

Rape Narratives & Survival within Counter-geographies: (Dis)Pleasure in Disrupting Globalized Universals

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From a rhetorical standpoint, rape narratives are complex and often contested accounts which problematically involve a multitude of perceptions, judgments, and counter stories from within and without the rhetorical situation. Case in point: in August of 2010, news media began reporting of mass rape that took place in and around the small Congolese village of Luvungi. The attacks were a concerted effort by rebel groups operating within an already unstable area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to media and humanitarian agencies, however, the numbers reported were staggering, even for this particularly dangerous area of the Congo; in a period of four days, rebels raped more than 10% of the village population, upwards of 242 women, one as young as a month old, and the eldest reportedly over 100 years. Additionally, media augmented these reports by suggesting that, considering the social shame of rape in this community, actual numbers may have been much higher. U.N. leaders responded by condemning the attack while also receiving wide criticism for their apparent lack of action in and around the community. The story was obviously widely covered and only seemed to confirm U.N. representative Margot Wallström's label of the Congo as "the rape capital of the world" (Heaton in "Luvungi"). Despite these reports, two years later, Laura Heaton, a freelance journalist working in the Congo, traveled to Luvungi to observe the aftermath, and she uncovered, through multiple sources, including U.N. peacekeepers, that the number of rape victims may have actually been shockingly exaggerated in an effort to gain funding for humanitarian aid (Heaton in "Luvungi"). Her report, "What Happened in Luvungi," published in *Foreign Policy*, explains how she realizes that "[m]ost emergencies center around one story and one category of victims,' . . . 'In Liberia, it was the child soldiers, in Sierra Leone it was mainly the amputees, and in the DRC it was the raped women'" (Heaton). While the accuracy of the mass rape in Luvungi is clearly disputed, and I do not advocate for any one reading of the events, the rhetorical interaction involved serves to illustrate how narratives of rape are produced, interpreted, and consumed across imbalanced geopolitical contexts that perpetuate unequal access to platforms for storytelling, understanding, and safety.

Of course, the use and fabrication of rape as a plot point—a means to an end—is distressing and creates an air of scandal for those surrounding

the rhetorical situation. Immediately, mainstream, Western audiences may uncomfortably doubt the authenticity and credibility of both humanitarian agencies and those who have been sexually attacked; however, Western audiences will rarely interrogate their own part in how stories like Luvungi's are composed. Postcolonialism, though, has long been interested in examining the overarching rhetorical dynamics of events and the various narratives of events like that in Luvungi, asking questions that expose slippery rhetorical agendas and networks of power: who gets to speak? through whom? who is listening? and how is the message disseminated?

This essay will focus on storytelling—how stories of the subaltern (Spivak) are shared, mediated, and commodified. Especially important for this article are the implications of how subaltern humanitarian narratives consist in “a genre embedded in universalizing notions of the human” (Peek 117).¹ To be sure, this paper is not an attempt to uncover fabrications within humanitarian narratives; I am aware that all narratives are rhetorical constructs that are the result of collaboration of the rhetorician with the many players and contexts with which they interact. Instead, this paper scrutinizes the more meaningful issue of how globalization problematically plays into demands for universally recognizable humanitarian narratives, such as those required to obtain humanitarian aid and legal residency. In particular, I analyze how Western audiences value and commodify rape as a plot point within subaltern humanitarian narratives, producing unsettling results for marginalized, local communities. To that end, I examine the messy rhetorics of two subaltern rape narratives within cultural representations: the Luvungi mass rape as reported in the U.S. based National Public Radio 2017 *Rough Translation* podcast episode “The Congo We Listen To” and Israeli author Ayelet Gundar-Goshen's *Waking Lions*, a novel about an African refugee woman's rhetorical agency and silence while displaced in Israel. By pairing these two cultural productions, I closely examine the relationship between subaltern humanitarian narratives and rape in Western rhetorical contexts. By applying a rhetorical ecology methodology, this article explores how subaltern rape narratives play out within “counter-geographies” (Sassen, “Scales” 82), demonstrating how paying attention to concrete, local, and current contexts leads to worthwhile postcolonial analysis.

Globalization and Narrative Universals

In his essay, “Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory,” within *The Postcolonial and the Global*, Timothy Brennan invites postcolonial scholars to question whether globalization is simply colonialism repackaged (48). One of globalization's central tenets (and a source of wide criticism) is how the world is “being reconstituted as a single social

space” (Brennan 39). What is crucial to understand about Brennan’s analysis is that globalization theory does not intend to interpret human beings as faceless masses; instead this theoretical perspective understands that humans are unique, consisting of varied pockets with a “governing logic or social tendency that brings all these localities and regions into a unity unknown before” (39). This unity, despite its promise to acknowledge humans as individuals, is inherently problematic, as implied in Brennan’s description of globalization’s totalizing effects on perception: “Totality does not merely stipulate a unity, but suggests that any contingent or local problem is only clearly seen as being conditioned by its place in a total relationship of objects and events, all governed by a dominant logic” (43). Pierre Bourdieu develops this specific point in “Uniting to Better Dominate,” in which he describes how hybridity is a myth, and what may be perceived as a positive merging of linguistic, literary, and cultural variants is actually the virality of U.S. global hegemony, especially perpetuated through the consolidation of national economies. What is more, cosmopolitanism is a direct offshoot of this “dominant logic,” as “it both describes and endorses (endorses as it describes) the creation of a singularity out of newness, a blending and merging of differences becoming one entity” (Brennan 44). This cosmopolitanism is distinct from internationalism that identifies differences, but seeks to cooperate and network through those differences of politics and culture. The “dominant logic” associated with globalization is also complexly damaging as it may lead to universals within demands, constructions, and interpretations of humanitarian narratives, constricting how humans tell their stories across genres and rhetorical situations.

