



BMUN LXXII



UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (UNCSW)



LXXII
SEVENTY-SECOND SESSION

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Delegates,

My name is Roxie and I am going to be your Head Chair for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in BMUN LXXII! I use she/they pronouns. A fun fact about me is that I am a music fanatic and have been playing all sorts of instruments for over a decade now. An unhinged fact about me is that when I was ten, I memorized four pages of Dr. Seuss, and I still know it today. I am so excited to read your position papers and hear these topics debated, as they are two topics that I am deeply passionate about. These topics are mature, but I was once a BMUN delegate too, and I have complete faith that you can treat them with respect and curiosity. Our first topic is the “Effects of Language on the Perception of Gender;” this has been a personal topic of interest for me for years. I chose this topic because it is a valuable skill to be able to understand the underlying beliefs that hide in people’s speech patterns. I have found that this skill helps me read people fast, and say what I truly mean when I am speaking. On a larger scale, this is something that I simply believe is important to think about—we live in a modern world in which social media creates verbal fads that have the potential to be harmful or undo generations of bigoted beliefs. With the first topic I truly hope that you internalize this information and really think about the words you put into the world, as well.

The second topic is “Domestic Violence and the Legal Independence of Women.” Once again, I think that this is an increasingly pertinent topic—misogynistic propaganda spreads through social media like wildfire, leading to real legal consequences. Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that people may need to isolate at any time, and this may only get worse with time due to increasing antibiotic resistance. While isolation has been necessary to keep people safe, it left many alone with their abusers. In the second topic, we will continue to think theoretically and socially by investigating women’s legal rights to exercise bodily autonomy.

These topics are very near and dear to my heart, and I hope that you can learn as much in your research as I have learned in mine. Please do email us if you have questions at uncswbmun72@bmun.org. Good luck and I cannot wait to read your papers and meet you at the conference!

My name is Sara and I am a freshman part of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in BMUN LXXII! I use she/her pronouns. I am double majoring in global studies and political science. I am part of GETH, an environmental theme house on campus (I’m a huge activist for human rights and the planet). In my free time I enjoy playing all kinds of sports, running, swimming etc. I was an athlete all throughout my life, but I’m also a music lover and I love playing the violin and reading banned books whenever I’m ignoring my class readings.

My name is Alaina Delsignore, and I will be one of your Vice Chairs for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) at BMUN LXXII! I use any pronouns. I am a third year majoring in Rhetoric at UC Berkeley. I also work at the Berkeley Center on Comparative Equality and Anti-Discrimination Law (BCCE). A fun fact about me is that I love reality tv real estate shows (think Selling Sunset, Selling OC, etc.). I look forward to reading about all of your research on our topics this year, and I can't wait to see everyone at BMUN LXXII!

My name is Kamilah Elmarsafawi, and I am a staff member for the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). I am a freshman and first year for the BMUN class of 72, I use she/her pronouns. I am an intended philosophy major, and along with BMUN I am volunteering for Berkeley's Queer Alliance and Resource Center (QARC). A fun fact about me is that roughly 25% of my current possessions were obtained randomly — found on the street, “borrowed” from friends, or picked up from walking down Sproul. I look forward to meeting everyone at BMUN!! Feel free to reach out, I am down to discuss all things philosophy, gender, sexuality, and just love getting to know people!

Hi everyone my name is Bella and I am a Senior from Portland, Oregon studying Global Studies at Berkeley. One of my favorite things to do is travel and I was fortunate to study abroad in Paris at Sciences Po this past semester and it has been an incredible experience and I would love to talk to anyone who is interested in studying abroad. In my free time, I love playing soccer, sleeping, and rewatching my favorite TV shows and movies. I look forward to meeting you all during the conference!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roxie Baggott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Roxie Baggott
Head Chair of UNCSW
Email: rbaggott@bmun.org



TOPIC A: EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE ON THE PERCEPTION OF GENDER

PREFACE

There are several things to keep in mind while reading this background guide. Firstly, we do not condone the usage of derogatory language toward any delegate or group of people. This is true regardless of your country's policy and cultural beliefs—BMUN as an organization is strictly against harassment of any kind. Next, we as a dais have tried our best to stray away from Eurocentrism and American-centrism in this topic. However, our primary goal in this background guide is to provide clarity, and utilizing English in our examples is the most effective way to do that for this conference. This does not mean, however, that the debate is going to be focusing only on English-speaking countries. We chose this topic because of how impactful and interesting as an internationally focused debate. We absolutely expect you to stay true to your country throughout the conference. Similarly, we really want you to keep intersectionality in mind during this conference. We are the Committee on the Status of Women, and that includes all women and all people who are socialized as women.¹ There will be an in depth explanation on intersectionality in the “Key Terms” section, but please keep this in mind during every step of the conference.

Throughout this paper, we will discuss the effects of colonialism and the importance of highlighting indige

¹ The issues that affect women will also affect feminine presenting non-binary people and non-binary people who were raised and socialized as women. Further, both trans men and women are affected in ways by these issues, so please include them in your research as well.

nous voices as well as respecting sovereignty. Continue to consider this throughout your research, reading, and conference experience. Lastly, this guide and committee will be discussing mature topics and using mature language. We ask that you stay respectful and do not take this topic lightly. Please do not use slurs by name in conference even if we say the slur in this paper. If you're unsure about anything, you can always email us.

KEY TERMS

Biological Sex: This refers to the sex that someone was assigned to at birth. You may hear people say AFAB or AMAB meaning “assigned female at birth” and “assigned male at birth.” Someone can also be born as intersex. Biological sex may also be referred to as sex throughout the paper. This is different from gender.

Gender: Gender, unlike biological sex, is something that someone will self identify as. There are infinite gender identities that someone could hold, but as an example, someone could identify as a man, a woman, non-binary, or gender fluid.

Gender expression: Someone's gender expression is how they manifest their gender—this could be a haircut, color, the way that they dress, etc. It does not necessarily have to fall in line with societal gender expectations.

Pronouns: As many have learned in elementary school, pronouns are a way to refer to people and objects without directly stating the name. Instead of saying, “Roxie is my Head Chair,” you might say “she is my Head Chair” or “they are my Head Chair.” Similarly with objects you might say “it is pink: instead of “the shoe is pink.” Please keep in mind that someone can use multiple pronouns at the same time; someone might use all pronouns, someone might use she and they as pronouns. Despite your country's stance, we do ask you to respect people's pronouns during this conference, and if you make a mistake, please apologize and move on.

Intersectionality: “The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination ‘intersect’ to create unique dynamics and effects” (Center for Intersectional Justice).

Gendered Languages or Languages with Grammatical Gender: Languages that have masculine or feminine nouns (i.e. Spanish, French, German).

Suffix: “a morpheme added at the end of a word to form a derivative (e.g. -ation, -fy, -ing, -itis“ (Oxford Languages).

