Trust in the Truth as a Healing Measure to Long-Lived Histories of Gendered Violence: A Representation of Congolese Refugee Women and their Resilience to Love

This paper explores the historical contexts of the gendered violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a preface to the overall sense of mistrust that remains, especially that of which is forced within women themselves. Paired with personal testimonies of Congolese refugee women living in Providence, RI and formal academic research, I hope this will bring an authentic awareness to the effects that the practice and feelings of trust has on women. I anticipate the personification of the overarching power of resilience that refugee women exhibit to shine through to you as a result of my work.

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"Men are stronger than women. So when the men speak, you are listening. The men are the chief, I must be voiceless, I depend totally on my husband", (10/28/2019) Rehema claims after she is asked if she is a feminist.

Rehema, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been in the US for around three years after residing in a refugee camp in Tanzania for 15 years. Now, she is often seen paired with one of her eight grandchildren, most who were born in the US. Her typical charismatic stature lacked while giving her personal testimony as this was the first time she agreed to narrate her story to someone. In her mid-50s, Rehema remains married to her husband which had been arranged in her late teens.

Understanding what it means to be a woman, takes the authentic articulation of various viewpoints and narratives, specifically accounting for the historical contexts affecting her identity. She is shaped by her own interpretations of the experiences of her past, but often is not given the agency to own or tell her stories .

But worse, what if someone's history is unknown and recited by an outsider? How can she trust herself, if she cannot rely on her own history?

As human beings, we are called to storytelling, and often the experiences that we choose to share reflect ourselves. Stories bring audiences together, but it's important to recognize those who do not have the chance to tell their own. If this form of storytelling has the capacity to free some women, then "narratives contain people's perceptions and, often, their own interpretations of meaning derived from lived realities" (Pavlish 2). This paper takes a closer look at the reactive and possibly persuaded interpretations of some Congolese refugee women's personal testimonies. Perhaps, most importantly, "by ignoring the past, we are encouraged to repeat its

mistakes" (Lorde 117), so this paper brings attention to the atriciotices in Congolese history. As the storyteller of someone's lived history, I have the utmost obligation to recite it authentically and ethically.

The notion and feelings of home has tremendous utility when safety is being compromised. Especially in more communal orientated cultures, safety is replicated in patterns and practices of trust and in traces of the truth, rather than the physical home itself. Yet, when history has the momentum to compromise a woman's trust in herself, it intentionally places her as lesser than others, especially those who identify as men. These implemented biases, whether intentional or not, are extremely difficult to crawl out of.

This piece is a call to action, a showcase of the resilience that these women have brought into my life through their personal testimonies which support other literature and research in the paper. First, I lean on the works of the historical accounts and the sociological and cultural effects from colonialism to foreshadow my own conclusions later in the paper. More specifically, I take a closer look at the Congolese education system and its all too often exclusion of women as a means of power. The ancetodatal evidence is taken from my field experience that often prefaces the formal research. Through this time, I have developed genuine friendships and rapport in order to conduct interview-like personal testimonies during the Fall of 2019 and Spring of 2020.

In addition to the relatively informal interview style testimonials, I acquired further insights from my conversations during the weekly Friday sessions of the "Women's Empowerment Group" at Women's Refugee Care that I have facilitated. The eight women mentioned in this work shared powerful glimpses into their lives, bringing together shared

experiences, yet entirely unique transitions into their resettlement processes to the United States. The women that come to these Friday discussions are generally those who have suffered from extreme forms of PTSD and trauma, potentially making it the only occasion they have left their house all week.

In these testimonies, I witnessed women express a strong sense of their own femininity, however sometimes it was transcribed unconventionally, that I myself-- a white, liberal, woman raised in the United States had difficulty grappling with. As a self-described proud feminist, the differing meanings of their claimed feminism raised important questions about their own history and have influenced this paper. Their meanings of femininity were unique to each other as well--Rehema stood alone in her interpretation of her "anti-feminst" perspective. Nonetheless, all of the women admitted that the US has failed to make them feel like their authentic selves. We must rid ourselves of " an era of 'world apartheid', according to which the border differentiates between individuals" (Khrosravi 331), as we will never learn to appreciate one another.

As a disclaimer, many of the words and stories that the women have introduced to me are raw, and can be triggering to those who have experienced gendered violence themselves. However, their willingness to relive and relay these experiences is an absolutely tremendous act of courage, and as the narrator, I encourage you to keep their strength in mind.

Refugee women, specifically from the Congo, have suffered gendered oppression due to the forceful practice of a patriarchal colonial government which has enlisted a mistrust in conventional forms of community and in the victims themselves. Nevertheless, when their truths are uncovered and dismantled themselves, women are given the opportunity to trust again and begin to heal.

How can you be resilient when your own trust within yourself has been so tarnished?

