affected the most. However, while illiteracy level can be perceived as the inclusive exclusion of grassroots women, the movement can be seen as sidelining an important group who are already at the margins and whose voices need to be heard. Kagoro and Makamure (2019) emphasize on leaving no one behind and especially call for movements to be inclusive of rural women. Hence, these findings can be explained by Spivak's concept of "elite zone of subalternity" where in this case, the educated women speak "in the name of" the rural women. Castillejo (2008) who writes on the women's movement in Sierra Leone observes that a lack of rights awareness on the part of rural women affects the potential for women to perceive injustice and act upon it collectively. Concurring is Earle (2011) who observes from her study on fragile and conflict, states that elite leadership does not necessarily delegitimize social movements, instead, having a dynamic, charismatic figure at the centre of collective action can help to mobilize the grassroots women.

5.4.1 Collective agency and visibility

To further illustrate another aspect of collective identity, the movement has a specific dress code, a loincloth with colors of the Congolese flag and carries the name of the movement and campaign, Rien sans les Femmes [nothing without women]. One of the leaders of the movement mentioned that activists make outfits (from the loin cloth) in the form of dresses, skirts, blouses or shirts. She further highlighted that she wears it at every opportunity she has to spread the aims of the movement, within and outside Congo. She added that she wears it to advocacy meetings and activities like the International Women's Day to make a point that RSLF is visible. Thus, through collective agency, I argue that the movement actors use every platform they are given to advocate for the rights of Congolese women.

A movement leader further explained,

We chose to have the loin cloth as an advocacy tool so that whoever wears our uniform understands the message. That dress is unique, it is an identity and a trademark of the movement. Wherever one goes, the dress will bring the reader to want to learn more about the message and the message has attracted the attention of many people. I remember once when I was in London, I went for a high level meeting and I was wearing the loin cloth and I met a young white lady and she knew French so she stopped me and asked for what this means for the Congolese women. Also, at the anniversary of the UN Resolution 1325, one ambassador said he appreciates the RSLF movement and said all countries should adopt this campaign because nothing can be done fully with the exclusion of women as they are the majority. (Core-group, Leader 2).

It can thus be argued that in expressing collective identity through dressing, the movement is also strategically trying to reach to broader audiences, within and beyond borders with the claims they are making for inclusion of women in political participation and decision making. The dress becomes a visible marker of collective identity which the movement also uses to create solidarities as well as interest in allies such as the encounter that this movement leader had outside her country, and also with the ambassador.

This chapter has paid attention to the history of the movement and tried to explain how the movement mobilizes for the inclusion of women in the Congolese political spaces and positions of decision making through strategic use of the master frame of women's inclusion and political representation and collective identity. They ride on the particularities of their experience of war (Mohanty, 2003) and together they envision a better future for Congolese women. As observed by Martin de Almagro (2018), what the women have experienced did not depoliticize them but became the basis upon which to mobilize. The next chapter focuses on the resources that enable the movement to carry out its mobilization efforts.

CHAPTER 6: Mobilization of resources

This chapter looks at resources which are regarded as the mainstay of successful mobilization in social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Aslandis, 2015). Diani (2000, p. 392) distinguishes between “participatory resources” and “professional resources”. Responses from participants highlighted both forms of these resources as crucial in bolstering advocacy efforts and emboldening activism.

6.1 Mobilization of professional resources

All activists voiced that the work of the movement needs financial support to thrive highlighting that finances make it possible to travel to meetings in other towns and cities to support the expansion of the movement, pay for transport and communication. They mentioned that the movement receives activity support from international donors which is channelled towards advocacy activities. The findings resonate with those of Tripp et al (2008) who from their analysis of the women’s movement in Cameroon, Mozambique, and Uganda, argue that supporting women’s organisations at the right time empowers them to broaden their demands to challenge the fundamental laws, structures, and practices that constrain them and are regarded as taboo. They aver that it is through such partnerships that women’s movements have been able to influence the political agendas and challenge culture (Tripp et al 2008, p. 228).

