Insiderness, Outsiderness, and Situated Accessibility: How Women Activists Navigate the UN's Commission on the Status of Women

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Abstract
The goal of this article is to explain micro-political aspects of women's participation within the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) by explicating how Non-Governmental Organization's (NGO) representatives negotiate and perceive their work. Data from ethnographic participant observation of CSW meetings between 2009 and 2012 demonstrate the simultaneity of *both* clear insider/outsider distinctions as well as blurred and permeable boundaries between the intergovernmental body of the CSW and civil society in the form of women's rights activists who attempt to shape CSW outcomes. Concepts of fluid insiderness and outsiderness (Naples 1996) help explain that women activists perceive themselves simultaneously as insiders and outsiders in relation to the UN system, but also in relation to other, more privileged, activists. The concept of "situated accessibility" – the varying accessibility to the UN according to NGO background and NGO notoriety, geopolitical location, funding, experience as well as language skills, personal relationships and notoriety within the UN system – brings nuance to notions of insiderness and outsiderness and adds to a deeper understanding of the intricate and complicated global human rights agenda. It may help to enhance accessibility to the CSW which requires efforts on the part of the UN system, but also on the part of women's NGO networks.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a vital part in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in the United Nations

(UN). The notion of NGOization in this context describes the rise of formalized and officially sanctioned NGOs out of grassroots movements during the 1990s. Some feminists have identified these new NGOs as "traitors to feminist ethical principles who depoliticized feminist agendas" (Alvarez 2009: 175) and believe that their ties with the state may create new hierarchies (Roy 2004, Lang 2000). Yet it is by means of NGOs that women have used the UN as an "unlikely godmother" (Snyder 2006) of the global women's movement and as a platform to organize and successfully shape global gender equality policy (Bunch 2007, Moghadam 2005, Antrobus 2004). The goal of this article is to explain selected micro-political aspects of women's participation within the CSW, by explicating how NGO-representatives negotiate and perceive their work in this context. Data demonstrate the simultaneity of *both* clear insider/outsider distinctions as well as blurred and permeable boundaries between the intergovernmental body of the CSW and civil society in the form of women's rights activists who attempt to shape CSW outcomes. I use fluid insider/outsider conceptions derived from feminist standpoint theory (Naples 1996) to discuss the complex and shifting positionality of representatives of feminist NGOs, and offer ethnographic data to illustrate participation dynamics in the field. I argue that access to information for a women's NGO diplomat is moderated by geopolitical background, language, institutional background, social networks and notoriety within the UN system and activist networks, a phenomenon I call "situated accessibility."

While there is significant literature on transnational feminist networks (Katuna 2012, Ferree and Tripp 2006, Moghadam 2005, Antrobus 2004, Naples 2002), this article addresses the need for interactional and organizational level gender policy development within the UN (Miller, Razavi and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 1998, Staudt 1997). Comprising 193 member states, the UN plays a crucial role in the advancement of global gender equality by setting binding agendas to end gendered discrimination, establishing policy guidelines, and providing resources for projects in its member states. In the last few decades the UN has created important physical and virtual space for the evolution of a global gender equality regime (Kardam 2004) and has "cemented women's agency in the global era" (Desai 2002: 31). This era also has presented many challenges, including the reproduction of inequalities between women from the North and South (Desai 2009, Ferree and Tripp 2006, Naples 2002), persisting gender inequality on a global scale (World Bank 2011, Bose and Kim 2009, Fuchs Epstein 2007), and a lack of gender balance and support within the UN itself (Sandler and Rao 2012, United Nations 2010, Warburg and Suban 2006).

I define NGOs as entities that are not formed by intergovernmental agreement, are not bound to geographic boundaries,

and that express views which are of interest to an international institution and are independent of any national government (cf. Betsill and Correl 2008). The characterization of NGOs as consultants and lobbying entities attempting to influence international institutions (such as the UN) that give primacy to state actors establishes them as "outsiders." I purposely utilize quotation marks when using "outsider" because insider-outsider dichotomies and their implicit privileging of knowledge produced by one or the other side have been questioned in mainstream sociology (Bulmer 1982, Merton 1972). Feminist standpoint theorists have confronted dominant discourses of objectivity more directly by systematically developing a more fluid understanding of insiderness and outsiderness. Naples' (2007, 2003) conception of insiderness and outsiderness overcomes dualisms by offering an insightful spin on the insider/outsider. Naples (1996) contends that field researchers are simultaneously insiders and outsiders (especially when researching their countries of origin), thus insiderness/outsiderness "are not fixed or static positions but ever-shifting and permeable social locations" (p.139). She concludes that the insider/outsider distinction sets up a false separation that neglects the social construction of insiderness and outsiderness and that it masks power differentials and experiential differences between the researcher and the researched. Her considerations resonated with my own experiences as a researcher when I observed the CSW and constitute the backdrop against which I present the themes that emerged from my data around the categories of access and accessibility within the CSW.

In this article I will first explain how the CSW works from an activist's perspective. Data demonstrate that activists in many ways perceive themselves as outsiders to the intergovernmental process. Yet the CSW stands out among other UN commissions due to its high and ever increasing civil society participation, particularly with regard to NGOs. Data illustrate Naples' (1996) conceptualization of insiderness and outsiderness as constantly shifting categories for women activists within this context. I show in the next section how NGOs access the CSW through legitimate means, and simultaneously struggle with some mechanisms of the participation process. Women activists are incorporated into but also disenfranchised at CSW negotiations. They largely remain outsiders in the process of shaping normative gender policy. In turn they are granted a sometimes advantageous monitoring and watchdog position lending credibility to the process. To NGO activists, the bureaucratic procedures and informal conventions at CSW meetings seem like mechanisms of exclusion. Another dimension of accessibility of the CSW is the continuum of insiderness and outsiderness in relation to other women activists. Not only the UN system but also other NGO activists regulate women's access to information, and thus, the potential to influence CSW negotiations and to occupy related NGO spaces. My data demonstrate "situated accessibility"

among activists – access that shifts and varies due to multiple interconnected locations such as geopolitical background, language, institutional background, social networks and notoriety within the UN system and activist networks, as well as access to knowledge about institutional processes. The concept of situated accessibility also provides insight into my experiences as the researcher because my insiderness and outsiderness shifted as a result of the varying, layered, and sometimes simultaneous roles I occupied throughout the research process.