And I would think that most of the refugee women that I have known are hesitant to be resilient, as the unknown has led them to dangerous outcomes.

Can resilience be a preventive measure or just an outcome?

I think of the gendered violence that does not stop at the border of the Congo, but instead travels alongside the women potentially diminishing their hopes for any future.

Recognizing the implications of *surviving* as a refugee woman is essential as one must acknowledge how she navigates trust, especially after experiencing a past of gendered violence in such an extreme patriarchal society. The notions and assumed deconstruction of safety in community after experiencing something so dehabilating is not easily transcribed in their future, as Rehema exemplifies. Her past trauma has only been reinforced by laws and traditions under persuasion that women are lesser than men, and that they have minimal cultural or societal right to advocate for themselves.

"That side you can see there is rape, violence, and I come from the East side. There is more war, violence, kidnapping...many bad things. My siblings live there, they say 'I don't know what's happening tonight?' "(2/25/2020), Bora confesses a personal account of her experience in the Eastern region.

She had taken a break to sit down with me, after spending the morning sewing bags with imported African materials. Soon after, she will conduct sewing classes for other refugee women, using her teaching techniques that she acquired while in the Congo. After learning that she classified herself as an urban refugee for over 15 years in Uganda, we listened and laughed to

the sounds of my friend Acklynn's song "Ssebo". It is a Luganda word, a language of Uganda, meaning a formal greeting for a man.

Bora's experience is a still breathing example that has made me become cognizant of the fact that all eight of the women in this piece have lived in one the most dangerous places in their country, and some might argue the globe (Cosgrove 159). While teaching in an elementary school in the Congo, she wasn't paid for nine months and to her husband's response he asked her 'Why did you stay?' and she explains, "It taught me to exercise and to stand up". Bora continues to demand her work to be recognized, and hopes to become a teacher in the US some day.

Their words are a testament to their survival and often unacknowledged connection we all have to our homes. Homes are deceiving and sometimes keep us in caged realities that are not conducive to our own well beings. Yet, it would be unethical of me to impose my own thoughts about their home, as these are places that have formed and shaped parts of their incredible identities.

If home is where the heart is, then where is home when your heart has been taken from you?

"*I don't have any dreams because I didn't have an education, but I will take any job if I'm strong enough*", (11/6/2019) Furaha explains after I ask her what her dream job is.

She is the youngest of the interviewees--early 40s, but lived 22 years in a refugee camp in Tanzania. She came to the US with her husband and three children, eventually deciding to have another child after resettling. Furaha nobily wears her past on her body, pulling her shirt up to show me the deep divot on her forearm. She has never fully healed from the early morning

when she witnessed the military brutally kill her father. She experienced similar violence herself, as the men whipped her, stabbed her, but she managed to survive the inconceivable acts.

HISTORICAL AND COLONIAL EVIDENCE OF EDUCATION IN THE CONGO

So, what is it like to authentically dream for the first time? And why for the women, is dreaming so unimaginable? Do you really need an education to think about the future?

After investigating educational trends in the DRC, the school systems have never traditionally included women. As a result of official Belgium colonization in 1885, formal school systems by Catholic missionaries were introduced and designed to fit a more Eurocentric style of learning (Ruyskensvelde, Sarah, et al 5) and still have not fully recovered. This approach also involved gender- based school systems in which the curriculum differed, teaching the traditional Catholic gender roles (Kelly 131). And despite the initial rejection of this style of schooling by the Congolese, it later served as a status symbol for those who could attend forming *évolués* (Depaepe and Hulstaert 10), or those few Congolese who accepted it.

The "new" education system after the Congo's independence was incongruent with the rural way of life that most Congolese folk participated in. It is said that the state relied on 80% of it's employment in agriculture (Depaepe and Hulstaert 15), yet the *évolués* believed the Western ideals would be the proper foundation for the new independent state. Unbeknown to them, the "Congolese were being mentally colonised, even after independence...and the finger was pointed at the school" (Ruyskensvelde, Sarah, et al 10). Traditional schooling was not widely accepted for different religious and personal reasons. And for instance, Congolese students might have felt as if they were entering into "an initiation camp, in which young people were secluded, subjected to strange taboos and privations, and taught an occult language." (Depaepe and Hulstaert 10).

The apparent consent to formal education now sets the precedent of the current educational system in the Congo, which still translates into a means of power.

While considering the idea that "the education system was developed as an instrument of power" (Depaepe and Hulstaert 3), the men still reap the benefits from it. In 1957, after the country's independence, the post- colonial school systems decided to still continue to use French as the language of instruction for both primary schools and secondary schools (Depaepe and Hulstaert 13). Clemente, one of the participants's Aline's husband, argues that this is because very few indigenous Congolese people had qualifications to teach, so there was utterly no choice but to keep French as the language of instruction (12/09/2019). Due to this factor, many of the materials used in school were from France and Belgium (Depaepe and Hulstaert 13).