Narrative theory posits that narratives “are guided by reference to dominant cultural, social and political discourses as we make sense of our experiences and present [ourselves] in particular and strategic ways to others” (Miller 43). Most critics agree that narrative accounts of all individuals are really negotiations “in which individuals conform to, challenge or resist dominant (and counter) discourses” (Miller 52). Or, as Corder has argued, humans “are always seeing, hearing, thinking, living, and saying the fiction that we and our times make possible and tolerable, a fiction that is the history we can assent to at a given time” (17). Along these lines, there is already significant scholarship (Heaton; Hesford; Powell) which demonstrates that metanarratives, largely produced and consumed by western audiences, contribute to the rhetorical choices of subalterns’ stories as well as listeners’ interpretation/ validation of place-based experiences; in fact, western audiences tend to understand the “world in terms of spectator zones and sufferer zones” (Chouliaraki 83). The result is the perpetuation of stock stories, largely seen in humanitarian narratives which are required for status or assistance, as in immigration or humanitarian aid interviews. For example, Powell demonstrates how stock characters such as “savages,” “victims,” and “saviors” operate within stories of displacement: “An outside entity (like the UN or an NGO or well-meaning celebrity or politician) comes into place to save the victims

(who are helpless) from the savages (who often have machetes) and from the turmoil their own cultures have created” (*Power* 174). The obvious concern is the ways on which these stock stories “delimit the possible forms of public response to violence and injustice” (Hesford 3). What is lost within these reduced representations are the multifarious, nuanced representations of the individual stories and contexts within humanitarian dialogues. Overall, there are questions about how western framing of such narratives/visualizations promotes established networks of geopolitical power.

Additionally, there has been critical work which explores how rape, in particular, is interpreted by western global audiences as a plot point within humanitarian narratives (Baaz and Stern; Coundouriotis; Heaton; Hesford). In sum, rape is “sellable” in that it is “graphic and revolting” (Heaton 631) while simultaneously spectacular (Hesford). Heaton particularly reveals how humanitarian agencies “recognize that their programmes are more likely to be funded if their beneficiaries are victims of sexual violence; people in need of assistance may in turn be inclined to adapt their story to such discourse” (626). In addition to problematically adapting narratives for humanitarian assistance, there is also the danger that the humanitarian agencies will reduce a complex and layered account of rape to stock characters and actions that are easily identifiable, categorizable, and commodifiable for Western audiences: “It is easier for international actors to find consensus when passing judgment on a feature of an emergency that is unequivocally ‘wrong’, or even ‘evil,’” such as sexual violence (Heaton 630).

To counter this risk of totalitarianism, I suggest a close examination of how “concrete localized processes” (Sassen, “Scales” 86) play out through language and cultural rhetorics. This kind of contextual view seeks to push back against the West’s traditional rhetorical “impulse to taxonomize and collate, to force together various culturally distinct practices of communication or knowledge-making into a singular system or tradition” (Banks, *Cultural Rhetorics*). For example, Katrina M. Powell, who specifically focuses on rhetorics of displacement, explores how marginalized individuals may push back against being a “mute and faceless physical mass” (*Power* 184), albeit in subtle ways, to “resist having a narrative identity imposed on them, and create subversive narrative identities as resistance to the subjectivities inscribed on them” (*Power* 13). Understanding that there is a clear commodified correlation between supply and demand of humanitarian narratives allows postcolonial scholars, across disciplines and contexts, to pay attention to the composing processes of marginalized and “vulnerable populations,” in order to showcase how they are able to speak back to rhetorics of power in dynamic and efficacious ways—ways that highlight their rhetorical agency to survive while still operating within normative narratives (Heaton; Hesford; Huggan; Powell; Kjelsvik; Smith-Khan; Vogl). In the following sections, I describe how local contexts are clarified through an

intersection of sociological “counter-geographies” and rhetorical ecology theory.