According to Kvinna till Kvinna’s (2018) annual report, there is general acknowledgement about the need to support activism in the DRC. As noted in the report,

Unfortunately, the situation in the DRC has deteriorated in many ways, including security-wise. Many international actors have left the country; small women’s rights organisations are often the first to have their budgets cut. Because of our limited budget, we could only support a few projects in 2018 [...] We also supported Rien Sans Les Femmes (RSLF), a network of civil society organisations and women’s rights activists working for gender equality in decision making bodies. During the election, we provided RSLF with financial assistance to support the participation of women as candidates and voters. (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2018).

The quote above shows that despite the dwindling financial resources, there is still a commitment for supporting the movement. A partner to the movement gave an interesting perspective on how the two INGOs (Kvinna till Kvinna and International Alert) work with the movement. She stated,

We do not consider ourselves as a donor but for us, partnership has a different meaning. So, we partner with RSLF both financially and technically. Right from the beginning, we ensured that we made it clear that there was real activism going on [...] RSLF does not pay salaries but pays actions, hence members are already organisations that have funding and activities going on. (Movement partner).

From the above quote, it is interesting to note that the movement partner said they do not see themselves as donors but rather as partners to the movement. One participant who has been involved in activism for eight years mentioned that they have received capacity building training leadership in general but also on monitoring the elections during the presidential elections in 2018 (Periphery, member). She did not have prior experience of monitoring the elections. This kind of relationship has been explored by Martin de Almagro (August 2018; 2018b) through “hybrid clubs” where she argues that if meaningful change is to be achieved, activists and international partners should work together. These sentiments resonate with Ndaliko (2016) who suggests that meaningful change in the lives of Congolese can happen through collaboration in activities and projects. She avers that there is a need for local initiatives and INGOs to reach a mutual understanding when it comes to funding or implementing projects as both depend on each other.

One of the participants from the core group emphasized that the major challenge is lack of commitment from donors, and as a result, her organisation has had to invest in funding proposals and building relations with donors. Her sentiments resonate with Kagoro and Makamure (2019) on the issue of NGOization where they aver that a lot of social movement organizations are faced with a challenging task of having to pay allegiance to donors and hence losing connection with their constituencies. Yet, activists highlighted that institutional funding is crucial for ensuring that the movement achieves its goals and can reach other constituencies that it is currently not able to reach.

Be that as it may, one of the participants from the core-group mentioned that the movement is working on introducing membership fees.

We are thinking about introducing membership fees but we are aware that while this can carry the work of the movement forward, we also know that this will exclude other members who may not be able to afford the subscription fees. We want to be as inclusive as possible. (Core-group, Leader 2).

The above quote illustrates that in trying to generate its own funding source, the movement is trying to think of local and internal solutions to their problems. However, the need to create a balance between being inclusive to those with a shared goal and financial resources is what the movement needs to work.

While participants mentioned financial resources as critical in pushing forward the movement's work, they mentioned capacity building and training as equally important. The findings are similar to those of Debusscher and Martin de Almagro (2016) in Liberia where they noted that the women's movement was calling for the international community to professionalise and develop the capacity of national civil society organisations and enable them to participate on the international arena and hold their government accountable.

Another dimension of financial resource was highlighted by the movement's ally. He reckoned,

People have been used to receiving aid so in some of the communities when you go with a movement message, they will ask you what you have for them first. Sometimes it is difficult to convince them about what we are trying to do with the movement because they are expecting something in return. (Movement ally).

It can thus be noted that activists sometimes face backlash and pushback when they go to communities for awareness-raising campaigns. Hence, here we see that RSLF is working in an environment where mobilising people to support the cause of the movement is a challenge because of the "give it to me" syndrome or "donor mentality" that has been created by the donor community in Congo. Thus, I argue that because women have been framed as universal dependents (Mohanty, 2003) as a result of wartime sexual violence, NGOs have undermined local agency and fostered dependence (Ndaliko, 2016). This, therefore, poses a huge threat to the work of the movement.