Accessing history has proven to be a privilege, but finding relevant accounts of native Congolese people is nearly impossible. I have chosen to focus on the educational history in the Congo as the nucleus to this work because of the importance it has on a woman's independence. Finding accurate academic histories has been difficult because "too many non-African historians have tried to influence the research agenda of African historians and to impose on them historiographies generated in the West" (Pascal and Reid 28). I continue to wonder about the validity of many of the resources that are accessible, illustrating that embedding bias in history is real and truly dehumanizing.

The absence of women presents an added element to the way Congolese women were viewed historically. Undoubtedly, it is reflected in how women are viewed socially, culturally, but most transparently in the law. The women in this work have unveiled their truths to us, and as readers, we have the obligation to understand the contexts of their words.

To forcefully implement a bias in history to the indigenous people is a tragedy and shameful. It personifies the colonial injustices that still bear today.

This manipulation of history has made coming to concise interpretations about the education system in the Congo relatively unattainable.The literature is teased by past colonizers who view this form of education as a means to successful "development"---domination.

There was little to no mention of women in schools, or about the rejection of females in the education system. The gender disparity in schools shortly after their independence was less than 9% for attendance of girls (Kelly143). This perceived neglect in academic literature can account for the disproportionate amount of females to men who are literate in present day Congo. In fact it is predicted that, "one in two adult women are illiterate (as opposed to one in five adult men), with the rate of illiteracy remaining significantly higher for women than for men—41.1 percent for women and 14.2 percent for men (Freedman 3).

If Furaha cannot dream because she was never formally educated, then I can safely assume that she believes that those who have been educated are strong. Leaning on the factual evidence, if men are more statistically more likely to have access to this type of education in the Congo, then women are set up to view themselves as weak. If a person cannot dream, she does not envision a future, and might lack hope that her life will never be unimagined from a static state (Pavlish 4). However, this framework of inherit power has to "address western-generated knowledge regarding identity in the context or as a result of colonialism, which naturally involves power relations" (Depaepe and Hulstaert 9). Thus, the eurocentric view of education in the Congo is embedded in patriarchal ideals which views the knowledge acquired through formal education as the only means to "knowing" or power.

"I have a dream of just getting a job, any kind of job, but my body and state of being doesn't allow me for now. I don't know how to interpret that opportunity because women don't have the education opportunity. I couldn't have a dream job`` (10/28/2019), Rehema offers an additional obstacle to employment.

The continuous execution of a woman's exemption from power has the potential to prohibit women from viewing a future. Their scars from the violence proposed on them is a disturbing aspect of the refugee experience. And even when the women are "freed", most are "often left wounded or with long-term physical ailments as well as the psychological symptoms of trauma, these women face multiple barriers to earning a living" (Cosgrove 162). The effects from the Congo have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles for Rehema, making her feel further alienated in the US.

Her response resembled similar to others in the group, and they each described that they would want to housekeep if possible. This occupation is already seen as traditional women's work, and almost the most imaginable job for a woman whose roles were limited to "caregivers, child-bearers, nurturers, and community workers" in their home country (Banwell 8).

"Women were voiceless, and I was a woman from the same background and that once I was educated I needed to stand up. I was surrounded by the miseries and growing up I was missing everything I needed as a woman. Women are so abandoned to themselves, so I wanted to make sure I can help them a little bit" (11/20/2019), Aline describes her childhood in the Congo as such. She was the one of three women in the interview group to go to formal schooling,

including obtaining a college degree in Social Work in the Congo, and aspiring Masters degree in the US to build upon her skills.

Her journey to asylum was influenced by her and her husband Clemente's persecution for supporting women's and young girl's rights. After advocating in court on behalf of a young girl who was raped, they received a phone call from an official in the Army explaining that "you are reaching your end" (9/25/2019). They left with their six children and an USB drive as evidence in the middle of the night for their family's villages.

One described that colonizers believed "Christian patriarchy saved women from pologymy" (Kelly 130), but the unintended consequences make mass rape of women the new form of *unconsented* pologymy. In fact, these forces allow for the continuous exploitation of women when:

"patriarchal structures retrench due to wartime practices and economic pressures, and women—especially young women and girls—find themselves at the mercy of angry fathers and men in general. Women's rights to bodily integrity and other human rights are threatened while men's positions are privileged" (Cosgrove 162).

Here, is a little better than the Congo (treatment of women). Back in the Congo, the women don't have freedom and there is a lot of domestic violence because the government doesn't care. Here is different, the government gets involved, (10/23/2019) Caterina explains after being asked how she views the US.

She is in her mid 50s and a single mother of five from the DRC, although she considers Burundi her home because she spent most of her adult life there. Her smile stretches wide across her face, but is not often seen, especially during the interview process. Her initial rejection to

testifying was transparent through her cross-legged position, and inability to make eye contact with me.