Counter-geographies and Rhetorical Ecology Theory

In her essay, “The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics,” (“Scales”) also in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, Sassen presents an important goal; she aims to revisit normative assumptions about globalization in order to understand how stock victims are able to resist “global power” in what she labels “countergeographies,” or “structurations that might use the major corporate global infrastructures, but do so for purposes other than their original design or intent” (82). Sassen examines local entities, movements, and structures that have global implications because “they involve transboundary networks and formations connecting or articulating multiple local or ‘national’ processes and actors” (83), as in human rights and environmental organizations’ sites. In her article, “Women’s Burden: Counter-geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival,” Sassen provides particular examples of these “alternative circuits for survival,” such as “prostitution, labor migration, illegal trafficking of women and children in the sex industry” (506) which operate in a “shadow economy,” by borrowing from the larger “institutional infrastructure of the formal economy” (504). In addition, Sassen explores how we measure and define global, national, and local, which enables her to advocate for a re-examination of these scales because they are more complex than hierarchical structures; instead, these scales are a “multiplicity of economics and work cultures in which the global information economy is embedded” (“Scales” 86). In other words, it is time for a new scale of globalization to “emerge alongside the old ones” (“Scales” 85) in order to appreciate the interconnected web of systems which represent both the visible and shadowy local, national, and global circuitry; and for Sassen, this is achieved by focusing on place and “concrete, localized processes” (“Scales” 86).

Through this type of local examination and inquiry, postcolonial scholars are able to appreciate how the subaltern may enact political movements outside the formal systems (governmental, judiciary), demonstrating their unique agency and global impact within their geographical spaces:

Street-level politics makes possible the formation of new types of derogatory political subjects that do not have to go through the formal political system in order to practice their politics. Individuals and groups that have historically been excluded from formal political systems, and whose struggles can be partly enacted outside those systems, can find in cyberspace and in cities an enabling environment both for their emergence as informal political actors and for their struggles. (Sassen, “Scales” 91)

While Sassen is hopeful to see “localized struggles [aim] at engaging global actors” (90), I problematize this hope by asking: what if the global reaction is totalitarian, “governed by a dominant logic” (Brennan 44)? Do we lose the local context for which Sassen maintains postcolonialists strive to obtain?

If focusing on language within counter-geographies is the beginning of decentering the scale system which Sassen critiques, it is then crucial to specifically notice how subaltern rhetoricians balance mainstream, reductive, western expectations with their own unique life experiences. In his work, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Graham Huggan explores how in ethnic autobiography, claiming authenticity is a complex endeavor because it requires discourses which include a culturally exclusive experience while also incorporating culturally stereotypical people, events, and experiences to serve the “international ‘market reader’” (176). To that end, a marginalized rhetor (or in this present argument, a subaltern rhetor), often enacts “strategic exoticism,” a composition technique in which “postcolonial writers/ thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes . . . or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power” (32). The result is a commodified, culturally “authentic work” which contains universally recognizable stock characters, as well as particular “(inter)cultural” key traces and distinctions of a particular, local culture. In cultural production, this is a perceptive and subtle rhetorical move which, according to Huggan, allows the rhetor to “‘play the market’ to their own ideological ends” (176). Huggan describes how commodified ethnic autobiographies, such as humanitarian narratives that are told in exchange for aid or assistance, demonstrate “obvious tensions created between oppositional forms of ‘marginal’ writing and the multiple constraints placed upon them by the mainstream demands they are invited- or even expected- to meet” (157).

While Huggan’s point is not specifically contextualized within humanitarian narrative rhetorics, it is still meaningful in this discussion because the means in which marginalized fiction authors and cultural rhetors establish an ethos of authenticity to Western audiences is comparable, in many ways, to the rhetorical context of humanitarian relief or advocacy. Additionally, Huggan’s work is applicable to this present study as western audiences consume and commodify narratives of marginalized authors similarly across rhetorical contexts and genres, such as fiction, news media, humanitarian aid rhetoric, and even institutional immigration contexts (Powell; Hesford; Shemak; Vogl).

In addition to paying attention to the cultural demands of “authenticity” in subaltern humanitarian narratives, rhetorical theory notices the multi-layered, slippery rhetorical roles and context at work in interconnected sites of meaning-making. Biesecker’s seminal work “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of *Différance*” aims to rethink origins or “causal relations” (114) of meaning-

making in the rhetorical situation. According to Biesecker, traditional rhetorical theory (Bitzer; Vatz) assumes certain hierarchical stabilities in the rhetorical situation, and she cautions of the danger of these presuppositions: “the power of rhetoric is circumscribed: it has the potency to influence an audience, to realign their allegiances, but not to form new identities” (111). Crucial for Biesecker is that a deconstructive lens of rhetoric demands no origin because there are always “traces” of difference on any symbolic action (sign). Biesecker explains through Derrida’s example of the texts by Hegel and Genet in *Glas*, that it is the liminal space between two texts or symbols where meaning-making—rhetoric—occurs (119), and any text is simply a unifying of difference, never original, glossed over as a new symbolic action through “writing and the speaking” (120). Ultimately, Biesecker deconstructs the notion of a stable, cohesive audience/ subject as well (124), even an individual’s core values are marked with traces of *différance*; she concludes: “If the identity of the subject is to be taken as the effect of *différance* and not of essence, then it is marked, like any sign or any object, by an internal *différance* that prevents it from being present in and of itself” (125). What is significant about her analysis is that “[a]udience is not fixed, as it is perpetually “open to change” (125), and “rhetorical events [function] as sites that make visible the historically articulated emergence of the category ‘audience’” (127).