METHODS & DATA

My research is an ethnographic exploration of the social construction of gender equality policy in the United Nations. From 2009 to 2012, I conducted 700 hours of participant observation and engaged in informal field conversations. I collected much of the data during a two month internship in the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in the fall of 2010.[i] After my internship I accessed the field site through an annual UN ground-pass in my capacity as an elected UN delegate of Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS). In this capacity I participated in, observed, and documented the CSW 53 meeting in 2009, the CSW 55 meeting in 2011, and the CSW 56 meeting in 2012. CSW 54 and 57 I observed remotely by means of webcasts and electronic mailing lists. In addition I tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed a total of 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with an average interview time of one hour. The interview sample consisted of five UN staff members involved in the logistics of the CSW; one diplomat from the global North; one diplomat from the global South; and 13 global gender activists. Nine of the activists were from the global North. I used an interview schedule with questions around four themes: history/career in UN work, meanings of gender and gender equality, viewpoints on processes of knowledge production, and perceptions of interactions between different actors inside and outside the CSW. Fieldnotes and interviews were transcribed and organized with qualitative data analysis software.

My analytic strategy was the constructivist grounded theory approach of Charmaz (2006). This approach involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, the pursuit of emergent themes, and the inductive construction and integration of categories into a theoretical framework. Data analysis alternated with, as well as guided, further data collection (theoretical sampling). For example, "access" and "accessibility" emerged as themes in my second field research visit in 2010. I thus made an effort to meet long time activists who were able to speak about changes they perceived in terms of accessing the CSW in follow-up research in 2011 and 2012. I also asked about access and accessibility in all subsequent interviews with UN staff and diplomats. My discussion of

the findings begins, however, with activist's perspective on how the CSW works.

FINDINGS

How the CSW works – An Activist's Perspective

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1946 as a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) dedicated to gender equality. The four World Women's Conferences increased the importance of the CSW in the UN system (Reanda 1999, Winslow 1995). In 1987, the CSW's mandate was expanded to monitor the implementation of internationally agreed measures such as outcome documents from the international women's conferences (United Nations and Boutros-Ghali 1996). The annual 10 working days of negotiations in late February/early March involve member states of the UN, representatives of the UN system, and invited experts. Since 1996 the meeting has focused on working themes pertaining to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). Since 2008 the CSW meeting has been organized around three topical areas; one priority theme, one review theme that monitors progress towards Agreed Conclusions of former CSWs, and one emerging issue that flexibly responds to current issues at stake. Table 1 shows the working themes of the CSW for the last six years. Its outcome document, called "Agreed Conclusions," contains concrete recommendations for member states and different stakeholders to advance gender equality (for a history of the CSW see United Nations 2006; for a brief overview of various instruments of gender and sexualities human rights in the UN beyond the CSW see Jauk 2013). The Agreed Conclusions provide normative guidelines for governments which are also used by activists in member states (Bedford 2010, Gaer 2009).

Table 1. Working themes of CSW meetings 2009-2014
*observed by author

Nr	Year	Themes
58	2014	*Priority Theme:* Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. *Review Theme*: Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work (Agreed conclusions of CSW 55) *Emerging Issue*: Women's access to productive resources
57	2013	*Priority Theme*: Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls *Review Theme*: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS (CSW 53) *Emerging Issue*: Key gender equality issues to be reflected in the post-2015 development framework
56*	2012	*Priority Theme*: The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges *Review Theme*: Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women (Agreed conclusions of CSW 52) *Emerging Issue*: Engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality
55*	2011	*Priority Theme*: Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work *Review Theme*: The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (Agreed conclusions of CSW 51) *Emerging Issue*: Gender equality and sustainable development
54	2010	15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000)
53*	2009	*Priority Theme*: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS *Review Theme*: Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels (Agreed conclusions of CSW 50) *Emerging Issue*: The gender perspectives of the financial crisis

Forty-five member states of the United Nations serve as members of the Commission at any one time on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, yet all 193 member states are invited to partake in the negotiations of the Agreed Conclusions, and most send delegates to New York City (CSW 2013). The support structure of the

CSW is provided by UN Women, the new gender equality structure within the UN System that became operational in 2011. Staff members of UN Women (formerly staff members of DAW, the Division for the Advancement of Women) work year round to prepare for the CSW meetings. They support and document the meetings and the negotiation of the outcome document. A CSW meeting can be graphically represented in concentric circles, as a research participant suggested in a field conversation (FN 030412)[ii] and with which other research participants agreed. Significantly, this representation of a CSW meeting establishes NGOs as outsiders. The circles denote different levels of power, reminiscent of Wallerstein's (2004) typology of core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries developed to explain the world system (see Figure 1). Even though many activists perceive themselves as outsiders, data also show that in practice the dynamics are more complicated and the boundaries are permeable, represented in the figure by dashed lines.

In the core of the "world system" of the CSW are appointed representatives of member states. They collaborate in the intergovernmental process of negotiating the Agreed Conclusions. These representatives may be diplomats who work at the diplomatic offices of their countries in New York City, called missions, or political officials who are sent from member states to engage in specific negotiations (e.g. women's affairs ministers, in the case of the CSW). Negotiations of the Agreed Conclusions are closed meetings called "informals." Here, delegates of member states discuss the language of the outcome document sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph. NGOs may serve as silent observers at the discretion of the facilitator. This boundary is repeatedly challenged, as I discuss below. The semi-peripheral ring is made up of "side events" on UN premises. These are more informal gatherings in which member states and UN agencies present new reports and programs to advance gender equality in their local contexts.