6.2 Participatory resources

6.2.1 Movement actors as resources

While the above section has shown that support from their international partners is crucial for enabling the work of the women, the interviews also illustrated that the movement has become an opportunity for activists to harness their skills, experiences and expertise to carry the work of the movement forward. Participants also perceived the movement to be a great platform that amplifies the voice of Congolese women and leverages the skills and expertise of its

members. As Spivak (2014, p. 149) avers that “the solution cannot come from the international civil society ...”, the activists seem to understand that they can leverage on their experiences and pool resources in order to advance the rights of women and girls.

In light of the above, participants revealed that the movement capitalizes on the diverse experiences and competencies of its members given that members are from different sectors. A participant who belongs to the periphery group of the movement says,

RSLF is a multigenerational/ intergenerational movement that includes different generations, young and elderly people. Elderly members bring their diverse expertise that we take advantage of in advancing the rights of women's rights. (Periphery, member).

Another participant at the periphery of the movement who works with young women and girls mentioned that not many organizations work with young women so this strategically places them in a position to reach out to young women on issues that affect them. She added that many young people are generally not in school but as a young woman herself, she finds it easier for her to reach out to them and they can understand her. These findings of young and veteran activists working together to push forward a better society resonate with those of Kagoro and Makamure (2019) where they highlighted the importance of young and old women in the movement working together. In their study in Sierra Leone, they found that the young women in the women’s movement and the older generation of activists had power clashes as the older movement had years of experience while the younger activists had the technological know-how.

Dovetailing these sentiments, a participant who belongs to the core group of the movement and has been an activist for over 30 years mentioned that she was part of a group of Congolese women that advocated and lobbied for the signing of the Sun City agreement in South Africa, which is considered a landmark agreement that led to the reunification of the country in 2003. She added that some of the decisions that have been taken up at the UN level such as Resolution 1325 were a result of African women in general and women in Congo specifically who raised their voices. Thus, I argue that this past experience is a resource to the movement because members have an understanding of what mobilization strategies and tactics have worked before for actions similar to what the RSLF movement now aims to achieve. Fallon (2008) also emphasized on the experience of past organizing as a resource to women’s movements as was the case with the Liberian women.

To further illustrate the importance of experience to the movement, all the activists mentioned that they want to learn more from similar movements like the Liberian women's movement and networks around the region and the world as this can help the movement grow and be very strong. One of the movement leaders belonging to the core group said there is a need for the movement to share experiences with the Liberian women's movement and learn from their experience what worked for them and what did not and learn innovative approaches.

6.3 SMOs as mobilization structures

To advocate for law reform, the DRC constitution stipulates that contesting parties should submit a petition with 100,000 signatures. Participants highlighted that they believe there is strength in numbers for it is through mass mobilization that they were able to garner over 200,000 signatures for the petition advocating for electoral law reform within one week. To accompany the petition handover, there was a march attended by over 6000 people. The movement was able to garner the required signatures through the work of its member organisations. Thus, it can be concluded that in order to build agency around constitutionalism, the movement adopted the repertoire of action of what James DeNardo in della Porta and Diani, (2006, p. 171) calls the "logic of numbers".

To explain how the movement was able to mobilize such a high number of signatures and 6000 people to march, participants mentioned that they mobilized through their constituencies. For instance, a participant from the core group whose organisation is an umbrella of 35 organisations states, "We are among the founding members of the Rien sans les Femmes North Kivu movement, we are in charge of mobilization, advocacy and lobbying at all levels" (Core-group, leader 4). Another participant whose organisation is an umbrella organisation consists of 28 groups says,

[...]we said, let's gather together in numbers and push for equal representation of women and men at the decision-making level in DRC. (Core-group, Leader 2).

Perhaps, such mobilization can also be explained by the work of Barnes et al (1979) cited in della Porta and Diani (2006) who observed that when a movement takes a peaceful political action such as petitioning, it has higher chances of getting public approval.