KEY ACTORS

Countries do not often outright address how biases in language affects the quality of life for their citizens, which means that the key actors of this topic will differ from other topics. The key actors in this debate tend to be scholars. More specifically, the top scholars in this field are often from universities that are European or American and majoritively white (e.g. University Edinburgh (United Kingdom), Stanford University (United States), the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands)) (EduRank). This is likely due to the exploitative nature of colonialism and how that has affected the socioeconomic status of regions that have been colonized by these European countries. Additionally, it is necessary to consider the impact that colonization has had on language internationally. For example, colonizers forced Indigenous people to abandon their native tongue and arbitrarily created country lines that benefited them while ignoring the

languages and people who presided there. While the United Nations has addressed the importance of language preservation and representation through means such as language digitalization, they have not directly addressed language and gender in the way this topic does. While it is rare for countries to address language directly, it is not unheard of. For example, Sweden in the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women said that gender equality should be central to the creation of policy, and this also shows in their actions as they have required schools to actively fight against gender norms and use gender neutral language in the “Education Act” of 1998 (United Nations Press). Alternatively, the French “Académie Française” is a governmental organization tasked with “implementing... language policy, which seeks to support the use and development of French” (Renwick 462).

PAST UNITED NATIONS ACTION

While there have been few UN resolutions that actively address the impact of language directly or indirectly, there are some that exemplify the importance of language.

Security Council Resolution 263 (S/RES/263) (1969)

In this resolution, the United Nations Security Council added Russian and Spanish as “working languages” (Security Council 11). Working languages are the

languages in which resolutions are written and passed in. When the UN was founded, the official languages were Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish, but the working languages were just French and English (Security Council 11). This is highly Eurocentric. The only official language that was not included as a working language at the time was Mandarin, China’s official language. This resolution communicates who the United Nations was truly serving at the time. This resolution is a great example of how language itself can be impactful on

an international scale.

Security Council Resolution 528 (S/RES/528) (1982)

This resolution added Arabic as a working language (Security Council 22). The significance of resolution 528 is essentially the same as resolution 263, but it is noteworthy that it was another 13 years from 1969 to 1982 before another language was added (Security Council 22). This communicates that equal communication was not a priority for them.

“Multilingualism” (A/RES/76/268) (2022)

This is the most recent resolution on multilingualism adopted by the General Assembly, and it essentially emphasizes the importance of multilingualism (General Assembly 1). By doing this, they are recognizing the importance of inclusion and communication, as well. While there is still a lot of work to be done in this subject, it is a vast improvement. Diplomacy can not exist without multilingualism.

“Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (A/RES/77/203)

This resolution, adopted by the General Assembly, discusses the importance of empowering the voices of women and indigenous people through language (General Assembly 1). The applicable clause specifically states,

“Stressing the importance of the empowerment and capacity-building of Indigenous women and youth, including their full, meaningful, equal and effective participation in decision-making processes in matters that affect them directly, including policies, programmes and resources, where relevant, that target the well-being of Indigenous women, children and youth, in particular in the areas of quality... languages, spiritual and religious traditions and practices, and the importance of taking measures to promote awareness and understanding of their rights,”

and the resolution continues on to emphasize the importance of language in several other clauses (General Assembly 3). This resolution is a great example of a solution that empowers people to help themselves rather than continuing to oppress them using modern colonialism.

GENDERED AND NON-GENDERED LANGUAGES

There are countless ways that gender shows up in different languages. Tamil, a language in South India has a grammatical system divided by caste (Montell 147). The Indigenous Ojibwe people (Native to Berkeley) distinguish between animate and inanimate

(Montell 147).

Perhaps the most obvious is languages with gendered grammatical systems. Many of these languages are romance languages, descending from Latin. The

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis exemplifies the impact language has on the perception of gender (Frothingham). In their research, Sapir and Whorf used objects that were feminine in Spanish and masculine German (or vice versa) and asked people to describe them (Frothingham). The feminine verbs were described as “beautiful” and “elegant” which are associated generally with women societally, and the masculine words were described as “strong” and “long” which is generally associated with men (Frothingham). It is admittedly a jump to go from objects to people, but this phenomena may affect humans too. For instance, in languages such as French, many of the more prestigious jobs (doctor, professor, engineer, etc.) are grammatically masculine (Montell 145-146). These subconscious associations have the potential to affect the amount of women that go into those fields. Studies suggest that children who speak a grammatically gendered language, such as Hebrew, “start to grasp their gender identities earlier” (Montell 151). Amanda Montell, an accomplished linguist and author explains, “because grammatical gender and cultural perceptions of human gender are not separate for these speakers, theoretically, their impression of aren’t able to escape the languages influence” (Wordslut 148). It is important to note that gendered languages are not necessarily more patriarchal.

Languages with grammatical gender actively high-

light gender with every noun—because it is so blatantly in the spotlight, more attention is brought to gender inequality (Montell 152). This has the potential to lead to a solution. In France, language is used as a tool of resistance, as women will actively use feminine versions of nouns instead of the normalized masculine version (Montell 152). In this case, the clear bias in the French language leads to a more clear solution, and there is very little subtlety in what they are doing.

In opposition, English speakers skew toward replacing masculine language (chairman, policeman, salesman, etc.) with gender neutral language (chairperson, police officer, salesperson, etc.) (Montell 153-154). In fact, it is frowned upon to use feminine nouns (i.e. actress, comedienne, waitress) in English when there are pre-existing gender neutral options (actor, comedian, waiter) (Montell 153-154). This is due to the fact that feminine suffixes in English (-et, -ess, -en) are not historically feminine at all, but rather had negative associations with meanings such as “smaller,” “weaker,” or of “lesser value” (Montell 153). It is interesting to contrast these two methods of reclamation when both of these languages are descended from Latin. It emphasizes that language reclamation is highly cultural, and there will be no “one size fits all” solution.

STEPPING OUTSIDE OF THE LINGUISTIC BINARY

Even in languages without a fully fledged binary grammatical system, it is difficult to find gender neutrality due to politics, religion, and simple habits. This has been seen in English speaking countries and

the use of pronouns such as they/them, ze/hir, ey/em, and so on). If neutralizing the gender in a language that is not grammatically gendered is this difficult, imagine the widespread effort and innovation it will

take in a grammatically gendered system. Still, there have been efforts to move outside the binary in these languages. At a Hebrew speaking camp in Maryland, campers use a combination of the female and male suffixes to refer to groups of people in order to use inclusive language, or create completely new suffixes altogether (Montell 155). While this example may seem insignificant, it exemplifies how solutions can be crafted, which is half of the battle. The other half of the battle is the more difficult part of the debate: implementation. There are several ways that changes in language could be implemented. There is top-down change in which the change comes from a government's legal system such as what Sweden did in

implementing laws around education or what France¹ and the “Académie Française” does with the approval of official language (United Nations Press & Renwick 462). Of course, a top-down approach is only as impactful as a country's legal system is. The reverse of top-down would be a solution in which individuals make the linguistic change, but this is often infeasible as it is difficult to unite so many people. Historically, when there has been a distinct shift in language, it has been in an oppressive setting such as the suppression of Indigenous language by colonial efforts. In many ways, change grows out of oppression and uprising—linguistic shifts often reflect social shifts.

1 Although France has not made substantial efforts in using the Académie Française to increase gender neutral language and inclusivity, it has the potential to do so.

PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY OF GENDER

While the concept of a non-binary gender system is seen generally as new, it is actually quite the opposite. Non-binary people have been recognized in many ancient and indigenous cultures going back to the Aztec people which was about 4,000 years ago—and possibly much further (Mirandé). There is evidence of a third gender in early civilization in India, Mexico, the United States and more (Mirandé). Being non-binary or associating with the “third gender” has been a very normal and respected part of indigenous societies across the globe (Ramirez 1869). It is imperative to recognize that the oppression of women

and the erasure of non-binary people is a product of colonialism and the structures implemented by colonizers where power has been equated to “domination, exploitation, and conflict” (Ramirez 1869). Thus, it is imperative to highlight indigenous voices and respect the sovereignty of all countries and tribes while looking at solutions to this problem.¹ The “third gender” appears in many indigenous cultures, but something that they all have in common is that they are given a name: in the Zapotec tribe in Mexico, there are the Muxes, in the Ojibwe tribe Native to Berkeley there are “Two-Spirit” people, and in India the “hijras”

1 The main source that has been referenced in this section discussing indigenous cultures and the impact of colonialism is definitely worth reading if you would like a deeper understanding of the impact of colonialism on language for this conference or for your own personal education. It is called “The Written and Intellectual Legacy of the Zapotecs” and is in the works cited page.

(Mirandé). A name for a group of people is more than simply a way to describe them, it creates space for them and a way for people to describe and relate themselves to society—inclusive language is a crucial

part of uplifting marginalized groups. While this is a complicated and very non-tangible topic in many ways, language has been inclusive before and has the potential to regain that once again.

SLURS, RECLAMATION, AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

There is a lot to consider in the big picture of language and gender, but the meat of this debate is actually in the subtleties. This section will focus on the English language simply because it is the language that the conference will take place in, and thus, the most clear way to explain these parts of language. However, at the risk of stating the obvious, slurs, insults, stigmatization, filler words, cat-calls, and reclamation exist in all languages.

Cunt

“Cunt” is one of the most stigmatized slurs in the United States, but it is far less stigmatized in English speaking European countries. Cunt has historically appeared in several different parts of the world, including Egypt, India, and the Middle East (Muscio 4-6). In these countries, its meaning is related to the empowerment and strength of women descending from goddesses’ names and sacred beliefs (Muscio 5). It continued to be a powerful word with positive associations, reflecting a time in which women were valued and treated with respect. The downfall and stigmatization of this word was related to imposed ideals of colonial christian beliefs—this explains one theory of why it is so stigmatized in the United

States (Muscio 4-6). The Puritans, who resided in the US, were known for their strict and conservative religious practices and likely enforced patriarchal beliefs with more ferocity than the Catholics and Protestants. Today, the official word used to refer to a “cunt” is “vagina” which is of Latin descent and roughly translates to “sword sheath” (Muscio 4). In its core, this relegates the female genitalia to a tool for a man to use, which is highly reflective of how society views women’s bodies today. This is one of many examples where words that were used to empower women—“bitch,” “whore,” “cunt”—were turned into a slur and used to demean women. It is a sad but ever present pattern in our modern society.

Stigmatized Words

There are various words that are not slurs, but still have a negative connotation. Words such as fat, bossy, and slut are all especially stigmatized for women. A woman may get called “bossy” for something that a man would be called a “leader” for. Similarly, a woman may be called a “slut” while a man is called a “player.” The word “slut” is generally seen as an insult; although the word “player” could be used as an insult, more often than not, it is used as a semi-neutral

observation or in many cases, a congratulatory phrase or title. If a woman is sexually active, she is villainized for it. If a man is sexually active, he is put on a pedestal. This double standard is frequent in language and exemplifies that language reflects social norms.

In contrast, being fat or being called fat is stigmatized for both men and women. It is impossible to understand the history of this body-type and word without recognizing Black history. Very few people view fat-shaming with the intersectional lens it requires. It became stigmatized during the slave trade because many Black women naturally had larger bodies (Strings 4-5). In the late 16th and 17th century, being fat was actually a sign of affluence and health and was quite desirable, but this trend quickly changed when Black enslaved women exhibited those same traits (Strings 42). While patriarchy awarded control to men, white women joined them in ridiculing the Black feminine body, despite the fact that these beauty standards actively harmed white women, too. While all women and men are acutely criticized for their bodies and weights, it is ultimately the result of our patriarchal and racist society. Even today, fat bodies—especially fat, feminine, Black bodies—are stigmatized globally. This is a great example of how internalized racism and sexism can harm people outside those marginalized identities and highlights the importance of undoing these subconscious beliefs.

There has been a long history of Black women, especially Black queer women fighting for queer rights, women's rights, and civil rights while getting very little recognition and payoff for their hard work. For these reasons, it is crucial to keep intersectionality in mind in any debate. True feminism is intersectional

feminism, meaning no woman is free until all women are free. Amongst women, white women are the most privileged and protected. They should, thus, use their power to make sure that all women are given the same rights. This could include working to educate themselves, educate others, and actively work with organizations to undo systemic racism and patriarchy.

The last example of a stigmatized word is not so much a word as it is a filler word. "Filler words" are the words that someone might use in the middle of a sentence to take up space such as "like," "uh," "um," or "you know." Disproportionately, women are criticized for their use of these words and are told that it shows a lack of confidence, knowledge, and direction (Mele). In reality, however, there is a distinct reason why women specifically use these words. While men say "uh" and "um" proportionately to women, they say "like" and "you know" substantially less (Kidd 4). Women's language evolved this way to protect from being interrupted (Handcock and Rubin, 2014, as cited in Kidd, 2016, p. 3). The filler words "like" and "you know" are set apart from "uh" and "um" because they are not just filling space, they are actively invalidating the speaker while validating the listener (Kidd 4-5). Men say "uh" and "um" to fill space and avoid being interrupted in conversation as well, but women will still get interrupted unless the listener feels validated in their knowledge (Kidd 4-5). These filler words specific to women's vocabulary have become increasingly stigmatized despite the fact that they are a smart linguistic evolution (Mele). When communication for any group loses validity, their message is lost, too. Women's thoughts, beliefs, and opinions are undermined from the moment they open their lips.¹

1 If filler words interest you on a personal level, I would highly recommend reading "Like totally whatever," a poem by Melissa Lozada-Oliva. The poem is available here, <https://genius.com/Melissa-lozada-oliva-like-totally-whatever-annotated> (this is not necessary material for your success in conference. It is simply an opportunity to dive in deeper.)

Reclamation

The reclamation of slurs is not only fascinating, but can also provide insight into how people actively morph language. There are two types of slurs distinguished by Robin Jeshion who released a 2019 study on this topic. “Insular” reclaimed slurs that only people within the marginalized community the slur refers to can use such as the N word (Jeshion 1). “Pride” reclaimed slurs can be used by people in and outside of the marginal community it refers to—it may even be used as a label for that group. An example of this is the word “queer” (Jeshion 1). Throughout history there have been successful, unsuccessful, purposely, and accidental reclamation of slurs. The body positivity movement, for example, has been generally more successful while previous attempts to reclaim specific words such as “fat” have been unsuccessful (Jeshion 6-7). While this may seem contradictory, Jeshion asserts that these previous attempts to reclaim distinct words were unsuccessful due to the fact that “what they [were] reclaiming [was] their own bodies,” not a specific body type (Jeshion 6-7). This is an example of language’s tangibility. When words are reclaimed, much more happens under the surface: people are reclaiming their body, their autonomy, their place in society. Reclamation at its core is the act of overthrowing a social norm, and thus is very powerful in this debate.

In his article, Jeshion asserts that there are four stages to reclaiming a slur (2). The “preliminary state” is the point in which the slur is unchanged, following that is the “linguistic creativity” stage where the slur’s meaning is shifted to something positive or empowering (Jeshion 2-3). After that, there is the “imitation” stage where it becomes more of a trend, and finally the “end stage” (Jeshion 2-3). While it seems simple,

this process takes several years, and this can be seen in the slurs that are reclaimed (e.g. the N-word, queer, gay) or those that are in the process of reclamation (e.g. bitch, slut, fat). Still, the reclamation of slurs lays the groundwork for how to change language in general, as in the beginning it only takes one person with “linguistic creativity” and something catchy that people can imitate. This could be one way to change the dialogue around gender.