The outer ring, literally dislocated from the UN headquarters, is constituted by "parallel events," organized by women's NGOs and faith communities in the "Church Center," a building across the street from the UN Headquarters. These parallel events are physically and discursively separate, yet NGO activists infiltrate the UN Headquarters and its events. The parallel events are a buzzing gathering of hundreds of women (and some men) – some in traditional dress, others in business and casual wear – which take place in small seminar rooms, bursting elevators, and congested hallways. The interactions in the Church Center make clear that the Agreed Conclusions are just one of many outcomes of the CSW. Here, women from all over the world meet across cultural and language barriers to discuss mutual concerns and potential solutions. The CSW parallel events are key stages for larger transnational feminist networks that lobby other parts of the UN system. We might conceptualize women

and men around the world who could not access the CSW as an imaginary fourth ring, yet information technology allows for observance of the main events which, in the last few years, have been live-streamed and archived on the CSW website.

Activists mingle in parallel events, caucuses and briefings, establishing new connections or rejoicing in old friendships that have formed over the past years of CSW attendance. They are organized by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW/NY, with sister associations in Vienna and Geneva). NGO CSW organizes the NGO Consultation Day that usually takes place a couple of days before the opening ceremony of CSW meetings. Consultation Day functions as training and orientation day for newcomers to the CSW and as a networking platform for seasoned activists. The NGO CSW/NY also rents out the Church Center for activists who want to organize a parallel event. It facilitates a "morning briefing" every day at 8:45 to 9:45 AM to share updates on negotiations, to coordinate events, and to address any current issues. For the first time in 2012, it also facilitated meetings between UN Women and representatives of regional NGO caucuses. Some regions and member states now offer one to two briefings that enable civil society actors to explicate their positions. These briefings typically occur in the offices of the diplomatic mission of the state(s).
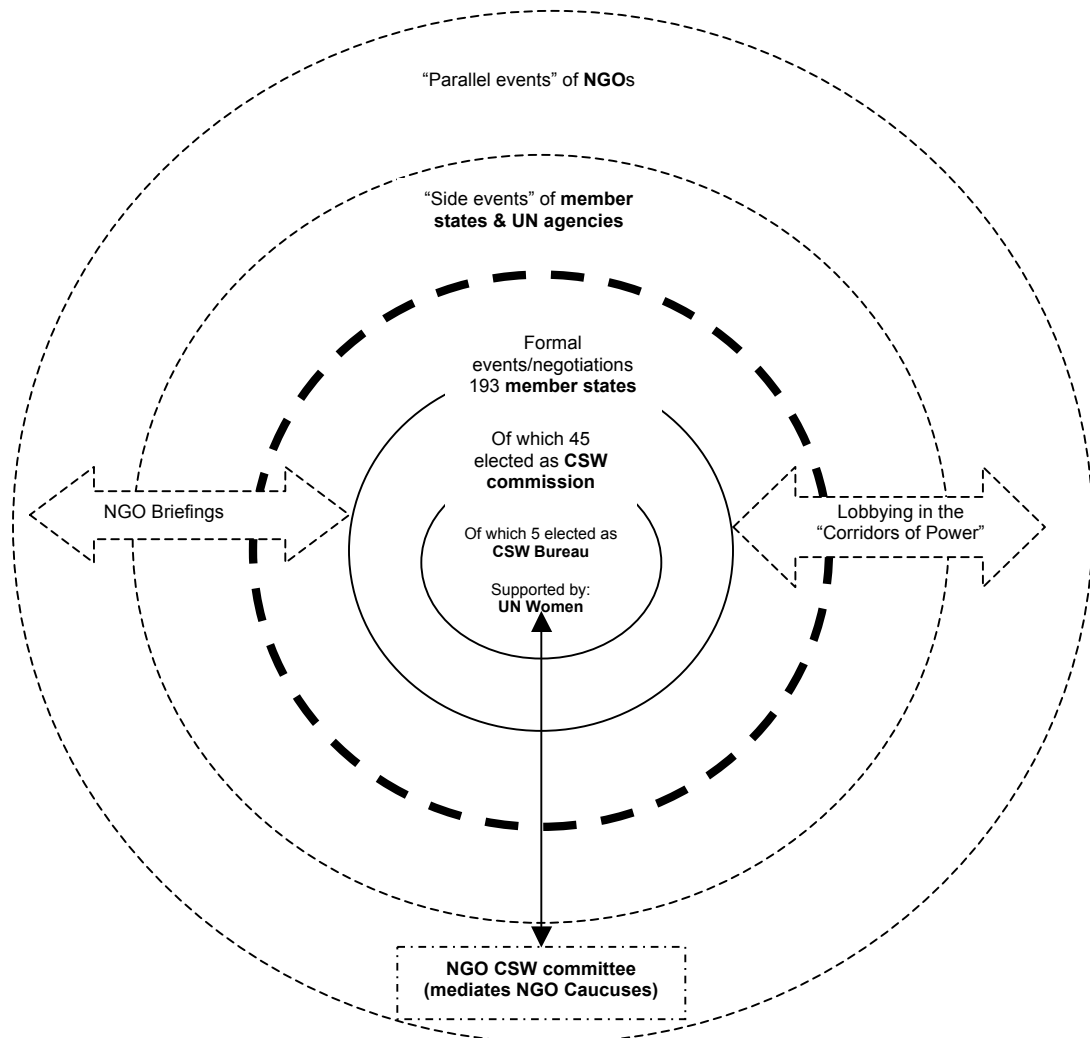
Figure 1. How the CSW works, graph by author

To break through the gilded gates of the UN and gain access to formal CSW meetings, activists have to navigate and utilize various strategies and dimensions of intentional institutional capture (Eastwood 2006). Intentional institutional capture describes the process through which practitioners translate their interests into something that is recognizable by the organization, in this case the UN. Intentional institutional capture is thus the ability of activists to utilize terminology and bureaucratic processes in order to shape institutional outcomes (Eastwood 2006). Many NGO activists utilize participation mechanisms and bureaucratic procedures, so they *can* access the CSW, but at the same time many of them *cannot* participate in desired ways. They perceive themselves as outsiders, even though they are inside the process

of the CSW, reminiscent of Hill Collins' (1986) famous concept of the outsider within.