Through an interview conducted with one of Aline's daughter, Marie, (10/18/2019) for a different assignment, I learned that traditional Congolese women are culturally prohibited from showing their emotions and discussing their concerns with others. I used this conversation as context to my approach with Caterina, revealing to her that opening up to others about my own past trauma has allowed me to exert the pain it has caused outside of myself---an empowering process for a woman who has been manipulated by a man. I then realized that it was again, a monumental feat for Caterina and the others to share their thoughts with me.

Caterina described it as a "miracle" that she was allowed to pass the Burundi state line, and believes that this was because the officials saw her alone and with a baby, or that it was God. Once she filed her asylum application in Burundi, it took her three years, a relatively short amount of time compared to other women interviewed.

It makes me wonder what more she is carrying with her.

Based on the evidence from a focus group held in the Congo by academics, several strands of their gathered responses related with historical contexts with gendered violence, particually involving rape. For instance, "nearly all participants in the focus groups identified the first Congo war in 1996 and the associated influx of foreign armed actors into the region as the starting point of the epidemic of rape in their experience" (Kelly, Jocelyn, et al. 288). Again, this trend of foreign forces instituting harmful practices into the Congo is present, but now through the eyes of the native Congolese.

However, the capitalistic intentions of the international investors are being overlooked here. The Congo holds 80% of a mineral, coltan, which is used to produce phones and other popular electronics (Banwell 5). As a means of control over the exportarty sites, local militias manipulate women to exert their power and gain monopolies over the sources. The land has the potential to be taken over by these militias, and in the case that it does, the men use rape as a tactic to ensure their success in selling to nearby countries, who then sell to the US, Japan, and countries in Europe (Banwell 6).

"They allow kids and use the kids to remove the silver and gold and don't pay them. Then, I say 'what does the government mean about the kids who died there'?They pay the women just a little, they do a job that's very hard (2/25?2020), Bora explains the exploitation of children to extract the materials, too.

The local militias, fueled by global powers terrorize and rape women, but there is evidence that the training specifically instructs soldiers to engage in this violence. Banwell describes it as "militarized masculinity and heterosexuality" (7). And since, this are no repracutions or accountability for these men, this may contribute to her explanation why "individual soldiers use rape and sexual violence to subvert their marginal position within the gender hierarchy in order to acquire superior sexual and financial status over other men"(Banwell 3). The men who are recruited for these military positions typically did not hold much of a status in Congolese society, and most likely were not educated (Banwell 7). Thus, by raping women, the military men inherit a sense of power that they might have not been able to attain otherwise.

THE DETERMINATIONS OF WOMEN'S BODIES

Women's bodies in the Congo were politicized and degraded and continue to be into the use of the man--a body cannot be weaponized. There was a new term coined in the early 2000s and "this particular description of "rape and other forms of gender-based violence" reflects an understanding that sexual violence as a weapon of war is not an inevitable by-product of war but a phenomenon to be condemned and prevented" (Her Story...78). The lack of reporting further silences these acts, and gives the state an opportunity to continue ignoring them. And if "rape is on the increase, reported and unreported, and rape is not aggressive sexuality, it is sexualized aggression" (Lorde 120). This aggression is an attack on a woman as a human being, and it's twisted justification is to ensure pleasure for that of a man.

Women and their bodies should never be an instrument--their harmony is no one's but their own.

"For Clement being involved, it helped men to understand because he was the example. He was happy and he tried making his wife happy, you will be happy. But he didn't have friends because of what he was doing and many people didn't like him", (11/20/2019) Aline professes to me, identifying the consequences of their work in the Congo.

Although, there now exists laws protecting women from abuse, it is rarely enforced or even accessible to the victims. Even more so, the state is especially weak in the Eastern regions and "if they are functional at all, and tend to prefer the needs of elites and those with power, often men" (Cosgrove 163). Due to several factors: costs of travel to the capital city, acquiring a lawyer, and inadequate knowledge to identify the offender, most choose to not report it (Banwell

9).Also, the cultural expectations of women are another stronghold which prevents victims from seeking justice as well.

Some current laws made to protect women also seem to contradict this principle. One law in the Congo mandates "a woman to obtain her husband's consent before opening a bank account, gaining employment, or buying and selling property" (Banwell 8). All of these requirements are extremely problematic, especially if a woman wants to flee an abusive relationship. Her husband essentially still holds ownership over any chance of her succeeding under her own terms. The independence of a Congolese woman is predicated on the opinion of the men in her life, who might view these opportunities for her as limitations on their manhood.

"I was strong and I was everything for them, I was the father and the mother" (11/18/2019), Clementina, the oldest of the interviewees who is in her mid 80s explains her role in the Congo.