Jenny Edbauer continues the discussion concerning deconstructivism and destabilization in “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies”. Most notable, Edbauer expands on a term that had been used since the 1980s, “rhetorical ecology,” to examine how abstract and physical sites are essentially a system of connections of components which help configure the slippery rhetorical dynamics and interpretations that emerge from any given context. Within rhetorical ecology theory, rhetorical identities and interactions are fluid and ever-evolving, taking place in social contexts/ networks, or a “wider sphere of active, historical, and lived processes” (Edbauer 8). In other words, the elements of the traditional rhetorical triangle (author, audience, message) are not stagnant or fixed when seen as taking place in a wider “ecology,” rather than a fixed rhetorical situation in isolation. Understanding a rhetorical ecology as a larger, uncontained, “delimited” (Edbauer 23) view of rhetorical interaction emphasizes the interconnectedness and gradual awareness that is necessary for us to understand ourselves as organic and rhetorical beings.

I have focused here on Sassen’s, Biesecker’s, and Edbauer’s respective theoretical approaches, as they all advocate for a deconstruction of the universals which perpetuate established globalized circuits of power. The following section discusses specific cultural representations of subaltern rape narratives (human interest news story and fiction) to deconstruct the rhetorical situation from stable elements operating within fixed universals to an unstable, shifting, and organic counter-geography that invites complex, modern reexamination of rhetorical roles. While the

narratives I discuss stem from distinct contexts, it is not my intention to conflate the narratives or composing processes of a fiction author to that of a marginalized rhetor sharing a rape narrative for humanitarian assistance. This would problematically reduce such complex narratives and storytellers in ways which perpetuate incomplete and stereotypical perceptions. Instead, I pair them here intentionally to emphasize the counter-geographies in which they are produced as well as the western audiences for which they are originally crafted and to which they were repackaged and disseminated. In other words, I have intentionally chosen to discuss and juxtapose works across dissimilar genres in order to demonstrate what Powell refers to as “the generic expectations of [non-Western] narratives and the audiences that are constructed in creating those narratives” (112). In doing so, I hope to emphasize the problematic, streamlined consumption (rather than production) of non-Western rape narratives across genres within the global west.

Deconstructing Rape Narratives

In 2017, the podcast *Rough Translation* aired the episode, “The Congo We Listen To,” in which host Gregory Warner interviews Heaton and focuses specifically on postcolonial discourse or “how people in rich countries talk about rape in Congo and how people there are talking back” (Warner in “Congo”). In the podcast, Heaton expands on the rhetoric surrounding Congo’s reputation as the “rape capital of the world” in the aftermath of International Medical Corps 2010 staggering report of hundreds of Congolese rape victims. Of course, Heaton, Warner, as well as the podcast and syndicator are all equally enmeshed in the complicated imbalance of storytelling in a postcolonial world. Heaton’s, and thereby Warner’s, Western privilege of hearing, reporting, and scrutinizing the Luvungi rape narratives clearly positions them as authorities of the contextual network, the events, and the implications. By acting as interpreters of the contested narrative, they perform within a powerful narrative role of storyteller which ironically points to the dynamic rhetorical disproportion to which the Congolese are carefully responding.

In the episode’s twist, Heaton recalls how when she spoke to a few Luvungi women who were said to be rape victims, she curiously observed the women’s lack of sensitivity to their *own* rape story. Heaton later confirmed from a Congolese local, Father Pascal who often lodged and assisted international aid workers, that the amount of rape victims in the Congo may have been astonishingly exaggerated; in fact, according to Heaton, Father Pascal compared the exaggeration to a “drama”: “[Father Pascal] started talking about the theater right from the beginning. It’s, like, what you do when you’re in theater, and you need to convince someone of your character. And you put on an act because the white people wanted to meet the raped women” (Heaton in “Congo”). One villager with whom

Heaton was staying opened up about the attack on Luvungi and how she was actually a victim of rape along with “some” others, but many “lost everything.” In the end, the villager disclosed how Luvungi elders agreed “that it was better to say that everyone was raped because there were people like her who would have become the target of all of this attention, whereas, instead, it took some of the pressure away from her” (Heaton in “Congo”).

Also in the episode, Warner interviews a young Congolese woman, Deborah, who admits to lying about being raped and agrees to “say [her] story and defend [herself].” Deborah’s family had been economically devastated by the death of her father, and could barely support themselves. Deborah confesses, in her own words, that at the recommendation of a neighbor, she lied to a charitable organization that had set up tents in her village to aid rape victims; Deborah explains that she was “jealous” of the support (food and money) rape victims received simply by telling their story. Deborah even reveals how she knew how to craft her fabricated rape narrative, using her mother’s very real warnings about the risk of rape while in the forest, collecting firewood. Although Deborah was fearful of her own lie, she prayed, donned her rattiest clothing, and followed through with her plan to support her family: “[The charitable aid workers] asked me my story, and I told them I had been raped by three armed men” (“Congo”). After being checked for HIV, Deborah was given money and food to take home to her family, which she quickly shared; she later used the money to start her own business, selling vegetables. Deborah admits guilt, but not about lying; she feels guilty that she stole from the women who were actually sexually attacked, the women who, she believes, deserve the food she received: “It was that she felt that other women - real raped women - deserved that food more because they were still shamed while her neighbors knew that Deborah was just telling a story” (Warner in “Congo”).