How NGOs Can and Cannot Access a CSW Meeting

The concern, anger, and discomfort voiced by activists about their lack of access to UN CSW meetings contradict the participatory rhetoric, honest concern, and practical effort of UN Women staff members and delegates to create a space that is inclusive for civil society. Access and accessibility emerged from the data as multifaceted categories. Activists perceive themselves simultaneously as insiders and outsiders in relation to the UN system. NGO activists access the meetings through legitimate means and carry some weight in the process as advisors and legitimizing entities, yet many of them struggle to understand and influence the process and outcome of the meetings. In the context of NGO diplomacy, Betsill and Corell (2008) state that influence occurs "when one actor intentionally communicates to another so as to alter the latter's behavior from what would have occurred otherwise"(p. 24). In their attempt to alter delegate behavior and language on behalf of global gender equality, women find themselves inside the UN system as accredited consultants, but outside the doors of actual negotiations and decisions. They have to use more informal strategies and are left to work what many call "the corridors of power" instead of the conference rooms. In order to be heard (i.e. intentionally institutionally captured) at the CSW, activists need to organize themselves in NGOs. NGOs then need to be accredited for a consultative relationship with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). If organizations are able to become accredited, they still find themselves struggling with physical access to the UN Headquarters, access to the quickly changing document of draft conclusions, access to negotiations, and access to technology. I briefly outline these mechanisms of participation, which are perceived as instruments of exclusion by most activists in the field.

Access through ECOSOC accreditation. The consultative relationship with ECOSOC is governed by a resolution (ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31) that outlines the eligibility requirements for consultative status and the rights and obligations of NGOs. Application procedures are lengthy and have been identified as a barrier to accessing the UN (Zettler 2009) even though they are meant to consitute an inclusion strategy. Historically, the first venue by which NGOs took a role in formal UN deliberations was through the ECOSOC. Forty-one NGOs were granted consultative status by the council in 1946; by 1992 more that 700 NGOs had attained consultative status and since then the number has steadily increased to 3,743 organizations (DESA NGO 2013b). The number of NGOs in consultative status from the global South is increasing every year, but the vast majority is still from the global North. As a result, NGOs from the North are better positioned to

influence policy making at the state and global levels (Bedford 2010, Zettler 2009). Despite the bureaucratic labor necessary, discussed critically in NGOization literature (Alvarez 2009), activists find bargaining power through accredited NGO status: "We NGOs do not only have a right to access the CSW, we have an *obligation* per definition of the consultative status!" said Marsha, the 2012 spokesperson of the caucus of NGOs from America, Europe, and Canada. "If you do not let us into the meetings we are breaking our contract with the ECOSOC!" Murmurs and chuckles were audible among the approximately 100 women present, as Marsha referred to the ECOSOC resolution (1996/31) that regulates and affirms NGO access (FN030212).[iii] Consultative status also structures intentional institutional capture, as it defines formalized ways to convey an agenda and grants increased opportunities for intervention at the CSW meeting. For example, NGOs with ECOSOC status may deliver written and oral statements. Participation and application procedures for oral statements require institutional knowledge, as well as access to information. These processes in turn privilege large NGOs and coalitions. Some activists question the authenticity of large NGO (-networks) as representative of marginalized populations and contend that critical voices are absorbed in this context.

   Access to the UN Headquarters. Access to UN buildings is important because it is a pre-requisite for lobby work that is necessary to influence official decisions. It is regulated by a hierarchy of badges. The "blue badge" is an annual pass, available only to official representatives of accredited NGOs. To get this pass, representatives go to a UN office building with a formal letter from their NGO. This letter is exchanged for another document in an office hidden in one of the uniform corridors of the UN office towers. Then one must proceed to the pass office on 1st Street, where a picture is taken and the pass is printed. In lieu of an Annual Pass, activists can obtain a CSW pass that is only good for the two week CSW session. On the first days of the CSW session, activists wait for up to three hours or more to obtain the blue badge. One needs not only to be fluent in English to understand the process, but also able-bodied, in good health, and prepared for inclement weather while standing outside on the sidewalk.

   More than 4,000 civil society members registered for the meeting in 2012; about 1,000 were present at the meetings on any given day. Yet only about 400 "secondary access passes," or "orange badges" (one per accredited organization) – which provide access to the official CSW meetings, panels, and roundtables – were distributed. The orange badge has been in existence since the UN was reorganized in 2010. Ironically, the architectural reorganization of the headquarters was named "Capital Master Plan" by the UN (United Nations 2013). Because the plan severely limits interaction space, physical access to the UN

Headquarters has become a daily topic for discussion at   morning briefings of the NGO CSW/NY. Until 2009, the daily NGO briefings were held in the UN Assembly Hall before the meetings, but they are now in the Church Center. Women get discouraged and even enraged about their limited access to "official" buildings. Access is made more difficult by the sheer numbers of activists at CSW meetings, which is unique among commissions of the UN (DESA NGO 2013a, Table 2). Access policies are enforced very strictly and every badge is checked. Here the hierarchy of the assembly hall is mirrored by a logic of secondary access passes and tickets that distinguish the haves from the have-nots. Some women choose not to expose themselves to the security screenings and opt out of participation at CSW events. Instead they attend only parallel events in the Church Center or follow the events via live streams that are sometimes offered in overflow rooms. Many representatives of civil society are critical of the fact that they are pushed back into the periphery. They feel symbolically and physically excluded from the master's house through the Master Plan.