Passive Voice

The use of the passive voice in English is a very interesting look into how grammar in ungendered languages can perpetuate misogyny. The passive voice is used to rearrange the focus of a sentence. For instance, a sentence using active voice might read “She ate the apple” while the same sentence using passive voice would read “the apple was eaten by her.” Naturally, this is less clear and changes the focus of the sentence from the person to the apple. To put it simply, the passive voice is recommended when noun one (the person) is less important than noun two (the apple.) This harmless grammar rule can become problematic, however, when dealing with real world situations and people. For example, it has become common to say “she was raped by him” instead of “he raped her” (Henley 61). By using the passive voice, the blame is subtly shifted onto the survivor. Sometimes the blame is completely omitted as someone may say, “she was raped” (Henley et. al. 61). This is especially common in journalism, despite the fact that the passive voice is highly frowned upon in journalistic writing (Henley 64).

On top of this, the passive can affect opinion and memory. Verb voice has the ability to affect comprehension and memory (Andre as cited in Henley et.

al. 62). One hypothesis is that people subconsciously use the passive voice to put “psychological distance” between themselves and a particularly violent action (Henley et. al. 70). This theory, however, does not explain why the passive voice is used disproportionately when referring to women or people of color (Smitherman-Donaldson & Van Dijk, 1988, as cited in Jimenez 3). Furthermore, “when people were exposed to reports of crimes, including rape and bat-

tery, written in passive voice, their attitudes [became] more negative toward rape victims, more accepting of rape myths, and more accepting of physical abuse of women,” and this affects men at a higher rate and frequency (Henley et. al. 80). This is a prime example of how subtle language deviations such as grammar and word choice have the potential to perpetuate cycles of misogyny and racism in everyone’s lives.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Nigeria and Yoruba

This case study will examine how gendered languages have perpetuated sexism and the negative effects will help to target what exactly language impacts. It is important to keep in mind that Yoruba is spoken by 15.5% of Nigeria, so the UN Women’s statistics for Nigeria is not reflective of the whole population (UN Women Data). Intersectionality and colonialism play an important role, as English is the official language in Nigeria. As mentioned previously, gendered languages can reinforce stereotypes and inequalities by creating a linguistic bias associating men with positions of power and the norm and downplaying the experiences of women. This can result in linguistic sexism, where we only attribute specific positions, professions, and attributes to one gender (World Bank). Many European languages like French, Spanish and Italian have masculine and feminine nouns and pronouns, and many people argue this normalizes gender roles in these countries because of this.

In Yoruba, the most important distinction is the age of the person. If one wanted to make a reference to a person’s gender, they would say “obirin and okorin” which would translate to “one who has a vagina” and “one who has a penis” (Montell). As English speakers, it would be very bizarre to refer to someone by this terminology, thus the Yoruba language makes us question the norm with which we immediately refer to someone’s gender to identify them.

However, it is important to note that although Yoruba does not have grammatical gender it does not mean that gender distinctions are irrelevant in Yoruba culture and society. Gender roles and identities are still an integral aspect of Yoruban society, although it may not be expressed through the language itself. Yoruba society is a patriarchal society where women are expected to marry and bear children, while men are the traditional leaders of the family and society. The concept of gender varies across cultures and societies, but in Western societies, gender has always been

associated with dividing individuals into the category of male and female. This understanding of gender is linked to an individual's biological sex.

In the past Yoruba women played an active and important role in the worship of deities in Yoruba religions. They were responsible for making offerings, maintaining shrines, and performing rituals to honor deities (Oládémo, Oyèrónké). Some women even became priestesses and diviners and possessed the authority to communicate with the deities and spirits, perform rituals and provide spiritual counsel to their community. Yoruba women were also known for their knowledge in healing medicine, and learning skills to provide remedies and offer spiritual healing and promote well-being in their communities (Oládémo, Oyèrónké). They were integral as social and community leaders who contributed to decision-making processes and provided guidance on community life (Oládémo, Oyèrónké).

To conclude, language has a lot of power. Learning a gendered language from an early age can unconsciously reinforce gender bias and sexism. Linguistic gender is a form of linguistic power and it can marginalize individuals who don't fit into these traditional gender categories. As mentioned above, in many Western languages we label gender in our words such as "heroine, hero, father, mother etc.," (Montell). Although the Yoruba language is an example of even though there may not be gender words in the language, traditional gender roles can still be enforced and expected in society. So the question remains, how does not having gendered language affect people's perceptions of gender and its construct? The conclusion reached from this case study shows that before colonialism, both female lines of authority existed alongside male lines of authority and women were able to participate in the decision making of

their communities. However, after colonialism where Yoruba culture was greatly influenced by western ideals, today Yoruba women are considered unfit to lead and they are considered to be beneath men in society. Therefore, having a non-gendered language does decrease gender bias so women are able to play more important roles in their community and they are viewed as equal to their male counterparts.

Case Study 2: LatinX

LatinX was an alternative to Latino and Latina that was allegedly coined in 2008 in a tweet (Dame-Griff 124). Later it became very popular as a term used in academia, and only after that did it become popular in everyday use (Dame-Griff 124). From the moment that it became publicly used, it was a highly controversial term (Dame-Griff 124-125). Some people argued that the term was more inclusive than Latino because it is more gender neutral by nature since "Latino" is part of a gendered grammatical system (124). Others argued that "Latino" is gender neutral in use and that the forced implementation of "LatinX" was modern day imperialism (Dame-Griff 121). While this term has the potential to be a positive change and highlight marginalized voices in the queer community, the implementation has been very confusing, lackluster, and problematic at times.

The debate generally centered on what the purpose of the word was, and the problem seemed to center on the term being an umbrella term for all Latino/a/X people (Dame-Griff 119). E. Cassandra Dame-Griff in her paper on this topic argues that LatinX is a term that should be used only to describe people that want to be described as LatinX (127). She parallels the use of LatinX to the use of pronouns, asserting that LatinX, Latina, and Latino should be self identified rather than something people are forced to use

(Dame-Griff 129). This method of implementation allows people to be introduced to the word slowly and use language that reflects their identities because someone who describes themselves as Latina may have a very different life experience than someone who identifies as LatinX or Latino and vice versa (Dame-Griff 124-125). At the end of the day, language is a way to communicate, and that is what this would accomplish.

While the implementation of the word was certainly reminiscent of colonialism, María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja, two researchers at City University, suggest that the “X” in LatinX is descended from historical activism in the civil rights movement, Xicana feminist movement, and borderland history (9). In their research they explain that the term LatinX has the unique ability to overthrow “the gender binary as well as evoke an intersectional paradigm that centers blackness and anti blackness in how individuals understand and acknowledge various points of identity in Latin America” (Scharrón-del Río & Aja 9). They also cite that “X” has been used in Latin American Indigenous languages which hold specific significance to gender as Indigenous cultures are often much more accepting of gender fluidity and

queerness (Scharrón-del Río & Aja 9).