Later, Warner and his team would uncover even more intentional fabrications of rape, aroused by the charitable foundations themselves in efforts to keep their rape statistics high to ensure funding for programs. Dorothea Hilhorst, a professor of humanitarian aid and reconstruction at Erasmus University describes this in what the Congolese call a “Fonds de commerce - it's a sort of business. . . about how people adapt to the fact that the international community only wants to hear stories about sexual violence” (Hilhorst in “Congo”). Hilhorst explains that in 2011, after the massive rape was reported on international news, “there were so many programs for sexually violated women, it was almost impossible for a woman to engage in a program without sort of hinting at the fact that she was sexually violated” (Hilhorst in “Congo”). In fact, these charitable organizations would hire locals, “antennas,” to seek out rape victims, and a sort of code was born between these local “antennas” and villagers; one ex-NGO worker explains: “all [I] would have to do is go to a village in [my] aid agency T-shirt and tell the village elders how many rape

survivors they needed that day. . . And then in return, we shall bring assistance for your community. They would come” (“Congo”).

Not surprisingly, Heaton received backlash after her story in *Foreign Policy* exposed the possibility of exaggerations of rape cases in Congo; but one particular critique from Eve Ensler, famous feminist playwright and activist, sums up an obvious, initial reaction to this piece: “Fundress . . . are like shoppers. They're fickle and change brands in an instant, particularly if they feel something might be wrong and someone is lying. You have introduced a problem. And now they will start to doubt” (Ensler qtd. in “Congo”).

Not unlike Deborah's story, Gundar-Goshen's *Waking Lions* illustrates a fictive account of one migrant's painful choice to ultimately use the narrative of rape as a means of agency in a hopeless cycle of displacement. Indeed, in the following section, I intentionally discuss *Waking Lions* as a parallel to the factual account of the Luvungi events as reported by Heaton and Warner because despite the genre disparity, both texts demonstrate how hegemonic, Western readings of subaltern rape narratives can drive discursive structures and mediations of such experiences. What is more, both the factual and fictive accounts reveal the creative resistance that subaltern groups enact in response to such oppressive discursive structures, often at the expense of silencing or neglecting other forms of violence and oppression.

The novel's plot follows the relationship of Eitan, a medical doctor carrying out an unrewarding career within Beersheba and Sirkit, an undocumented migrant from Eritrea, working and living discreetly within the Negev desert. Because of Eitan's accidental murder of her husband, Sirkit is able to exercise power over Eitan, someone outside her gender, ethnic, social, legal and economic status.

Even with this form of power, Sirkit, is noticeably unable to speak straightforwardly, as her words are italicized instead of quoted. The implications are complex in that, Sirkit, as a subaltern woman, is understood as a stereotypical, exotic and mysterious enigma, a “sphinx” (294), whose subtleties are seductive. In addition to her mysterious exoticism, Sirkit's italicized speech pointedly indicates she is problematically unable to speak for herself, as she must be translated and mediated by the narrator, similar to the Luvungi women in the “Congo” podcast.

Despite these obvious implications, Sirkit's silence and speech play out strikingly within the novel's plot which is based on multiple secrets concealing murder, undocumented migrant labor, drug trafficking, and sexual desire. At the crux of each of these secrets is Sirkit, speaking and keeping silent as a means to control others and her own fragile future. Feminist rhetoricians Cheryl Glenn and Kristina Ratcliffe have explored the ways in which the arts of silence and listening “have been conceptualized and employed in different times and places by many different people - some with power, some without- for purposes as diverse as showing reverence, gathering knowledge, planning action, buying time,

and attempting to survive” (2). One of the key arguments that Glenn and Ratcliffe make is that “the arts of silence and listening offer people multiple ways to negotiate and deliberate, whether with themselves or in dyadic, small-group, or large-scale situations” (3). Perhaps the clearest example of how Sirkit deploys agency in her displacement through the balance between speech and silence is her choice to blackmail Eitan. She trades her silence of Eitan’s crime in exchange for medical care for other migrants; however, she inwardly doubts the extent of her control in this situation as well, as her subaltern identity is haunting: “Tonight she stood outside the garage and knew that if she wanted, she could tell her doctor to come, and he would do so immediately . . . But you will never know, she thought, you will never know how much of that power is yours and how much is just chance” (183). Her rhetorical power of telling and secrecy is tainted, as she acknowledges her lack of globally recognizable power through citizenship, education, and language.