Activists and delegates interact on the fringes of the overwhelming event schedule of these two weeks. Despite being inside the CSW meetings, their simultaneous *outsiderness* becomes literal as NGOs are repeatedly advised to "meet your delegate outside in the corridor or go for a coffee." However, NGO representatives try to get to the core of the ring, the *inside* of negotiations of the Agreed Conclusions by lobbying "their language" into the outcome document. Practitioners submit typed and handwritten notes to their delegates in country specific civil society briefings or regional group briefings. Marsha, introduced above, found a creative strategy of access to do exactly that, and undermined the authority of the badge for 30 influential minutes:

> I wanted to go to this commission meeting, and I ran there and there was this big blue security guy and asked for my orange badge. My colleague had it that day and I said, I don't have it, I forgot it, but I am supposed to speak for my regional NGO caucus in this meeting. And he said no way I get in there. And so I went to the cafeteria, and saw these sisters of Notre Dames. So I asked them if I could borrow their badge for a half an hour, ran into the meeting and talked to my delegate, told her to put in this CEDAW text. And then I had 20 minutes left from these 30 minutes. So I sat down and wrote a note because I thought I may be able to also approach the EU delegate. And then I saw Azerbaijan delegate and took the chance to slip her a note of the text as well.
> (Interview 6, follow up interview, December 2012)

The battle for gender equality is a battle of words. Chasing down drafts of the outcome document constitutes the main plot of the CSW. It is an "annual scavenger hunt" as one activist put it, or "collective hysteria" in the words of a UN staff member, to retrieve updated and informally circulated versions of the outcome document with the goal of being up-to-date and able to craft language and notes for delegates that will fit the current version of the text, as Marsha explained above.

Access to draft conclusions. Because activists try to shape the language of the document, access to updated versions of the draft conclusions is essential, yet there is no formal mechanism regulating the communication of updated drafts to civil society. Some NGOs are able to obtain an updated draft from their country delegations, but most practitioners rely on fellow activists to share available drafts. Even though the Agreed Conclusions are not binding documents and many actors admit that only a few people ever read them, it is a document with symbolic weight. One of the biggest payoffs of the CSW meetings for activists is when they see "their language," their insider knowledge and voice, in the final document (see also Betsill and Corell 2008 and Humphreys 2004). Along these lines one activist stated at the European Union briefing (FN 022812): "We should be informed about Agreed Conclusions and get updated drafts automatically because we have to make comments and so help the EU!" This clearly shows that activists see themselves as experts and insiders on the topics discussed. Despite their factual and experiential insider knowledge, institutional processes place them physically and symbolically outside the actual negotiations.

Access to negotiations. "What some NGOs don't get is that this is an intergovernmental process and thus it is naturally closed to NGOs – NGOs are not governments!" said a UN Women representative in an informal field conversation. A CSW bureau member explains the boundary between the core ring of the CSW (governments) and the outside location that women activists intentionally seek to transgress, when he talks about a briefing with NGOs that he had attended that day:

> It is also a game where each of us plays a role. The NGOs were pretty aggressive and demanding. It was said 'it is a shame we can't participate in the [negotiation of the] Agreed Conclusions, I don't understand why, and it is against the UN charter, and we have ECOSOC status!...Then I explained that like in all other negotiations it is still an intergovernmental process where you have delegates from governments sitting around a table and agreeing…Inputs from NGOs are there, as they can informally approach delegates and UN

Women. But they cannot contribute officially to a
document that is made by 'member states!'
(Interview 7, CSW bureau member, diplomat)

Yet activists try to infiltrate the negotiations physically, and in morning
briefings they share their success stories, exhibiting pride in not getting
thrown out of the room by the facilitator. Some NGO representatives,
who have become acquainted with delegates over the years of their CSW
work, do not engage in this intentional trespassing. As Nicole, a seasoned
activist from a large faith community shared, she did not attempt to enter
the informals because she did not want to "spoil [her] good relationships"
(FN 030111). Ironically, sitting *inside* the negotiations may mark a
participant as an outsider, a stranger, and a newcomer in the CSW-game.
Being able to stay outside the negotiations may take on the meaning of
being more inside in terms of finding other, more informal, ways to
communicate to delegates and to keep up the appearance of a respectful
"partner" rather than an opponent. This phenomenon represents the
shifting and sometimes parallel nature of insiderness and outsiderness
(Naples 1996), and it exemplifies situated accessibility, as discussed
below. It also correlates with research conducted on environmental
negotiations in the UN. The influence of NGOs did not necessarily
depend on direct access to negotiations. Even when excluded from the
floor, NGOs were creative and effective in communicating with
delegates (Betsill and Corell 2008, Humphreys 2004).

    Access to technology. In lieu of unhindered access to buildings,
the NGO CSW representatives of UN Women advertise the webcasts of
events. The lack of access to basic information regarding the scheduling
of events and meetings baffles NGO representatives. Many women do
not have access to the internet or email on site because no public
terminals are offered. In a morning briefing an agitated middle aged
woman received overwhelming applause when she said that "the praised
internet based solutions are not accessible by many rural women present
who do not even possess mobile phones!" Carla, another activist,
reflected on the fact that women activists did not always have to deal
with problems like this:

> We used to have our NGO meetings at the UN, we had a
> big conference room where we had the morning
> briefings and everybody could be in the same room.
> Statements were always distributed through hard copy.
> Now the only way you can get them is through the
> web…and we also had a copier. It was free for our use.
> You had to bring your own paper, but the copier was
> free for your use.
> (Interview 14, CSW activist 7+ years, June 13 2012).

Some activists contend that NGO members occasionally romanticize the past, but Carla's quote shows that access — to technology, to buildings, and to negotiations — intersects with the eventual production of the outcome document. It is evident that activists from NGOs with branches in New York City can build continuous informal relationships with country delegates and UN staff. These relationships allow them to stay physically outside of negotiations and buildings because they can use their cell phones and/or attend business lunches to transmit and obtain information. They also can use their offices in lieu of access to technology on site. These observations illustrate that there is considerable variation among women who can and cannot access the CSW meetings.