Her marble blue eyes strike you as she is almost always the first to dance around the room to traditional Congolese gospel music. After spending over 20 years in a refugee camp in Tanzania, her past and old age do not hold her back from giving her the energy to speak her mind in the US. Her proudest identity is that she is a mother and a feminist, and she continues to commit to that identity, especially when she reminds her daughter of her worth in an abusive relationship. Even though Clementina arrived to the US just a few months ago, she calls it her home because she will die here.

Regardless of the lack of implementation of the laws to protect women, their intent is questionable. The familial laws dictate that a husband's role is "to protect his wife. When a woman is raped or sexually assaulted this sends a clear message to the husband that he has been

unable to protect his wife and carry out his masculine duty" (Banwell 8). A rape is then defined through a patriarchal lense, leaving the women victims completely neglected.

Besides some Congolese women getting blamed for their rape, not being able to talk about it, and prosecute their rapist, her husband could betray her as well. He might view "his wife as a burden once she has been raped, particularly if she has suffered debilitating injuries... both men and women repeatedly cited fear of 'contamination' as a reason why husbands abandon their wives. (Kelly, Jocelyn, et al. 291). This statement implies that victims are at fault, and they are the ones who need cleansing reiterating that women must stay silent.

"I view my gender being hard like when the situation happened to me. I was wishing a lot of things at that time, I wish I wasn't a woman, I didn't have to go to school, I just wish I wasn't even born. Viewing my gender was really hard, but now I'll say it's easy. I feel relieved and accepted being a woman and maybe what happened--it happened for a reason. I accept being a woman. I accept being a mother. I accept my gender" (3/4/2020) Tina provides transparent insight about her feelings after her body was stolen from her in the camp.

She had spent most of her time growing up in a refugee camp in Namibia, but it wasn't until she was there that she realized her father was alive. Upon arrival to the US in 2011 when she was 19, the described non consensual encounter in the camp left her caring for her first child before attending school. Since arriving, she has pursued an education in cosmetology and has encouraged other refugee women in Providence to speak their truths and take advantage of the educational opportunities.

Ironically, Congolese peoples stressed education and religion as potentially effective interventions (Kelly, Jocelyn, et al. 295) to address the mass rape occuring. The suggestions are

the basis of the argument of this text of invasive procedures established by Belgian colonizers. Yet, mass rape appears to be a pepetual cycle in the Congo that was politicized by global forces. For those who observe rapes, the obvious traumas stain their future but also taint their conceptions as well. The pattern is more visible when"boys who witness violence against women as children are more likely to commit violent acts against women as adults; adult women are more at risk of sexual violence if they witness it as girls"(Kelly, Jocelyn, et al. 296). If this is the case, then how can the Congo recover?

"Some Congolese people think white people prevent black people to grow with birth control" (12/11/19), Clemente, Aline's husband, describes after being asked why he thinks many Congolese women do not have access to reproductive health services.

It is predicted that about 1.8 percent of women have access to these services (Freedman 5). This statistic in itself confirms the lack of support that these women have been expressing throughout this piece. The fear that the white colonizers have left in Congo has evolved into a legitimate fear of the ending of an entire race. Whereas, if women were more equipped with these resources, they might gain more agency over their lives.

THE JOURNEY AND ITS OPPRESSION

Building upon a woman's historical context in the Congo, it is imperative to acknowledge that a refugee's journey is not lateral or linear. Instead, many refugees travel through and across various borders, navigating different histories and realities until they some settle in a refugee camp for upwards of twenty years. Some even might feel if they "were [was] the border"(Khosravi 332). Because of the subjectivity of an individual's experience during this

perpetual journey, to diagnose trust in an entire society, both socially and institutionally is unethical.

To identify as a refugee takes on various contexts, especially when the politicized term is so closely related to vulnerability. I would even argue that this status as a label distinguishes someone to just that, limiting their own agency as an individual. The rhetoric in migration literature broadly labels "transit migrants", as many women that are in this piece would fit the description because of the ambiguity of their journey. However, this accepted, clandestine category ("a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality"(Mainwaring 4)) and its "concept encompasses imagined journeys before migration, journeys from countries of origin through countries of transit to destination" (Mainwaring 2). The designation as a "refugee" is a measure to describe the cause of fleeing, not an explanation of the trek itself.

Due to the shrouded nature of the journey, migrants themselves who are negotiating these circumstances are, too, invisible.

In order to make refugees visible, their past must be recognized by the victims themselves. As women, they must be humanized (Riedel 7). Humanity should never be compromised, it is a right and obligation we have to one another (Friere 43). But, perhaps this system appears to be too complex for those entangled in it, so the true danger is internalizing oppression. Claiming the refugee identity is an outpour of emotional and past assumptions, and to traverse the various intentions of migrants takes away from their identity. True liberation comes from identifying yourself, and not living through the dictation of others.