In large part to Sirkit’s silence, she remains inscrutable to Eitan, who is intensely infatuated with her throughout the novel. In true colonial form, and in an attempt to understand Sirkit’s psyche, Eitan studies Eritrea- the geography, economy, population, because to him, “[i]f a person is a reflection of the landscape of his homeland, then all those details should merge into something. A portrait. The face of a woman burned in forty-five degrees Celsius in the shade and washed in the average precipitation of eleven millimeters per annum” (203). Much like the geographical land of Eritrea has been colonially classified and catalogued, Eitan demonstrates a desire for Sirkit to be neatly “sorted, detailed, comprehensible,” but she remains hidden (203). It is only in the everyday moments of spending time with her -- watching her express embarrassment by a clumsy move or thoughtfully admiring the moon, that Sirkit’s humanity is exposed. Still, Eitan considers, “She’s like me. (But never: I’m like her)” (206), demonstrating himself as the standard of humanity. As Eitan discovers that Sirkit’s agency within her community involves drug trafficking, his tidy perception of the world and its players, informed largely by stock characterizations (250), begins to truly unravel:

Eitan was experiencing the same feeling he had when he went into a public bathroom and saw that someone has defecated and not flushed the toilet. A great deal of disgust, a bit of curiosity, and mainly anger at the person who had spilled his shit for all to see, a disgusting public display that couldn’t be ignored. . . but it wasn’t Eitan’s shit. He wasn’t supposed to open the door and see it. Not that he didn’t want someone to deal with it. He was willing to invest public money, and he was willing to vote for someone who promised that such things would not happen. But he wasn’t willing to have it shoved in his face. (265)

At Eitan’s disappointment, Sirkit inwardly seethes: “How dare he be disappointed by her? How dare he expect her to be different? . . . She should have known that he’d prefer her to be the victim and not the victimizer” (296-7). The disruptive discrepancy between Sirkit’s multifaceted humanity and Eitan’s conventional expectations of her

showcase similar points made within Warner's podcast, especially Elsner's discomfort with the exposure of falsification of rape narratives in the Congo, which she sums up as, "[y]ou have introduced a problem" (Elsner qtd. in "Congo"). In accord with this reductive, mainstream, Western reaction, Sirkit problematically interferes with Eitan's simplistic perceptions of who Sirkit should be. After all, Eitan considers "how useful it was to divide the world into good guys and bad guys" (250). Sirkit, however, demonstrates more depth in her reflection of Eitan, and perhaps similar to Father Pascal's reflection of Western audience's constricted perceptions, Sirkit can appreciate Eitan's willful ignorance:

It wasn't his fault that for him, everything was ordered, explained. It wasn't his fault that he had no idea what to do with stories with no order or explanation, stories that wept in like a sandstorm and departed like one. Dust wandering from one country to another. He couldn't understand her story, just as he couldn't eat her African food or drink her African water. Because it would make his stomach turn. Because his body wasn't built for the sort of things they had there. So she remained silent . . . (293-4)

Similar to the "Congo" podcast, *Waking Lions* demonstrates how institutional discourse is a site of demand and supply of universally recognizable humanitarian narratives. Even Liat, Eitan's wife who works as a police detective, perceives Sirkit as a frail woman through reductive characterization. Within the scene in which Liat institutionally interrogates Sirkit about Eitan's involvement with the undocumented migrants in the desert, both women demonstrate varying types of agency, but it is Sirkit's silence which achieves the desired end of this rhetorical context. As Sirkit closes her eyes during the interview, "[Liat] never thought for a moment that eyes could be closed not only out of tiredness but also out of defiance. It never occurred to her that such a woman could be defiant at all" (329). Liat's troubled world makes sense again as Sirkit constructs a narrative that fits in with the metanarrative Liat is used to, a narrative that places Eitan as a savior and Sirkit as a victim: "[Liat] grew more relaxed as the story became clearer, her relief increasing with each additional detail" (330). While this scene is an obvious critique of institutional discourse and the subaltern, it is also noteworthy to pause and consider that Liat is also a woman and a minority within Israel, herself; so, while there may be an expectation that Liat's own extended backstory of resistance and success, coupled with her current role to uncover hidden truth, may cause her to be more curious and informed about Sirkit's multidimensionality, she is not. Like Eitan (and Elsner in "Congo"), Liat is ultimately concerned with safeguarding her own tidy interpretation of how the world should operate.

Sirkit's destiny remains unclear at the conclusion of the novel, as she is sent to an immigrant detention facility, while Eitan's future appears to be comfortably predictable, and he is heroically celebrated for his work with immigrants. At the facility, Sirkit stands, literally and figuratively, in limbo, along with countless other displaced African women. When Eitan visits Sirkit to thank her for concealing his murder, any hint of individuality that Sirkit had obtained fades. For Eitan, the women at the

detention center “really did look alike. The same dark, deadened faces. The same slack expression of apathetic boredom. Any of these people could be Sirkit. Brown eyes. Black hair. Straight nose. Black Eritrean African women refugees. Identical. They looked as alike as a herd of sheep. Of cows” (332). Eitan’s resistance to see Sirkit as an individual is surely a strategy to reduce his role in her detainment.