Insiderness, Outsiderness, and Situated Accessibility among Women Activists

In addition to the continuum of insiderness and outsiderness an NGO representative experiences in relation to the UN system, insiderness and outsiderness is experienced in relation to other women activists. This finding speaks to the multivocality of the women's movement and the differences between women who constitute the seemingly monolithic block of "global sisterhood" that has been discussed in the literature (Ferree 2006, Naples 2002, Bergeron 2001). NGO background, geopolitical location, funding, experience, language skills, personal relationships and notoriety within the UN system regulate the resources available to activists, and consequently, the volume and efficacy of their voices. Many women remain simultaneously inside and outside the hustle and bustle of annual CSW NGO activism due to a lack of critical resources, inclusing money, language, and information. Others are simultaneously inside and outside the NGO realm They simultaneously serve as representatives for NGOs and as country delegates, a process well documented in the NGOization literature (Alvarez 2009, Sultan et al. 2008).

"There is no other place where women can convene like this" said the Egyptian activist sitting next to me at the anti-poverty event of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation (FN 022311). More than 140 people had gathered to learn from Gladys' and Maria's daily anti-poverty work in South Africa. Despite their joy in being able to visit the US for the first time, they regretfully informed the audience that their colleagues were unable to join them. The Foundation managed to bring in some activists from the ground, but this was not the case for most parallel events. Due to funding issues, the parallel events at the CSW sometimes come across as elitist when white middle class managers of NGO Headquarters in the US or Europe present work others conducted for example in the Philippines or Sub Saharan Africa. Merry (2006)

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discusses the contradictory role of privileged educated women, who lobby on behalf of "their sisters" at the international level, but simultaneously marginalize the voices of women they seek to represent. One factor in this skewed equation is money: "The CSW is too expensive. The NGO CSW consultation day and reception alone cost $165.00. I can't go to either this year" said a retired feminist sociologist who lives in NYC and already had an advantage over women who had to travel and locate accommodations in one of the most expensive cities in the US. Despite increasing overall participation, the level of regional wealth is reflected in persistent participation gaps across regions (Table 2).

Table 2. Participation statistics of CSW, obtained from UN Women statistics department, 2014

# Session CSW,	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58
Year	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
Representatives	1228	2990	1776	3244	1613	2054	2837	2476
Organizations	273	323	309	450	348	434	556	482

Regional distribution of Representatives

	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58
Africa	52	249	395	675	248	411	486	447
Asia	20	89	168	349	160	187	285	247
Europe	43	182	233	642	255	288	410	381
Latin America*	8	36	86	228	92	122	237	230
North America	104	474	831	1271	813	979	1324	1070
Oceania	6	39	40	76	45	65	92	98
Unknown	995	1921	23	3	**0**	2	3	3
Total	**1228**	**2990**	**1776**	**3244**	**1613**	**2054**	**2837**	**2476**

Regional distribution of Organizations

	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58
Africa	30	41	44	57	51	73	79	75
Asia	28	37	31	55	40	41	53	44
Europe	75	93	83	134	95	117	166	139
Latin America*	9	9	10	22	11	23	28	26
North America	107	137	132	169	141	172	215	183
Oceania	6	6	7	9	9	8	14	15
Unknown	15	0	2	4	**0**	**0**	1	0
Total	**270**	**323**	**309**	**450**	**347**	**434**	**556**	**482**

*including Caribbean Countries

The CSW stands out among other commissions because of its particularly high participation of civil society actors in the form of NGOs, namely women's organizations of diverse geographical, ideological, and religious backgrounds. Literature on comparable conferences like the World Social Forum (WSF) finds a tyranny of distance whereby the majority of participants are from the country where the conference is held, followed by participants from Europe and USA (Chase-Dunn et al. 2008). Given that the CSW meetings are held in New York City, the majority of participants are, not surprisingly, from North America followed by Europe and Africa. The high participation of Africa in comparison to Latin America stands out and partly mirrors demographics. Africa is a much larger geographical construct.[iv] It is still underrepresented, however. Africa's highest participation rates occurred in years when issues of HIV and rural women were discussed.

Consistent with research on the World Social Forum, Asia and Africa are the most under-represented world regions. It is not just the tyranny of distance that skews participation statistics. Differences in economic and organizational resources and different degrees of connectivity to transnational civil society (Reuveny and Thompson 2008) are at play. As such, participation statistics hide the stories of women who cannot come to CSW meetings for various reasons. For example, women from the Chechen Republic could not enter the US during CSW 56 for visa reasons, so they blogged about the meetings from afar. Similarly, women from Iran were detained after coming to prior CSWs. In the following years, they chose not to come for the sake of their corporal safety (National Council of Women of Canada 2012). Thus, geopolitical differences among women clearly regulate access. In Naples'(1996) sample, individuals with resources felt like outsiders because of their power. I had a different experience, as I met women who proudly called themselves "UN-insiders" and enjoyed their privileged access to the UN as activists. They were often retired UN staff members who now associate with NGOs, or who founded their own NGOs. Or they are women like Gail, who can afford to be a full time activist because she is financially secure. Gail explains how she became an activist:

> I've been working for a non-profit in London and my husband got relocated back to the States. When I arrived here they asked me if I would represent them as a volunteer…I got so interested in it I really handled it like a job and I was here [at the UN Headquarters] every day. I quit my regular job so that I could do this. I think I went about the first three to five years almost every day and was very well known by the UN and even by security…I would come in and go to all the different

> types of meetings just to learn …I already have two masters degrees so I don't need another college degree but this was really, you know, just so interesting…so you're constantly meeting with people from UNC and UN and sending out your business cards corresponding and it really was like a full time job. (Interview 9, CSW activist 20+ years, March 7 2012).