The findings above on resources partly concur with Ellis and van Kessel (2009b), Martin de Almagro (2018), and Engels and Müller (2019) who emphasise that financial dependence on

external donors, directly or indirectly via local NGOs, is a characteristic feature of many social movements in Africa. It is easier to reach this conclusion when looking at the financial aspect of the movement, however, when looking at the “participatory” aspects of the resources, movement actors bring in experience, expertise and time, all of which are invisible in the works mentioned above. As movement partner stated,

They have done a lot of things without funding; they have committed a lot of their personal time and you know, using venues in their offices (for free), they manage to survive and they want to continue. (Partner).

As such, Lamer (2010) avers that there is a need to analyse power relations between the agencies and the social movement in question. I found it interesting that there was no mention of the state, or prospects of receiving any financial support from the Congolese government. This also confirms findings by Tripp et al (2009) that democracy is supported by a strong civil society and this civil society is seen as a threat to the state.

CHAPTER 7: Attribution of opportunity

To understand what opportunities participants perceive to exist to enable the movement to mobilize for gender equality, I asked participants what opportunities and what threats they have encountered in carrying out movement-related work and work related to their organisations. Hence, it was important to get the participants' experiences from the organisational level and at movement level as it emerged from the research findings that activists carry out movement-related work within the auspices of their organizations. Therefore, it made sense to analyse and discuss the conditions that enable or disable their activism.

According to Tarrow (1998), social movement actors look to the political climate for cues on when to mobilize and on what issues. As mentioned in the previous sections, the movement saw an opportunity in the legal framework and as such, decided to build the movement around advocating for the revision of the election law whose Article (13) was contrary to the provisions of parity in the constitution. The movement actors advocated at the national level to ask the senate and parliament to review that article and oblige parties to respect parity on their electoral list.

We saw this law as an opportunity to engage decision-makers to be accountable so we said let us work on that. We tried to explain to them the content of the law and how they are accountable and how to have a national plan which would allow them to promote parity in their work. (Core-group, Leader 1).

Most participants said that the movement has created spaces within and outside DRC enabling women to access spaces they would not ordinarily have been able to, had it not been for their collective work. They also mentioned that they talk about the movement in the spaces they are invited to under the auspices of their organizations. "For each opportunity, for example, gathering of civil society organizations, the movement is invited to speak. If there are opportunities to have committees, the movement is among those actors who are elected" (Core-group, Leader 1).

Other participants mentioned that in taking up these opportunities, the movement does not only talk about challenges that women in Congo are experiencing but also what the movement is doing to change the trajectory of women's lives. Another opportunity that the movement has been able to harness is working on the 8th CEDAW Shadow report on the status of women in the country, in 2017 which was presented in Geneva in Switzerland. A partner of the movement

highlighted that the conclusions to this report were presented at the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) in New York in 2018 and to the African Union. It can be argued that the frame of inclusion and women's political representation, has opened up opportunities for RSLF beyond local spaces in DRC and the women are envisioning change through actively participating in these spaces. I argue that by accessing these spaces, the RSLF movement is strategically placing itself in pushing for the Sustainable Development Agenda and ensuring the attainment of gender equality.

7.1 Claiming space versus instrumentalism

A participant from the core-group of the movement mentioned that some of the movement leaders have now assumed positions within the country's national political structures. She gave an example of a member of the movement who in 2019 was appointed the National Delegate Minister in charge of people/ persons with disabilities. While this in and of itself can be seen as a progressive move given that the presence of such women in political structure will promote the rights of women, an ally of the movement highlighted that the movement should be careful of being co-opted by those in power. The participant warned against the capture of the movement by the state. This is in line with what Debusscher and Martin de Almagro (2016) found in their study of the Liberian Women's movement, the national government has tried to appropriate the movement for itself and to integrate it into governmental structures through the Rural Women Structures of Liberia. In the same vein, Tripp maintains that such co-optation of women's socio-political activities is a recurring pattern in postcolonial African states where women's organizations are co-opted by their governments and encouraged to applaud the actions of male-led organisations (Tripp 2000, Tripp et al, 2012). Hence, drawing from these observations, such co-option of members into existing political structures could also be seen as a misattribution of opportunity. However, it is too early to conclude this as a misattribution of opportunity as the mentioned incumbent has only been in office for one year, since 2019.