A study linking policy beliefs and the use of LatinX versus Latino and Hispanic showed that people who use LatinX support LGBTQ+ policy more so than those who use Latina/o (Vicuña & Efrén 682). While this logically makes sense, it does not necessarily point to the use of LatinX leading to different policy opinions—in fact it is likely the reverse. In this sense, the use of the word may be a way to signal someone’s political beliefs or morals, which is part of language’s purpose. However, companies have utilized this as well, and in their attempts to signal that they are moral, they erased the experience of people who identify as Latina and Latino by using it as a blanket statement (Vicuña & Efrén 678). While the implementation of LatinX was less than perfect and stirred up a great deal of controversy, from it has created a very interesting conversation around language and gender. Since the introduction of LatinX, other gender neutral terms such as “Latine” have been introduced by queer and non-binary Latino/a/x people (Colorado State University). This case study exemplifies how difficult implementation can be as well as what to consider when coming up with solutions.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Look at some common proverbs or sayings from your country. What are their implications in relation to gender? What are their origins? How have their meanings changed over time?
2. It is important to understand how language evolves and what the evolution process looks like. How does language evolve in your country?
3. On a National and International level, what role does colonialism play in the evolution and reclamation of language? Please provide specific examples.
4. It is impossible to consider misogyny and sexism in a vacuum. What are some ways that queerness, disability, and race are relevant to this topic?

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TOPIC B: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE LEGAL INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

PREFACE

Content Warning:

Before we begin, there are a few things that I think are important to mention. First off, I would like to give a trigger warning that we will be discussing domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, and death in this paper. If at any point it becomes too much for you while reading, we encourage you to take breaks and email us with any questions or concerns you have. Please be communicative towards your needs during the conference too. The last thing we want is for anyone to feel alone, triggered, or deeply uncomfortable during conference. On a similar note, you do not know what other people have been through, so please be respectful before and during the conference even if your delegation has a controversial view on this topic. This is a very serious topic, and we expect you to take it seriously.

Overview of the Topic

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Globally, 1 in every 3 women at some points of their lives have been inflicted with physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or husband.” It is important to mention that despite the fact that we are majoritively talking about how domestic violence

affects women, non-binary people and men also greatly suffer from domestic violence and that should not be ignored. Still, it is important to recognize that the majority of abusers are male, and the majority of survivors are female (Valparaiso University). Additionally, this is a highly socio-cultural issue that needs to be considered and addressed in an intersectional lens that considers more than patriarchy but also institutionalized racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia too. Please try to think critically as you read this background guide, write your position papers, and participate in conference. While this is a much more substantive topic that is less theoretical than the last, we encourage you to use the same mindset and lenses on this topic as well. Lastly, something that I noticed in my own research for this background guide is that studies measure how many women have been abused and violated rather than measuring how many men have abused and violated their partners. This solidifies the social norm that it is the survivor's job to leave and seek help rather than the abuser's job to control their actions. I think that this issue can be tackled from both sides, and I encourage you to keep this in mind during your research and as you come up with solutions.

KEY TERMS

Domestic Violence: Domestic Violence (DV) is violence or aggression—including sexual violence—that is faced in the home. This is often inflicted by one's partner, sibling, parent, or guardian. In this paper we will be discussing DV committed against women specifically.

Gender-Based Violence: According to the European Commission, "Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately."

Abuse: Abuse is defined in the Oxford Language Dictionary as the "cruel and violent treatment of a person or animal." While this is a valid definition, abuse is often thought of simply as physical (hitting, punching, cutting, burning, etc.); however, there are several types of abuse such as psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse. Between these different types of abuse there is overlap as psychological abuse can include verbal or physical abuse as well. Often, in an abusive relationship, several or all of these forms of abuse are utilized to belittle and control the person being abused.

Coercion: Coercion is the act of persuading someone to do something that they do not want to do through manipulation and threats. Often, this is referred to in the context of sexual coercion although it is applicable in many parts of life. Someone may say, "if you break up with me, I will hurt myself," and that would be coercion.

Queer: Similarly to LGBTQIA+, the word “queer” is used as an umbrella term to refer to someone who does not comply with societal norms surrounding sexuality or gender (i.e. those who are not heterosexual, cisgender, etc.).

Disabled: The American Disability Association’s definition of disabled is “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity” . Not all disabilities are visible, and it is important to note that disabled is the politically correct term to refer to people with disabilities—do not use “differently abled,” “special needs,” etc.

Victims versus Survivors: Throughout this paper you will hear us refer to women that have faced domestic violence as “survivors” as opposed to “victims.” The implication of calling someone a victim implies weakness and has a negative connotation around it which is not accurate. To continue to live after facing domestic violence is an act of strength and resistance, and that is why we will use “survivor” and we ask you to do the same.

ABORTION LAWS

Abortion lives in the intersection between the legal independence of women and the presence of DV. It is additionally a very controversial subject because many people and countries oppose abortion for religious and moral reasons. They are, of course, “entitled to their belief but a democratic State cannot have laws that are based on belief systems that are not shared by all individuals, cultures and religions” (Raday 3). The act of having repetitive abortions is correlated to sexual and physical abuse because DV and sexual violence often come with “birth control sabotage and forced sex” as well as coercion (Côté & Simon 285 & 287). On top of this, if an abused woman carries through with a pregnancy, the baby is more likely to be underweight at birth, have HIV, or have syphilis (Devaney et. al. 12). Children that are born into abuse face physical and mental side effects

that have the potential to plague them for the rest of their lives (Devaney et. al. 118). How a mother is treated during and before pregnancy shapes the view she has of being a parent just as much as her own childhood shapes her in this regard (Devaney et. al. 118). Further, if a woman is forced to give birth to a child that was conceived through rape, coercion, or abuse, then in many ways that tethers her to her abuser, making it more difficult to escape DV.

What happens, then, if a country does not provide access to abortions? It does not stop abortions; it only stops safe abortions (Raday 2). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “around 45% of all abortions are unsafe, of which 97% take place in developing countries.” This statistic highlights how it is women in poverty who suffer the most, as

women who are wealthy are able to pay exorbitant amounts of money to travel to receive a safe abortion in secrecy (Raday 2). Countries that have the most access to knowledge and resources surrounding contraception and abortion have the lowest rates of abortion globally (Raday 1). Women and girls' access to abortion has a very real consequence on their autonomy and rights as humans, and the UN has emphasized on multiple occasions that it views access to abortion as a fundamental human right (Raday 1). In their 2017 report on reproductive rights, the

UN Special Procedures group wrote, "The right of a woman or girl to make autonomous decisions about her own body and reproductive functions is at the very core of her fundamental right to equality and privacy, concerning intimate matters of physical and psychological integrity" (Raday 1). Survivors of DV have more abortions, and unsafe abortions is a leading cause of maternal morbidity—access to safe abortions is a key part of protecting survivors of DV and allowing them to gain autonomy over their bodies and eventually their lives (WHO).

MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS

Mandatory reporting laws are an important part of the conversation around DV. Mandatory reporting laws are essentially laws that require certain people to report concerning behaviors and crimes (e.g. abuse, rape, suicidal ideation, etc.) to the applicable authorities. Mandatory reporting laws originated in the United States, but are becoming increasingly international with Brazil, Bahrain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Canada implementing similar laws (Al Saadoon et al 40-42 & Lui et al. 220-221). In some cases, mandatory reporters are teachers, psychologists, doctors, etc., while in other regions every adult is technically a mandatory reporter. While these laws are seemingly well-intentioned and should protect women and girls from DV, they do the opposite. In a survey of survivors of DV that had interactions with mandatory reporting laws and, subsequently, the criminal justice system in the United States, only 1.8% of women said that it made their lives "much better," but 51.2% of women said that it made their

lives "much worse," and of the 1.8% people of color represented a very small minority (Lippy et al. 262). There are several reasons why this might be. In the United States, the criminal justice system has historically discriminated against people of color and failed to help survivors of abuse. This has fostered distrust of the justice system for women of color. Yet, amongst all women, there were several concerns about mandatory reporting: that the criminal justice system would take action without their consent, that their abuser would get angry, that child protective services would take away their children, that they would be arrested for neglect, and more (Lippy et al. 263). Survivors fear that all of these things could happen if they are reported, but another fear is that nothing will happen. When the police were involved, several survivors told similar stories: "Getting cops involved made him even more mad, and every time cops got involved, they never arrested him for it...so now he keeps coming after me knowing he gets away

with it,” or “The only difference was he went to jail one night and came home the next day” (Lippy et al. 263). These are all very tangible fears that women have, notwithstanding the social stigma of DV and expectation placed on women as “the pressures they face to maintain peace and family honor leads them to remain silent due to social stigma and potential isolation” (Qamar et al. 2957).

These laws admittedly look good on paper and supposedly have the potential to help women, but when they are too wide reaching, they have negative side

effects. Mandatory reporting laws in some areas require that “all persons above the age of 18, regardless of profession, are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect” (Lippy, Carrie, et al. 256). Instead of stopping abuse, all this does is isolate the survivor and make it harder for them to maintain a support system. There are a myriad of reasons, as previously discussed, why women who have faced domestic violence would not want to go through the justice system, and with widespread mandatory reporting laws, that becomes nearly impossible.

MARRIAGE LAWS

Marriage law, especially surrounding child marriage, is highly correlated with domestic violence rates. Child marriage can have adverse mental and physical affects on women and girls, as “globally, the leading cause of death in females aged 15 to 19 are complications with pregnancy and delivery, and girls younger than the age of 15 are five times as likely to die due to such causes,” (Qamar et al. 2956). This is exacerbated by the fact that sexual violence is 20% more prevalent with girls who marry before the age of 15 (Qamar et al. 2953). On a deeper level, child marriage highlights and perpetuates the inequalities that foster DV as well. In Afghanistan, for example, while the legal age for marriage is 16, they are allowed to be married younger with the permission of their father specifically (Qamar et al. 2957). This reinforces the gender stereotype that men are the leader of the household and that women are property to be “given away” in marriage, often for economic compensation.

This is seen on a statistical level too when looking at a study evaluating legal protections to address violence against women Laws on Violence against Women and Girls Index (LoVI) which ranked countries depending on their legal protections to address DV. The LoVI method is internationally reaching as it uses data from the World Bank, and it is much more comprehensive than other methods that attempt to measure the legal status of women (Yount et al. 2). High rankings meant that there was a strong legal infrastructure that worked against DV whereas a low ranking meant that they did not. The four factors for the LoVI are child marriage, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and marital rape, and they did find that these four factors co-occur (Yount et al. 2). It was found that “National [Laws on Violence against Women and Girls Index] rankings were positively associated with gender equality in human development and economic rights-related rankings and negative



ly associated with rates of justifying wife beating” (Yount et al. 1). Through this method, they recognize that policy does more than control a population, but also establishes “legal norms or expectations about the treatment of women” (Yount et al. 2). While

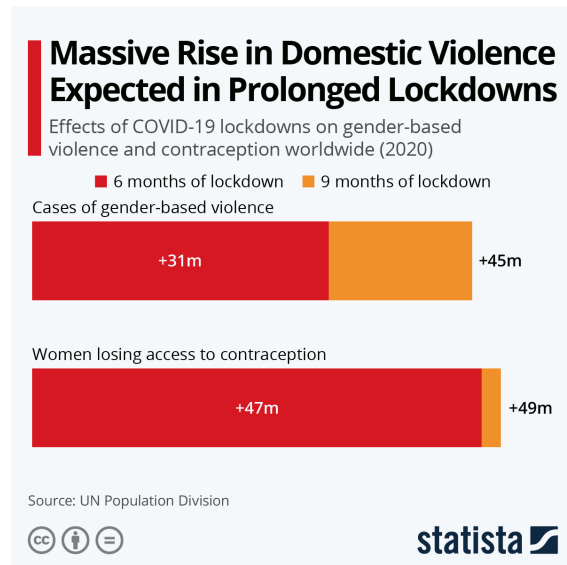
nothing exists in a vacuum and undoubtedly societal and economic factors affect DV rates in countries, this study shows the impact of legal action against DV.

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

It is impossible to discuss this issue without bringing up the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had. Internationally, countries shut down their economies and forced people to stay indoors on lockdown, and while that was necessary considering the circumstances, it left many people alone with their abusers and socially isolated (Mahtab 199-201). Shelters became less accessible, and services that were helping people experiencing DV, like mental health services, were reallocated to address the effects of the pandemic (Mahtab 213). All of these factors lead to an increase in domestic violence, sexual coercion, and abuse. Furthermore, during the pandemic, there was

an increase in child marriages due to “interrupted education, economic shocks, pregnancy, death of a parent, and disruption to programmes and services aiming to prevent child marriage” (Mahtab 203-204). UNICEF found that globally, child brides are more likely to say that DV is justified, possibly due to lack of education, cognitive development, and the general normalization of DV in areas in which child marriage is common (19). This increase in child marriage and the subsequent social acceptance of DV has already affected millions of girls, and has the potential to affect millions more due to generational trauma (Mahtab 200). While it would be a com

forting thought to believe that COVID-19 was an isolated incident, pandemics are increasingly likely due to antibiotic resistance, and COVID-19 was simply the beginning. On top of this, isolation occurs outside of pandemic, as isolating survivors from their support networks is often the first step abusers take to gain control. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for increased social networks for those who face DV, but there will always be women who become isolated due to abuse. It is for these reasons that it is crucial to consider how to provide resources for people who are facing DV during these periods of mass lockdown.



INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is crucial to understand and consider in this topic.¹ Women of color, Indigenous women, women in poverty, queer women, fat women, and disabled women are all affected disproportionately by this issue. A white, abled, heterosexual, cisgender woman’s experience of DV and abuse is still valid and important to recognize, but it is extremely important to center marginalized voices in the conversation around domestic violence because marginalized women are the ones who are most affected.

Internationally, it has been the hard work and political activism of Black queer women that have allotted women, queer people, and Black people the majority

of their rights today: as they fought for their rights, they fought for the rights of Black people, queer people, and women globally. For example, in South Africa during the early 2000s, Phumi Mtetwa, a young queer Black woman, took part in and led several protests that resulted in the legalization of gay marriage, and she has continued to fight for housing access, food security, and an end to DV (Stewart). Similarly, in the United States, the women of the Black Panther Party are the reason that school lunches are provided in public schools (Hall 6). They established their own free breakfast program “two years after the Black Panther Party² began, and just one year later twenty thousand children came to rely on the Party for a

1 Please see the definition of intersectionality in topic A “key terms” section.

2 The Black Panther Party was a Black political activist group that started in Oakland but became nation-wide in their reach.

balanced breakfast” (Hall 6). What is remarkable is that the United States government stated a free lunch program as something completely infeasible, but after the Black Panther Party succeeded, they were pressured into making one of their own (Hall 6). The Black women within the Black Panther Party created something for their community, but it has continued to serve children and families in lower socio-economic classes across the United States. Even in countries that have little to no Black population, the work of Black queer women in the West has influenced what is considered as human rights, as Western countries have traditionally had more power in international organizations such as the United Nations.