Unlike many other NGO activists who lack funding to participate (Desai 2007), Gail had the privilege to quit her job and focus on her UN work. Her experience also illuminates the steep learning curve for activists who become involved in processes of global governance, as well as the time and effort these activists must dedicate to intentional institutional capture. Besides differently colored badges, this process requires a new vocabulary and fluency in one of the UN languages, generally English. I observed women whispering translations of spoken words for other women during events. I also documented several incidents where women were not able to obtain translations in their native languages, not only of intergovernmental negotiations but also of parallel events. In 2012, rural women "are being paraded by some huge NGOs" as one first year - activist critically remarked, "but no-one can hear their voice because other activists do not speak their language"(FN 030812). The activists present at the CSW do not necessarily embody the same characteristics as many of the women they represent. They often come from a higher class position and many, like Gail, have not been elected by their constituencies (Desai 2007, Ferree 2006, Yuval-Davis 2006). An activist from Lithuania expressed her discomfort after a morning briefing, stating: "The NGO CSW seems to me like an uppity women's club, honestly. I don't feel they help us access the CSW; in fact this morning they clearly said they don't want us to talk to UN Women staff!" She vented her disapproval of the NGO CSW that functions as a mediator to the UN system. The NGO CSW's function is to facilitate participation of NGO's and to train activists, yet some activists are uncomfortable with its role as "Super NGO." They criticize that the NGO CSW is taking advantage of its situated accessibility due to its presence in New York City, and that the close ties with the UN establishment are not appropriately shared with its members.

Big NGOs and the NGO CSW are seen critically by some women because they seem more supportive of the UN system than their constituency of smaller NGOs. They increasingly function as gatekeepers to the UN system. Feminists have criticized North-centered coalitions like these because women's voices are lumped together and sold as an artificial unified voice of the "global women's movement" (Ferree 2006, Naples 2002, Bergeron 2001). The process of NGOization adds another challenge. Alvarez (2009) identified three trends that led to

NGOization by the late 1990s: states increasingly turned to feminist NGOs as gender experts, feminist NGOs were addressed as surrogates for larger civil society groups, and governments increasingly subcontracted NGOs to carry out women's programs. As a result, there are women who work on both sides and who are incorporated into the hierarchy, which can be interpreted as a cooptation strategy of powerful state actors and a purposeful shifting of insider/outsider boundaries to domesticate feminist activists (Alvarez 2009, Sultan et al. 2008, Roy 2004, Nagar and Raju 2003). Marsha, the seasoned CSW activist, is critical of the double role of some NGO delegates whose travels are paid by governments. Since 2012 the Europe/North America/Canada NGO caucus has an electronic mailing list and until March 2014 three such representatives in dual roles have identified themselves in emails. Only one of these self identified dual role activists occasionally reports on the mailing list about the progress of informal negotiations. When I interviewed her she contended that "you get the funding but basically you are muzzled" (FN 011813). Follow up interviews with more individuals should be conducted in the future to trace more concisely the influence of NGOs on representatives in dual roles.

Situated accessibility also emerged as a theme in my reflection of my own subjectivity during this research. As a feminist ethnographer with an interest in human rights, I have a strong commitment to strengthening global feminist activism. I attended CSW meetings from a standpoint of privilege, as a registered representative for a feminist NGO. I am an insider to the processes within and around CSW meetings after several years of field research and nine weeks as an intern in the UN. I am an outsider to the life worlds of most of my research participants, ranging from women's activists to UN staff to diplomats to country delegates. I am an insider as the UN representative of my NGO, but an outsider as a non U.S. citizen in a U.S.-based organization. I am an outsider to the knowledge-power nexus of intergovernmental processes, yet more privileged than other NGO members by means of education, skin color, and language. Thus, this article is my attempt to simultaneously reflect on my positionality and my access to the data I collected, as suggested by feminist epistemology (Crawford 2013, Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007). When I shared these reflections with Marsha, she taught me one of the greatest lessons of a global feminist movement. She said:

> "I actually don't care who you are, how much money you have, what religion or politics you may represent. What I care about here at the CSW is if you share the information you have got with other women activists. I have seen conservative, rich, white women handing out draft conclusions and share, and I have seen others

absorbing, never say a word and running back to use
what they learned for their institutions only."
(Interview 6, March 2012)

Marsha's quote bears the hope that situated accessibility within the global women's movement, i.e. hierarchies of class, age, religion, nationality, race and ethnicity, as well as experience and notoriety in the UN system, may be thwarted by feminist solidarity. It also substantiates that situated accessibility exists, and that more must be done to provide better access for more diverse activists at the UN CSW.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of how NGO activists negotiate access to the UN CSW meetings illustrates shifting insiderness and outsiderness (Naples 1996). Feminist activists bring insider knowledge about women's experiences to the table of UN negotiations, and are experts/insiders on the very topics negotiated at CSW meetings. Yet they face challenges in terms of access to the UN. First, women's insiderness and outsiderness shift in relation to the UN system. Activists are incorporated but also disenfranchised at actual CSW negotiations by means of their NGO status. They legitimize outcomes and have a place and a space at CSW meetings, but largely remain outsiders in the process of shaping normative gender policy.

Second, I found that not only did women activists face different degrees of outsiderness in relation to the complex UN system, but also in relation to other women activists who regulate their access to CSW meetings and related NGO spaces. The concept of situated accessibility denotes the variation and permeability of insider/outsider boundaries on the level of transnational women's networks, as some women can access the UN system and information in more privileged ways than others. Access to information is an important currency in the UN business that is moderated by multiple interconnected locations (Bhavnani 2007), such as NGO background, geopolitical location, funding, experience, language skills, personal relationships and notoriety within the UN system, and access to knowledge about institutional processes.