By viewing oppression as subjective, it agrees to dangerous consequences that the oppressors have placed upon the oppressed falsely giving people agency. It allows the stories to

be told and lived unauthentically, separating each person's trauma from the rest. Whereas, oppression is an objective truth and should be categorized as a universal experience. Needless to say, still the personal experiences should never be overlooked as an entity of its own, but more so seen as a collaboration of the system that does not value these personal attacks on humanity.

TRUST AS A PRACTICE *AND* A FEELING

"I would say it's easy to build trust, but if you destroy it-- to regain it--it's really hard. That's why I take trust as a unique thing--something unique to myself. If I trust you, I take it like an egg, as soon as you [break] broke it, it's really hard to get that trust back", (3/4/2020) Tina explains a powerful comparison of trust, describing its fragility.

The past can no longer be classified as an impervious history, because the experiences of the women beautifully showcase and articulate the way it moves. Although their histories are oppressive, it must be noted that it has not restrained them. Instead, I highlight the testimonies of community, and their endless capacity to instill trust through the uncovering of truths.

To view trust solely as a feeling limits its ability to extend into the lives of refugee women. Simply, one who does not often practice trust may not have positively perceived the actions and emotions of others or themselves. In some cases, if someone did once practice trust, but had misinterpreted the intentions of another's actions or emotions, then they will be less likely to engage in that sort of practice again. Hence, using language like the "journey of trust" is used in tandem with that of the refugee journey (Lyytinen 6 December 2017). It might not ever be clear when this journey ends, but I have inferred that there is no expiration because of the temporary changing dynamics of trust. This language includes the anecdotal evidence and the stories of those who have traversed new territories to find some forms of safety.

"I think about trust when I was in Congo, my trust was-- I didn't trust everyone--no. In Uganda, my trust was too low because every night at midnight, I say "Oh my God" what will be my tomorrow?" (2/25/2020), Bora categorizes her trust through "levels" presenting the ambiguous and fluctuation that it has.

Therefore, the understanding of trust cannot solely be discerned as a generalization, but also particularized (Lyytinen 8 December 2017), which I conclude often intersect. The nature of trust was enunciated in various forms during these interviews, promoting the idea that trust is extremely subjective to the individual and based on experience and feelings. Hence, this is the reason why I have decided to offer the explanations of trust that the women concluded, while simultaneously trying to not diminish their views because of its constant flexibility.

COMMUNITY AND ITS POWER

"Community is a gathering of people who speak the same language, who are connected, have some same goals, and who work for a better life. They come together, they rejoice, they share, they enjoy food and meetings, and dance", (2/23/2020) a thoughtful definition of what encompasses community according to Aline.

Familiarity as a sense of comfort in community is the thread that defines and keeps those who seek it to stay. For Aline, she hinted that shared cultural norms, or those willing to learn and participate in them is what her ideal community would look like. For some women, their "old communities have often been destroyed, a sense of new or emerging community must be crafted from common circumstances and the potential for future bonds and identities" (Mason, Gail, and Mariastella 4). As per the women I interviewed, the Empowerment Group exemplifies the power in their past circumstances as refugees to bring about a stronger replication of community.

If this is the case, are we responsible for making "community" or do they exist on their own?

"It's a place where you can be-- a community can be a group of people find peace with them" (2/25/2020),Bora connects peace with community bridging each feeling together.

In conjunction with community, there underlies the obvious undertones of trust which can be directed to the reason why some individuals are drawn to that certain gathering. The use of trust I would even argue that trust is "required for establishing meaningful communities where their members can feel protected and secure" (Lyytinen 2017 page 2). Therefore, communities have the aptitude to extend far into the lives of human beings, perhaps more than we have realized. Yet, their very function tends to the visceral prerogatives of the person , making its utility extremely valuable, especially those who are fragile.

"What makes a community first is the people itself where they meet and peace within themselves. There will never be a community where neighbors are fighting and not talking. People first have to live in peace" (3/4/2020) Tina includes sharing ideas as a means to promote peace in a community.

With an emphasis on peace as the cornerstone to the meanings of community, I am again reminded that peace cannot be negotiated with trust. It is not necessarily the physical existence of a building, or the meeting place, it is rooted in the relationships that are maintained and protected. So when defining "communities of trust' it is the 'socio-spatial setting in which substantial relationships of trust among people exist, and in which people feel sheltered and safe because they do not perceive other community members as posing them a risk'" (Lyytinen May

2017 2). So when communities in the Congo object to a woman's ability to defend herself, and bring peace, it produces dangerous outcomes of mistrust, including that in herself.

TRUST IN ONESELF

"I can make something safe by myself. When it was hard, I made it safe"(2/28/2020), Louise reclaims when I ask about her feelings of safety, although she was somewhat timid.