7.2 Navigating patriarchy and patriarchal structures

The RSLF movement actors are not only fighting against the political exclusion of women but also challenging their social exclusion due to patriarchal norms and beliefs that hinder the advancement of women in Congolese society. Participants highlighted that they are working to not only challenge attitudes that hinder women from aspiring for decision making but also the beliefs that women cannot be voted into office. Starting with the participation of women in the

movement as in other spaces and political activities, their participation is not well regarded by their families and society in general. A quote from one participant aptly demonstrates,

In DRC, when someone hears that you are an activist fighting for women's rights, their first thought is that you are fighting men yet it is not about that. Patriarchy has placed women at a lower status than men [...] They constantly say to you that you have to take your place, that if you continue like that you're going to be left without a husband. It is difficult. (Core-group Leader, 4).

Findings corroborate with a study by Kvinna till Kvinna (2018) in DRC which also showed that women contribute to their exclusion from political participation. The study shows that women who live in rural areas have little or no access to education, are subordinated to men and they are very poor. Consequently, women are completely absent from the struggle for women's political rights. As such, they sometimes tend to think of female politicians as 'rebels' or 'prostitutes'. The study concludes by suggesting a bottom-up approach where initiatives are undertaken at the grassroots level to educate women on their status in society and what their rights are. In the present study, one participant said,

At grassroots, we do sensitize communities on the importance of women's participation in decision making roles so as to break the norms and stereotypes about women's participation. Increase awareness on women's rights and women's roles in the country's management. (Periphery, member 3).

Participants also shared that even for men who try to challenge the norms and attitudes, society regards them as not being 'man enough'. A participant from the periphery group added that this is a display of discomfort and fear of being led by women.

When you talk about positive masculinity, for example, people look at you and say ... do you want us to be like women? ...[T]hey say this is a western thing so we have to find a way to engage them so sometimes you need to find a way of making them allies, and when they become allies, they become an activist and the work will be done. (Periphery, member 2).

Having highlighted the challenges of social exclusion from political life due to patriarchal norms and beliefs, the movement works with traditional leadership to navigate this sphere that has been almost exclusively dominated by men.

7.3 Opportunities perceived through allyship

As a participant belonging to the periphery group put it, “[...] As a woman, you are only expected to stay at home and take care of children”. This, therefore, explains why for the movement, as every activist enunciated, it is important to negotiate and work with men as allies.

By pushing for the amendment of electoral law, we realised the need to go slowly as the situation was getting tougher and tougher. By going slowly we said let us go on down- top level. We wanted to see how we can mobilize local level decision-makers to bring them to understand that they have to promote women on local level decision making. So we began by informing them about the law which speaks about women’s equal participation, although parliamentarians did not want to have such a law. We selected local entities and we found that those local decision-makers do not have any idea of that law. Now that they knew that the new law exists, they asked us if we could help them elaborate their action plan in order to elaborate parity in their local entities.

The movement decided that we had to encourage them to go forward and we initiated a *Rien les femme* trophy with which was followed by a recognition document saying the movement recognises and encourages you to go forward by promoting parity in your institution. We have delivered 49 trophies to 49 authorities, some have appointed women in their different services.