While the UN remains an important and vibrant platform for a transnational women's movement, women activists at the CSW who have fewer economic, educational, cultural, and social resources struggle to participate. Thus, paradoxically, the more "inside" a woman may be in terms of the embodiment of the social location under consideration (e.g. being a rural woman who does not speak English at the CSW meeting that focused on rural women in 2012), the more outside she becomes in terms of the factual production of global gender equality policy. On the other hand, not needing to physically get "inside" the informal CSW negotiations may indicate that an activist has better, informal channels

through which she can obtain information. Consequently, she is less reliant on the more conventional interaction patterns between civil society and the UN system.

Considering these insights, the concept of situated accessibility brings nuance to insider/outsider notions and can add to a deeper understanding of the intricate and complicated global human rights agenda. A key question in multicultural and postcolonial feminism has always been who speaks for whom and whose voices are heard in regard to issues of women of the South (Naples 2009). Feminist researchers suggest that Northern women fail to deconstruct their privilege in the context of a world system dominated by the North, and consequently, they may be projecting their own concerns, rather than providing the space for disadvantaged women to be heard (Chowdhury 2006, Mohanty 2003). I find these tensions mirrored in my data, as inequality along the axes of class, race, language, and notoriety within the UN system structure access and accessibility within the UN, and substantiate the fact that "global feminism" is not one monolithic block. Along the lines of Merry (2006) and Naples (2002), my data underscore the contradictory role of privileged women, who lobby for marginalized women without working to shift what I call situated accessibility through the redistribution of resources and information. These findings do not only substantiate prior literature on NGOization and transnational feminism, but also utilize standpoint theory to explain participation in the UN. It is my hope that this study, which provides deeper understanding of accessibility to the UN CSW, will ultimately be used to enhance accessibility to critical UN decision-making processes.

The article has two major limitations. First, it does not rigorously track and measure the success of women's NGOs in influencing governments. Betsill and Corell (2008) suggest assessing NGO's influence by process tracing which requires building a logical chain of evidence linking communication from NGO diplomats with other actors and the effects of that communication. I can describe how some women activists tried to alter the process and language of the Agreed Conclusions, but my analysis is not conclusive enough yet to make the case that activists have altered concrete language in the outcome documents. More data and counterfactual analysis (Betsill and Corell 2008) is needed to answer questions about the concrete influence of civil society on the social construction of global gender equality policy. Second, the article does not sufficiently take into account the role of different world regions in shaping CSW meetings. Future research should explore the roles of core, periphery, and semi-periphery nations, as well as the role of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). However, some recommendations for women's human rights practice at the CSW can be deducted from the present findings.

To strengthen participation mechanisms for women activists, the UN system can and should enhance accessibility to global gender equality policy construction in the CSW. Some improvements indicated by my findings could be implemented easily, like a simplification of badge and security measures, accessible information technology, public internet terminals, and better facilitation of physical access to UN Headquarters and CSW meetings for activists. More broadly, we have to rethink the NGOization of access. NGOs have privileged access to the UN, and power differentials exist in terms of access between feminist NGOs that divide along critical lines of privilege. Alvarez (2009) argues that there is no "Iron Law of NGOization" in the 20th century, even though NGOs are sometimes seen as surrogates for the larger civil society. Institutionalization and professionalization represent challenges to the internal democracy of community-based movement groups; research has only begun to investigate how NGOization affects feminist NGOs internally (Archer 2013). Along these lines, participation structures for activists who choose not to organize in an NGO could and should be designed, although this would certainly be a more challenging task for activists and the UN system.

My research also illustrates that assumed alliances based on gender often fail to produce collective emancipation (Mohanty 2003, Hill Collins 1986). For women activists who attempt to shape the CSW, it is not enough simply to recognize and talk about difference; we must be fully cognizant of how difference is integrally related to the distribution of power in a society and within feminist organizations. Some CSW activists foster the genuine solidarity necessary for revolutionary change, while others pursue self-interest and avoid confronting organizational structures that reify and reproduce unequal relationships (such as unequal access to the meetings). The CSW shows that hierarchies of class, age, religion, nationality, skin color, and experience may be mollified by feminist solidarity, especially due to the increasing participation of women from the global South. This potential could be strengthened by focused trainings for newcomers to the CSW already in their home countries, so activists do not waste valuable time on site struggling to understand complex participation processes. More travel funding for grassroots activists could be organized by women's NGOs. This strategy, in conjunction with better translation services, would create more space for the subaltern to speak and establish an environment enabling the privileged to listen. Additional studies should focus on women who occupy the outermost, nearly invisible ring of CSW meetings. These women, who have never attended or are no longer able to attend the CSW, are located in a position of extreme outsiderness. And it is exactly their voices the CSW needs to hear on the very inside.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BRICS	Five major economies between periphery and core: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DESA	Division for Economic and Social Affairs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGO CSW/NY	Committee on the Status of Women (office New York City)
UN	United Nations
WSF	World Social Forum

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Endnotes

[i] As of January 2011 DAW has merged into the new UN gender architecture UN Women together with three other gender entities in the UN system.

[ii] In this article I cite direct quotes from participants with quotation marks and denote material from fieldnotes that I paraphrased for the article with "FN" for fieldnote and the date the data was recorded (MMDDYY). I use pseudonyms for all participants.

[iii] NGOs can also access the UN through the Department of Public Information (DPI), which was established in 1946. DPI is the public voice of the UN. Its function is to promote global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the United Nations. Over 1,340 NGOs are associated with DPI, which supports their efforts to interact effectively with the UN in their areas of expertise (http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2013/ngo760.doc.htm, accessed April 11 2014).

[iv] Population density of Africa (1,138,229,000), compared to Europe (742,452,000), Latin America and Caribbean (616,645,000), North America (355,361,000), Asia (4,298,723,000), and Oceania (38,304,000), cf. Population Estimates for 2014, United Nations, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/SpecialAggregates/DISK_NAVIGATION_EXCEL_Geographical.htm , accessed March 25th 2014.

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