Upon the novel’s conclusion, Sirkit interrogates readers’ expectations yet again by indirectly revealing her secret thoughts through the narrator, but this secret is much more problematic than the drugs buried under a rosebush (303-304). Sirkit’s choice to create a rape narrative in order to escape deportation is unexpected and disruptive, especially because it does not provide sufficient time for readers to explain, in any comfortable way, how her choice is justifiable. If readers, like Eitan, are tempted to exit Sirkit’s narrative unscathed without disrupting their own reductive victim characterizations of her, the novel provides one final opportunity at bitterly listening to Sirkit’s complicated moral dilemma:

She had to think about other things: for instance, about looking carefully into the guard’s faces to see which of them she could have sex with . . . She needed a heavy body to lie on top of her, a pimply face that would contort when he came, so that she could utter the one word that would get her out of there: ‘rape.’ They didn’t settle for anything less than that here. . . Then there would be a trial, and when it all ended, they wouldn’t dare send her back. (337-8)

Instead of a clean and recognizably tragic conclusion for Sirkit, the reader is exposed to her inward machinations that demonstrate her survival tactics, once again, through speech and silence. In this way, she is compared to a tiger: “Sirkit wasn’t waiting for a tiger to leap over the fence into the detention camp. The tiger was already inside her, lying in wait, quiet, watching” (340). The novel has made thoroughly clear that Sirkit was, in fact, a victim of sexual violence, rape and domestic abuse; yet, her rhetorical agency here is troubling for readers because Sirkit is performing an unfamiliar role of victimizer while simultaneously crafting a narrative of victimization. What becomes glaringly clear is Sirkit’s awareness of her audience as she silently composes her rape narrative: “[R]ape’. They didn’t settle for anything less than that here” (337), and readers are made distressingly aware that for many subaltern women, like Deborah, “rape” is the standard and cost of humanity that Western, cosmopolitan consumers thrust upon them.

Both the “The Congo We Listen To” and *Waking Lions* invite cultural consumers to listen closely to how the unstable and shifting rhetorical components of a particular marginalized context—exigence, message, rhetor and audience—are powerful forces, especially in western, social justice conversations in which rape is involved. When considering the events reported in this podcast and the imaginary events in Gundar-Goshen’s novel through traditional rhetorical and globalization interpretations, there is a helpful beginning at mapping possible “events” which initiated discourse (the 2010 rebel occupation of Luvungi and the

rape of villagers; and Sirkit's displacement); however, it soon becomes frustratingly difficult to discern *how meaning was made* about what happened in Luvungi and in the novel through universals which are homeostatic and limiting in that they focus on one rhetorical situation at a time, comprised of stable elements (Bitzer; Vatz). Instead, by utilizing Edbauer's rhetorical ecologies distribution model, it becomes apparent how an organic, destabilized reading of how people "do rhetoric" (Edbauer 13) in counter-geographies exposes radical possibilities for intervention toward social justice.

First, it is crucial to understand that the Luvungi villagers, Deborah, and Sirkit exist within counter-geographies, as the "alternative circuit for survival" which each of these rhetors collectively or individually participated in was informed by their understanding of how their local context mapped a pathway to the global, economic and humanitarian infrastructure (Sassen, "Counter-geographies 515). For those represented in the "Congo" podcast, because of the internal conflict within the DRC, their counter-geographies run parallel with global infrastructures such as various western humanitarian agencies, international news media, and of course, the U.N. itself. The media coverage allowed news of the mass rape to be an exigence itself within U.N meetings, humanitarian aid calls to action, and questionnaires for possible aid recipients. Even within Luvungi itself, among villagers, the messages which were deployed globally were interpreted locally, creating a variety of rhetors, audiences and messages, each transitive and slippery. For Sirkit, her counter-geography is an immigration detention center, composed of institutional, legislative, and governmental agents in a community on the cusp of an inspiring news story of Dr. Eitan Green's secret medical care for undocumented migrants.

Additionally, rhetorical ecology theory advocates for a focus on the "lived, in-process operations of this rhetoric" (Edbauer 17) in an effort to highlight the interconnectedness of the discourse surrounding both counter-geographies. The "overlapping rhetorics" (Edbauer 18) taking place within these counter-geographies indicate the virality of rhetorical ecologies—a spreading of meaning-making that eventually manifested in unexpected ways in each site. The village leaders' decision to offset the shame of the women who were raped in 2010 by distributing the message that rape occurred in mass indicates that the villagers became both audience and rhetors of a narrative that would circulate and receive global attention. In many ways, Luvungi women became the message/ text themselves, as their faces were used in photographs and video of the media coverage surrounding the event. As "rich countries" (Warner) responded with various humanitarian aid and relief, similar narratives were used by other Congolese women, outside of Luvungi, who *understood* the audience's values and response to rape victims was heightened. Both Deborah and Sirkit, for example, use their respective "historical and lived process" (Edbauer 8) of the threat of rape within their own counter-geographies to craft their message. Sirkit, in particular, is even able to draw from her own authentic experience of sexual violence to

begin crafting details of the narrative she needs. In other words, both Deborah and Sirkit react to the “ongoing structures of feeling that shaped the social field” (Edbauer 10) and in response to the ‘varying intensities of encounters and interactions’ (Edbauer 12) about rape and African women, they both made difficult choices to share a story in an effort to survive. For Deborah, the funding and support that rape victims received through humanitarian aid was certainly reinforced by the U.N.’s proclamation that the Congo was in fact “the rape capital of the world”; for Sirkit, her connection with a celebrated doctor who was sympathetic to migrants may offer her rape narrative media attention it would have not had before.