The movement deploys a strategy of negotiation, which can be understood through “nego-feminism” (Nnaemeka (2004), a type of feminism that challenges power through negotiations and compromise. According to Nnaemeka (2004), nego-feminism “knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines” (p.378). In essence, this lens helps in understanding why for the RSLF movement women are forming allies with men in negotiating for their space in political structures and in mobilising communities for change in the Congolese context. I argue that the movement actors are using their lived experiences to negotiate cultural spaces with a full understanding that there are some men who can support their cause. Owing to this negotiation, DRC now has women traditional chiefs. Alex de Waal and Rachel Ibreck (2013) also add value to the above findings as they aver that movements need to understand their context so that they can strategically use the right tactics to mobilize for change

The importance of creating alliances was further highlighted by a partner to the movement. She noted that while national-level elections took place in 2018 where a new president was elected into power, the country is yet to have local-level elections which means that there will be a change in leadership. This change means that the movement will have to start mobilizing for the support of new leaders once they assume power. Hence, the challenge to the women's movement is that RSLF needs to build new relations each time there is a new incumbent.

7.4 Resisting threats to mobilization

While findings and discussions above have illustrated how the movement has formed and created allies with the state, it is also worth noting that the work of activists is becoming increasingly difficult as they and their families are being threatened as a result of their work. A participant from the core group elaborated,

Women activists get a lot of death threats over the telephone, by SMS, e-mail, or they send someone to warn you. All of us have received such threats. I have been threatened by local politicians, governors and members of parliament. (Coregroup, Leader 4).

Echoing the same sentiments, another participant from the core group who has been an activist for 30 years mentioned that she was forced to relocate. In her own words,

My whole family and I were insecure, I was forced to move my family [...] and from there, the death threats continued, these people went to my colleague's home to force her to say where I was, they shot her twice in the knee and they took her computer and everything that concerned work.

In the same vein, a participant who is an ally of the movement poignantly shared a harrowing account of how he experienced over 100 ambush attacks and had to secure security guards to ensure his safety. Despite having security, he and his family eventually fled the country.

There is instability in the eastern part of the country, people are abducted, attacked or killed by armed groups or at times by security forces. There is permanent violence where you could be killed any moment and there is still no mechanism to protect those on the frontline. My soul is in Congo and I respect those courageous women. I always think about them. I still provide advice and support. (Movement ally).

Be that as it may, despite the threats, some of the participants pointed out some of the ways they are using to resist repression from the state. A participant from the core-group mentioned

that she shares with other activists in the struggle who are based either outside the city or the country while another mentioned that she and others use the radio to denounce threats orchestrated by the state. In her own words,

Our partners at the international level, for example, they have powers, they are secure and they can broadcast and use the information at their level. So the situation is not easy for us because when we speak about women's violence, we have to speak about it. And sometimes you know in the context of conflict, it is various armed groups who are the first perpetrators and when we speak about them, they call us and threaten us to stop talking about it and deny that it is not true. (Core group, Leader 4).

It can be noted that while the movement activists are operating in an environment where activism puts their lives at risk (Okech et al 2017; Kagoro and Makamure, 2019; Okech, 2020), rather than stopping their activism, some of the participants have found innovative ways of resisting threats to mobilization. For example, they use the media as a site of resistance to name and shame those that threaten their activism. On the other hand, another participant added that in some cases they have meetings with authorities to enlighten them on why they are doing the work they are doing, as naming and shaming does not necessarily always work.

The findings above find an echo in a research by Okech et al (2017) on shrinking civil society space and its effect on WHRDs where they note that when activists are forced into exile or detained, this creates a “brain drain” in the movement. They further highlight that movement loses leadership and transfer of intergenerational knowledge and also, activists can experience burnout and trauma in an environment where activists are already working with limited resources. In the same vein, Kvinna till Kvinna (2018) notes that the use of intimidating tactics forces many activists to work in obscurity and remain anonymous.

This chapter has looked at how the RSLF movement has positioned itself within local and international spaces in advancing and championing the rights of women and girls. Such spaces include high delegation meetings such as the Commission on the Status of Women. However, the movement has also positioned itself strategically within the country by working within the structures of power through the “repertoire of negotiation”.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

This chapter presents an abridgement of key findings formulated from major themes. The research has looked at how the RSLF movement is mobilizing for gender equality in (post)conflict DRC.