Despite their role in leading movements for human rights and justice, women of color, queer women, and impoverished women around the world continue to struggle on a daily basis to survive amidst persistent racism, homophobia, sexism, and colonialism. A key part of viewing this issue through an intersectional lens is understanding the underlying cultural and socioeconomic factors that lead to DV. In times of economic stress such as the previously mentioned COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in domestic violence (Mahtab 200). Similarly, people who live in poverty and are in lower socioeconomic classes experience more domestic violence as increased stress due to economic position can push people into lashing out and financial dependence in an abusive relationship is a large reason in which many people are unable to leave (Mahtab 205-206). Another issue leading to domestic violence is the generational trauma from periods of violence that could have been decades or centuries earlier (Bukovcan & Zeljko 99-100). These periods of intense cruelty such as genocide, slavery, and war normalize violence in people’s lives which in turn normalizes violence in the

homes of survivors of the atrocious events or periods (Bukovcan & Zeljko 99-100)

Another underlying factor is that in many areas there is a generational culture that normalizes violence. While there are generational, ethnic, religious, and regional factors that play into the normalization of violence, it can also become normalized through a periods of intense cruelty such as a war, genocide, or slavery (Bukovcan & Zeljko 99-100). This normalization does not end when the period of cruelty ends; rather, violence becomes embedded in the social norms of the community for generations to come. Generational trauma is often attributed to cultural and ethnic stereotypes of abuse and domestic violence — people may argue that one region, culture or ethnicity as innately more violent, but it is actually the exploitation of this region, culture, or ethnicity that has normalized violence. Due to these reasons, it is important to utilize an intersectional lens and recognize the colonial and oppressive factors that lead to the normalization of violence in the first place as opposed to using cultural factors as a scapegoat. Resolutions for this topic should attack these social structures and work to heal communities rather than using biological racism or cultural reasons which have been disproved for decades.

When considering intersectionality, it is imperative to explore the experiences of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, national and international studies confirm that women with disabilities are abused at a much higher rate than women without disabilities, for a variety of different reasons. Women with disabilities are among the most impoverished members of society, meaning that they are often in situations in which they must rely on others to a greater degree than do those without disabilities. This position can lead to many women with disabilities to become

abused by those in their home, yet if their abuser is the one responsible for providing resources and care, women will feel that they are completely tied to them. In addition to this, there are several barriers for people with disabilities to call the police, among them are the lack of available text telephone (TTY) for deaf women, or the fear of not being believed by

the police by women with psychiatric disabilities. In addition to these financial and abelist barriers, it must be noted that many women's shelters cannot yet accommodate women who have specialized care, causing an absence of a safe space for women with disabilities.

KEY ACTORS AND EVENTS

This is a widespread issue that affects people all around the world, meaning that there are a wide variety of key actors. The United Nations organs and organizations that are most focused on addressing this issue are the General Assembly, which has passed several resolutions on this topic; the Human Rights Council, which has also discussed this issue at large and passed several resolutions; and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which has focused on issues such as domestic violence and child marriage (UNICEF 30-31). While there are other United Nations organizations that focus on this issue, those are a great place to start in your research. Other key actors in this issue are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work both nationally and internationally. Researching NGOs is a great way to see what organizations your delegation is involved with, as well as what your delegation is doing to combat DV. What makes NGOs unique and powerful is their ability to pressure governments socially, as well as their ability to enter war zones that United Nations officials are not allowed to go into. They have unique relationships with

individual countries, and they hold a very interesting place in society. Despite the fact that this issue is extremely widespread, there are some regions that are more affected than others. The most affected regions in order are Oceania, Central sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Andean Latin America (Sardinha et. al. Table 4). While this is helpful to keep in mind, there will be no one size fits all solution because the rates and causes of DV differ vastly across the world.

It is also crucial to examine legal milestones for women internationally and nationally, such as access to abortion, voting rights, and the legal age for marriage. Internationally, domestic violence was only talked about after the 1960s and 1970s (Devaney et. al. 12). Before this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was one of the main pieces of international law that centered on the rights and autonomy of all people, although it did not explicitly focus on DV. In the 1970s, the first shelter for women facing DV was opened in London, and it put into perspective how many women and children were

suffering (Devaney et. al. 12). Since then, shelters have become much more widespread, demonstrating how widespread the issue is internationally. After the DV become more recognized, there was the Convention Against Torture (1984) which outlined more human rights and the following Committee Against Torture (1984) which was put in place to “monitor the implementation” of the convention (General Assembly; United Nations). While these may not seem particularly related to DV, they were some of the first documents condemning violence and defining tor-

ture which created the dialogue around human rights that led to the comendation of DV. These documents are noteworthy because they are the root of a great deal of the legislation nationally and internationally. Along with the Convention and Committee Against Torture, there have been several United Nations resolutions on the topic of DV. In more recent years, the 2012 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have highlighted ending Violence against Women and Girls as one of their seventeen goals (United Nations).

RECENT UN RESOLUTIONS

Several resolutions within the past few years have discussed DV. A common thread between these resolutions is that they recognize how the pandemic has perpetuated domestic violence. Another recurring theme in recent resolutions is intersectionality, which is important to recognize in any issue, but especially domestic violence.

A/HRC/RES/44/17: Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2020)

This UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution was created in the midst of the pandemic and highlighted gender equality, the safety of women against domestic violence, the sexual reproductive rights of women, and the impact that the pandemic had on women facing domestic violence (UN Human Rights Council 2-4). It mentions the Universal Declaration of Human Rights amongst other histor-

ical international efforts made to address domestic violence (UN Human Rights Council 2-4). It called upon member states to promote programs and legislation that protect women from discrimination and violence. It was most concerned with prevention as opposed to helping with the aftermath of DV. It is an interesting snapshot as to what the world was concerned with during that time, especially considering the effects of the pandemic.

A/HRC/RES/47/15: Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (2021)

This UNHRC resolution built off of the A/HRC/RES/44/17 in addressing the pandemic, and expanded it to recognize the specific impact that the pandemic has on “women and girls with disabilities” (UN Human Rights Council 3). On top of this,

it emphasized intersectionality and requested that member states keep vulnerable groups in mind as they address violence against women and girls (UN Human Rights Council 2-5). It additionally calls upon member states to reallocate funding, review policy, and give the issue increasing attention (UN Human Rights Council 5-7).