Additionally, Father Pascal’s very Burkean comparison of the rhetoric surrounding Luvungi as a “theatre” is helpful in understanding how audience is mistakenly interpreted as a fixed element in the contexts explored here; even Ensler’s reaction warns of audience’s flighty temperament when it comes to humanitarian aid, implying that audiences want to hear the same story from the subaltern, and doubt is an expensive price to pay for humanitarian relief agencies. However, the danger of perpetuating a metanarrative of rape is made explicit by Warner: “This kind of doubt - the doubt of husbands and local journalists and Congolese politicians - this may be the most unsettling consequence of turning rape stories into currency. Not that this incentive might sometimes lead to false stories - but that the real stories lose their value.” And sustaining the metanarrative is predicated on the implication made by Father Pascal, Ensler, and Eitan - that audiences are stable and comfortable. But Biesecker reminds us,

There can be no doubt that the dominant concept of audience as a collectivity that both influences and is influenced by discourse is based on the traditional humanistic conception of the subject. As Michael C. McGee puts it, rhetorical theorists and critics “presuppose a ‘people’ or an ‘audience’” that is “either (a) an objective, literal extension of ‘person’, or (b) a ‘mob’ of individuals whose significance is their gullibility and failure to respond to ‘logical’ argument.” In both cases they hold firmly to a conception of the human being that presumes an essence at the core of the individual that is coherent, stable, and which makes the human being what it is. (123)

Sassen, Biesecker and Edbauer invite these counter-texts because it is critical to introduce a counter-narrative within universal humanitarian rape narratives, composed of various and embodied stories and the aid that is needed for those like Deborah and Sirkit. The counter-texts would introduce the gap and difference between those two messages/ texts (metanarrative and counter-narrative) which allow for audiences to transform and take on new shape (Biesecker 126-7; Edbauer 10).

Conclusion: Disruptive and Enabling

My aim is to emphasize that in order to survive, the subaltern rhetors represented here do not take the “cosmopolitan route to the global” in any

recognizable way for Western audiences (Sassen, “Scales” 87); instead by relying on the cosmopolitan or Western reaction to rape, they are able to enact and contradict the universals of globalization simultaneously: “Indeed, in many postcolonial theorizations of globalization the resistant subject appears as a subversive consumer who uses things and ideas in unexpected, pragmatic, even playful ways . . . The representation of consumers as savvy, pragmatic decision makers rather than as passive dupes is certainly both refreshing and empowering” (Krishnaswami 14). Postcolonial scholars realize that “subversive consumption” will do little more than “dent the dominant structure” (Krishnaswami 14).

Ultimately, despite their differing contexts, what both of these stories exemplify is “the emerging global order as a deeply disruptive yet ultimately enabling condition that unleashes subaltern resistance and enables creative adaptations in the margins” (Krishnaswami 3). The implications of such creative resistance are problematic not simply because the stories are admitted fabrications. The more glaringly troubling ramification is that both Deborah and Sirkit’s respective stories are also fundamentally dependent on Western mediation in order to circulate, as shown in the repeated, often overlapping mediation in both contexts; thus, their stories rely on —indeed, require— hegemonic interpretations for survival. In contrast, their silenced testimony of domestic violence, spousal abuse and rape, poverty, patriarchal violence and inequality are seemingly ineffective plot points within the global conversation surrounding subaltern experience.

Currently in Congo, work is being done to provide safe spaces for locals to share their stories and struggles, but not in exchange for any tangible aid, such as food or money. The expectation is that through group therapy, locals will find paths toward healing and solutions within their community. Unfortunately, however, the rhetoric of humanitarian aid still tends to lean toward metanarratives which are similar to the mass rape in Luvungi; Heaton explains in her work in *International Review of the Red Cross*: “to encapsulate a conflict for a mass audience, journalists and humanitarian actors tend to hone in on characteristics that are particularly riveting or emotional” (630). Combating the metanarrative will require a destabilization of the rhetorical situation, which will only be brought forth through discourse which embraces the shifting rhetorical elements highlighted in modern rhetorical theory and a closer examination of the counter-geographies in globalization theory. Through this kind of meaning-making, fluctuating and “radical with possibility” (Biesecker 111), women like Deborah and Sirkit can be seen as dynamic, valuable, and complex humans- not merely victims.

Notes

1. By “humanitarian narrative” here, I am aligning my definition with that of Michelle Peek in “Humanitarian Narrative and Posthumanist

Critique: Dave Egger's *What is the What*," which includes "narratives that are often used in the service of human rights claims," which "depict situations of violence, oppression or marginalization that actively elicit the support, understanding or intervention of others" (130). To be clear, I understand the narratives required for legal residency, such as in narratives as part of asylum or refugee applications, as humanitarian narratives as well.

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