Louise is a witty matriarch, but her husband tugs at her freedom, even after spending eight years together in the camps with their five children. She was able to go to school in the Congo, but was never allowed to hold a formal job.

"No I have not been able to heal. It's because of my family", she recognizes that her husband's treatment is unacceptable, in her words, it is ultimately the "culture" that makes her endure it. During the interview, Louise was reserved and quiet, so I decided to not push her as her limits were short winded. It was not until later that she opened up to me about her husband's daily abusive behavior.

Since the term trust is so subjective, and frankly ambiguous, it is imperative to define the varying forms. Foremost, perhaps the most debilitating form of trust that has been taken from refugee women is their belief in their own self.

If someone cannot believe in her own capacities to trust, then how can she see her true Self?

Although it is hard to determine where this mistrust originated, the political impact that the Congolese government had on the population, specifically the segmented role of women cannot be understated. If the government is a proposed democracy, but does not reflect democratic results, then "the loss of trust in political institutions seems not to be related to a

rejection of democratic values" (Toubøl 20). Instead, these values are not negotiable within the population, causing a loss in trust in the system itself, forcing those to rely or from other forms of litigations. Most of the women have never had a supportive political system, and all admit that the Congolese government does not care about its people.

WOMANISM

"I know that as a woman, I am strong and powerful and can make change also. It 's changed because I'm always connected to some of the powerful women in the states who work hard at feminism to advocate for gender equality", (2/23/2020) Aline describes her present feelings of her womanism in the US, which may have been what inspired her and Clement to start the nonprofit organization Women's Refugee Care. It aids Congolese refugee families in Providence, RI and provides an authentic approach to meeting the needs of Congolese women.

The term womanism can be described "a form of consciousness that incorporates intersections of race, economics, culture, politics, and nationalism" (Haffegee and East 2). When womanism is a reactionary measure to address their trauma, they are more likely to acknowledge their past safely. This mechanism allows for African refugee women to come together in solidarity to reckon with their perceptions of womanhood.

"A good community is to talk together and do something together. No--maybe only with refugee women" (2/28/2020)*,* Louise reveals that those who consider themselves as refugee women are those who she trusts to be with.

As a form of healing "a womanist perspective on the gendered experiences of women refugees from Africa begins by exposing these experiences" (Haffejee, B., & East, J. F.7), and by exposing these experiences they are using a form of trust to do so. That trust is earned through

similar experiences of traumas. To claim their identity as a woman would bring some clarity into healing. In other words, the truth has the capacity to extract a sense of their lived truth and trust with one another who may have experienced similar traumas.

" A woman can trust in a woman because it's a matter of the world. A woman has a big heart, and when you have a big heart, you open your heart to everyone" (2/25/2020), Bora elaborates on the special bonds that women possess together, as a community.

TRAUMA

The concept of "collective trauma", which recognizes that trauma is multifaceted and not always derived from one incident. It's effects and "fundamentally changes community functioning and identity and forces change upon an entire culture" (Riedel, Eberhard 2). Hence, trauma can challenge someone's identity within a community. Trauma can also be global and he argues that "collective trauma is at the heart of contemporary global anxiety and fear" (Riedel, Eberhard 3). Further, these effects are hardly addressed publicly, especially for Congolese women who are reluctant to express themselves due to the ridicule by community members.

If collective trauma is a global phenomenon, then has the potential to and "spreads epidemically by psychic infection, back and forth among individuals and communities and across generations" (Riedel, Eberhard 5). This reinforces my thoughts on the historical contexts that are affecting refugee women even today. If someone is entering a community that is predicated on the violence of women, even if the woman does not directly experience violence, she will likely be affected by it. And worse, if there is no collective action to advocate for this particular group, then the violence remains normalized and an unfortunate, crucial part of the function of the community.

The oppression that has then become cyclical, and it is difficult to break the pattern if the truth is silenced. Some of the communities that the women have described in their past are primary examples of one in which “the traumatized community scapegoats its victims. The community itself has become toxic, unaware of its fears, unaware of its collective shame and anger, unable to protect its women and children” (Riedel 8).

Other forms of trauma that are more subjective and apparent to the individual have dramatic effects as well. The idea of “moral trauma" is a result of when “basic trust eroded, even in international institutions, some people give up and lose their will to live” (Ridel 10-11). If categorizing trust as basic, we accidently place false narratives that trust is familiar and uniform to everyone. However, I would argue that trust is not traditionally habitual, but when it is dismantled, it is difficult to recover.This form of trauma eliminates authentic thought, I can assume, because her intentions are socialized into something that she may not actually intend or is aware of.

TRUST, HEALING, AND COMMUNITY

Safety is when you feel you are in good condition, or when you feel you are able to explain what you feel. That can be safe and safe when you are in security, a place where you are secure, (2/25/2020), Bora describes her feelings of safety.