A/RES/76/304: International cooperation for access to justice, remedies and assistance for survivors of sexual violence (2022)

This General Assembly resolution took a more comprehensive approach to DV, emphasizing both prevention through legal means as well as justice after sexual violence (General Assembly 5). It also recog-

nized intersectionality and called for inclusive legal representation and protection for survivors that hold intersecting identities (General Assembly 8). It urged member states to provide mental and physical health services for survivors and strengthen response effectiveness for DV and sexual violence (General Assembly 6). Something that is unique in this resolution is that it centers women and girls on this issue as it encourages countries to implement “full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of all women and youth in decision-making in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government” (General Assembly 6). This resolution is a great example of a comprehensive resolution that effectively provides care for the survivors as it provides legal protection, physical health services, and mental health services, as well as recognizing intersectionality.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Impacts of the Rwandan Genocide on DV Rates

The Rwanda genocide of 1994 was conceived by extremist part of the Rwanda’s majority Hutu population who planned and executed the mass murder of the minority Tutsi and extended to all opposition. Thousands of people died from both groups, and it is estimated that up to two million fled the country during and after the genocide. Despite their similarities and shared history, both the Hutu and the Tutsi as the two major ethnic groups in Rwanda shared the same language and occupied the north region until

the arrival of Europeans in the 19th century. Social differences between the Hutu and Tutsi grew when German and Belgian colonizers arrived and assumed that ethnicity could be distinguished by physical characteristics between both groups, and proceeded to create a system by categories. The physical differences between Hutu and Tutsi became a fight for power, influence and control between them. Ethnic tensions and violence flared periodically and led to mass killing of Tutsi in Rwanda in 1963, 1967 and 1973. Tensions arose again in 1990 after Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels invaded Uganda. Tensions continued to rise when on April 6,

1994, a plane carrying President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi was shot down. Although the identity of the person who fired upon the plane was never conclusively determined, Hutu extremists were originally accused. Later there were allegations that RPF leaders were responsible. The genocide of Tutsi, led by Hutu began that night and the prime minister who was a moderate Hutu was assassinated that day, leading to the murder of Tutsi and Hutu politicians with the intention of creating a political vacuum. The methods for killing were quite brutal and in addition to being used as a weapon, rape involved the intentional use of HIV/AIDS-positive perpetrators to carry out sexual attacks; as a result, a large number of Tutsi women were intentionally infected. The United Nations (UN) attempted to mediate a cease-fire but was unsuccessful. By early July, the RPF had successfully taken control of most of the nation. Leaders of the Hutu extremists, including the temporary government, left the nation. On July 19, the RPF commander Paul Kagame, a Tutsi, was named vice president and Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu, as president of the transitional government of national unity. The genocide had come to an end, the country faced years of recovery, rebuilding and reconciliation.

The Rwandan genocide is infamous both for its brutality and rapid unfolding, as well as for the failure of the international community to intervene and end the massacre. Tabled as an “internal conflict,” the genocide exposed the United Nations as reactionary and slow-moving, with an organization that lacked the ability to fundamentally intervene in times of need. Within days of the genocide’s outbreak, the UN Security Council “voted to reduce the UN peacekeeping force in the country from 2,500 to 270 soldiers” (“Pleading for Help”). What followed was the swift evacuation of the majority of international community members, as Rwandans were left to fend

for themselves with limited personnel, equipment, and support outside of the country’s borders. Following the massacre, the UN received a significant amount of backlash for its peacekeeping efforts, or lack thereof (“Pleading for Help”). To prosecute individuals held responsible for crimes against humanity during the Rwandan genocide, the UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which has had some success in recreating a judicial system that was virtually destroyed. The tribunal has been criticized for policies and practices that breach detainees’ rights, specifically the right to a fair trial, raising vital questions about the effectiveness of the body in serving justice (“International Criminal Tribunal”).

Despite the hard work that has been done to heal the communities that were affected by the Rwandan genocide, the generational trauma has affected rates of domestic violence. A study in the *Journal of Development Economics* discusses this very thing and found very interesting results that give several insights to how genocide affects DV rates. The study looked surveyed people who got married before versus after the genocide, and they found that in couples who were married before the genocide there was no increase in DV, but couples that were married after the genocide had a notable increase in DV in comparison (La Mattina 169). In addition to this, it decreased the decision making power for women that were married after the genocide (La Mattina 169). On top of this “the genocide decreased household’s education expenditure for families in which the spouse of the household head was of marriageable age at the time of the genocide (20 or younger in 1994) relative to families in which she was older” (La Mattina 174). This disproportionately affected girls because “genocide intensity is associated with an increase in individual school expenditure for boys and a decrease

for girls” (La Mattina 174). A contributed factor to this dynamic is that there was a larger disparity in sex ratio after the genocide, where there were substantially more females than males (La Mattina 169-170). This has been theorized to perpetuate domestic violence because men as a whole were more likely to find a spouse meaning that men that were violent and would have remained single because of that get married (La Matinna 175).

This genocide is a prime example of how a large violent act can normalize violence and create accumulative affect leading to less independence for women legally and otherwise. This case study highlights the importance of understanding the history in your delegation to understand why domestic violence is or is not more common, and how the relates to the legal infrastructure in your delegations country. It’s important to understand how colonialism relates to societal norms and finally leads to increased domestic violence.

Case Study 2 : A Close Up on Domestic Violence in the Philippines

In the last five years, there has been a significant increase in awareness surrounding the domestic violence (against women) rates of the Philippines. The Philippines has a comparatively high rate of DV globally (Ebbeler et al. 38). By listening to and empathizing with survivor stories and interviews, we can begin to see how cultural and societal norms are underlying causes for this issue.

In a study led by graduate students from Nova Southeastern University, titled “Lived Experiences of Battered Women in Ozamiz City, Philippines,” the researchers interviewed six battered women. Their findings are centered around “[f]our central

themes...namely recurrence of physical abuse, endurance to pain, disempowerment of women, and love for family“ (7). The fourth theme ties strongly back to these societal norms and cultural values.

One woman stated, “I view his beating as part of our relationship being husband and wife. I also think that I have some shortcomings. It is my responsibility to take care of my husband.” There is a sense of responsibility that wives in particular feel towards their husbands: to provide for them, to accommodate them, and to take care of the house and the children for them. This sense of responsibility in some cases might stem from the financial dependence the wife and children have on the husband. Another participant claimed: “Anyway, there is nothing I can do. If I leave him, I am afraid of what he will do to our children.” Another agrees, “I have two children. If I leave my husband who is the breadwinner of the family, how will I support the children?”

There is an unrelenting power of love that keeps many of these survivors to continue to stay in these relationships. For some it is the love they have for their children, and for others it is the love and understanding they have for their husbands. “Despite the times when he would physically hurt me, my love for him has never changed because I understand him,” one participant said. Based on the conversations the researchers had, they noticed that “the nature of Filipino family relationships forces the participants to keep domestic violence within the confines of the home. Hence, the participants of the study were silent about their experiences for fear of demeaning their family’s reputation. The social stigma attached to the situation may jeopardize the security of children’s future.” There is honor attached to keeping the family together and having a happy family. Many women felt that all their honor and respect would be

gone if they divorced or left their husband (caused by societal discrimination and judgment towards divorced women), leading them to often blame themselves for choosing the wrong partner or for their husband's violence. This study that peers into the

psychology and social norms that affect DV survivors highlights the complexity of DV. It is important to recognize this when writing resolutions and actionably try to fight against the stigmatization of DV by providing education and resources regarding DV.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Find a theoretical concept discussed in this background that you feel is particularly applicable to your country and research more in depth about it. What did you learn from this?
2. There is a concept called the “Triple Bottom Line” which essentially emphasizes how society is innately linked to the environment and economy. Research this concept and contextualize it within your country. How might the economic and environmental status of your country affect the cultural norms that lead to domestic violence being more or less normalized?
3. The United Nations is an imperfect organization, to say the least. How has the United Nations perpetrated domestic violence, colonialism, and other harmful cycles in their official peacekeeping missions? How can this be avoided in the future?
4. Generational trauma is very real and relevant to this issue. Look at your country’s history and statistics on domestic violence overtime. Is there any correlation? How does generational trauma relate to domestic violence as a whole, and your country more specifically?

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