Overall, findings from this thesis have highlighted that the major impediments to gender equality in DRC are the gap between the law and its implementation, and the culturally-dominated institutions and practices that render women's position lower. Therefore, the thesis has presented three central arguments to illustrate how the RSLF movement is mobilising to advance the rights of women in the country.

First, through framing and collective identity, the research has illustrated how the RSLF movement is mobilizing for women's inclusion and political participation and, more concretely how the women are using their collective experience of war to make political demands. Through repertoires of action such as petitions, marches, negotiations with power holders, advocacy activities with member constituencies, the women have been able to participate in issues that directly affect them. From a Spivakian perspective, I have also highlighted that while on one hand the women are fighting for political representation, on the other hand, the very existence of the movement subverts the dichotomy between docile, victim/activist.

Second, with constrained financial resources, the movement looks within and harnesses the skills and expertise of its members. Also germane is the contribution by members through their experience and expertise. However, the donor mentality which is a result of donations that have been given over the years by INGOs to communities in Eastern Congo, poses a huge threat to the movement in their advocacy efforts in those same communities.

Third, findings provide a nuanced understanding of how the women are demanding their rights within a context that on one hand seems to be enabling while on the other is repressive. Despite backlash and pushback, the movement has become a platform in which the women mobilize and strategically position themselves through building allies with, and negotiating with power holders through a repertoire of negotiation.

The study would have been more interesting if participants had included those that have left the movement. To some extent, the study included the voice of an ally who is supporting the

movement from the diaspora, who was forced to leave the country because his life was in danger.

8.1 Recommendations

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- At RSLF movement level, due to the nature of activism in an increasingly repressive environment, there is a need for the movement to explore opportunities that contribute towards the wellness and security of activists, these could be in the form of training. This could be a shared activity with the movement partners.
- The movement could also explore further ways of harnessing the resources it already has, and from the activists out the country.
- Overall, findings from this thesis point to the necessity of studies to be further carried out on how the diasporan community is supporting the mobilization efforts of the RSLF movement in general but, a body of scholarly work is also needed to explain the current context where activists are driven into exile but still support movement efforts in their countries.

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Appendices
Information sheet



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Dear Participant,

I am a Master's student at Lund University in the Social Studies of Gender programme. As part of my course requirements, I have chosen to conduct a study on how the Nothing Without the Women's Movement (*Rien sans les Femme*) is mobilizing to redress gender inequality in eastern DRC. As a women human rights defender and leader of the movement, I believe you are in an ideal position to give me valuable first-hand information from your perspective.

The interview takes around 45 minutes, in English, and will be via skype or an application suitable for you. In case of any follow-up questions, I will get back you. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed (to ensure accuracy) will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. Interview records will be deleted after the final write up and pseudonyms will be used in the final study. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time (however, you should inform the interviewer).

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be of great value to the research and findings and, could lead to a greater public understanding of the women's movement in general and the movement in DRC in particular.

Please kindly suggest a day and time that suits you. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours sincerely,

Yvonne Jila

Mobile: 0046 704307312

Interview Guide

Personal information

Name of Activist _____

Organization _____ Location _____

Activism related questions

- At which point did become an activist, what led you to become an activist?
- Have you/ did you face any challenges at an individual level due to your activism? If so, what were they and how were you able to overcome them?

Organization related questions

- When and why was your organization formed?

- What kind of activities do you organize?
- How do you mobilize? (*people and actors you engage with to take action and participate in the work you are doing*)

Movement related questions

- From your knowledge, how were women in DRC organizing for social change before 2015?
- How did your organization join the movement (*Nothing Without Women*) and how are you contributing to the movement?
- Can you describe some of the activities (or campaigns) that you have been part of? Can you share some of the activities which you think were successful, and why?
- What resources do you think would benefit the work of the movement in particular, and women's rights organizations in general?
- What are some of the challenges that the movement has faced and how were these challenges overcome?
- What is your overall impression of the NWW movement, do you believe the movement is important in the lives of ordinary women, and men in DRC?
- Is there anything you would like to add?