Bora and Caterina were the only women I interviewed that sought urban asylum rather than the camps, as if given the choice. Yet, this very idea of options may have persuaded them to seek asylum in Uganda in this way, but cannot be perceived as a traditional understanding of choice (Ramsay 113). While being forced to migrate, having the agency to decide where they

would seek asylum was somewhat "liberating". Not to mention that the overcrowding of camps and the lack of resources are a daily reminder that they are living under uncertainty.

"You need to be in a community who you can trust, and tell them about your situation and that will make you happy"(2/25/2020), Bora adds to how she has started to heal from her past.

Finding the passion to liberate oneself should come after redeeming the agency that has always been present. Yet, I can imagine that those who are oppressed can almost always feel the oppression buckling in their chest. This motivation comes from, "their recognition of the necessity to fight for it" (Friere 45), and by, it is the battle for love. And by love, it's a realization that one should push for the elevation of their voice to be recognized not only by herself, but by those around her as well. Hence why many of the women have explained that it is essential to view communities as a group of relationships so oppression will not be masked by progression for the individual.

TRUTH AS RESILIENCE TO HEALING

"The truth is hidden. It takes time to be sure to convince yourself. No one knows what is inside of you, and that is the truth. So the truth can depend on the trust people have in one another", (2/23/2020) Aline reveals that even the truth can be silent, and that learning to trust can heal.

Resilience as an outcome seems almost unattainable when domestic abuse is "quiet" (Mason, Gail, and Mariastella Pulvirenti 9). Yet, it must be said that it is an unfortunate common narrative that speaking out for themselves compromises their cultural norms as "fear of losing ties with their community has been identified as a major reason why they are reticent to speak

out about violence prior to resettlement" (Mason, Gail, and Mariastella Pulvirenti 10). Despite the incredible display of vulnerability in these testimonies, many of the women admitted to never recounting their traumas. Of course, the discussions may have been too painful, and continue to be, but I can only imagine the other possible conclusions.

"If I express myself, maybe your heart will feel free, you receive "a healing" because you know the truth. If you keep it "in" yourself, and only take medications and keep that burden in your heart, you won't heal", (3/4/2020) Tina recounts a metaphorical explanation of the power of sharing your larger Self in order to heal.

It is not until refugee women are able to take ownership of themselves politically, socially, and culturally that they can write equitable justice. If we can announce the past and harness the truth, it is then that "the future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new differences of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (Lorde 123). The notion of truth is at the very praxis of healing, and there cannot be trust in community without it.

"You can trust someone when they're telling you the truth,"(2/28/2020), Louise simply, yet concisely describes the connection between trust and the truth.

This broader discussion of oppression views the rigid dichotomy of a refugee themself, and their experience as separate. But, Because the women have chosen to "unveil the world of oppression...and commit themselves to its transformation" (Friere 54), they have used their truths as a means of healing.

LOVE AS A CONCLUSION

"*You know the truth makes you connect to some people. It makes you be able to be something you don't know what to do and trust within yourself and it gives me power"* (2/25/2020), Bora explicitly states the power behind the truth and the community it creates.

Although there was no specific mention of love or even of it's concept, I believe the semantics of their self derived meanings of community are present. For example, if communities are parts of civilizations, then "a civilization of love that did not demand justice of people would be a true civilization: it would not delineate genuine human relations' ' (Romero April 12, 1979). This further emphasizes that it may be the feelings of love that lay the groundwork for a trust within a community's ability to achieve greater unified change.

To argue even further, history serves as an interjection to this movement. The past has the potential to transition society from those actions, but simultaneously has the opportunity to further perpetuate dangerous mindsets. For the sake of this paper, "to try to preach without referring to history...we cannot preserve old traditions that no longer have any reason for being" (Romero February 18,1979, Febuary 25, 1979). And now, the old traditions that the women have conveyed must be in consonance with their new realities in the US since the truth has prevailed. The reflection of the past has never degraded the unity in love and community, instead has only strengthened it.

"If you hide the meat from the fire, how can you cook it?" (11/06/2019), Furaha concludes with a powerful demonstration of the neglect of women in Congolese society.

If you abandon the very notion of a woman, how can she live? She will find a way. As a conclusion, I have had the absolute utmost honor dissecting the testimonies that the women have

relayed to me in this paper. It must be said that my own conclusions are not determinations, they are just observations based on the contexts of history. The real meaning belongs to the women themselves. Histories can only be understood from those who have lived them, and I'm thankful that these women have allowed me to relay theirs. The trauma that has ensued upon each woman will never be tolerated and no longer be silent. Rather, they will work together in a loving and peaceful community to unpack the truths in order to gain a greater clarity for trust. Their resilience is unfathomable, and I believe each woman is capable of growing and becoming stronger each and every day, and will serve as an inspiration for those who listen.

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