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## **THE UNSPOKEN STORIES OF LGBTQ+ REFUGEES**

Healing personal trauma and social prejudices through storytelling and writing

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

'LGBTQ+ refugees' is the name given to the group of people that escape their homes because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. There are still a lot of countries in the world in which any sexual orientation different to heterosexuality is considered a mental disease. The emotional weight that this group of people carry with them as a consequence of the traumatic events they go through cannot be ignored either.

The thesis of the present dissertation is that LGBTQ+ refugees carry with them traumatic experiences which, when told, can help both heal personal trauma and contribute to a social cause.

The first objective of the dissertation is to explore the ways in which storytelling and writing can become tools to help healing the personal traumas that LGBTQ+ refugees sustain. The essay investigates how the necessity of storytelling arises from the struggles and the psychological gravity that this particular group of people endure.

The second objective is to heal society through the stories of LGBTQ+ refugees. This objective emerges from the need to contribute to a social change by giving a voice to a clearly affected minority group in an attempt to equalize the poor sensitivity that exists regarding LGBTQ+ refugees.

A relevant emphasis of the present paper is to make known a kind of persecution that is invisible. LGBTQ+ refugees are often not included or mentioned when talking about forced migrations. This is why the paper meets with the voices of five LGBTQ+

refugees that tell their story with the intention of healing personal trauma. At the same time, their words serve to bring visibility, raise consciousness in society and to make people aware of the privilege they live in. In addition, this research attempts to denounce the gap of psychological treatment and emotional therapy that LGBTQ+ refugees encounter when they arrive to their countries of asylum.

There is a need to break the distance with the harsh reality that the world is living. The real-life stories of LGBTQ+ refugees help bringing a more sustained, complete and faithful view on the matter of *sexile*.<sup>1</sup> It is important to engage with the following stories and to put an emphasis on the lives of LGBTQ+ refugees because they exist, and they cannot longer be ignored.

## **2. A WORD ON STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY**

### *1. Structure of the paper*

This paper is divided into three parts:

- 1) An exploration of the historical and social context of a specific group of people with the analysis of the current problems that the group faces.
- 2) A theoretical investigation on the literature related to the social problem that is exposed. There is a focus on the specific group of people that is affected.
- 3) An illustration of the theory through interviews of real-life cases and a debate for future investigation of the problems presented.

### *2. Methodology of the paper*

The paper is based on a theoretical ground which is later exemplified by the real-life stories of five LGBTQ+ refugees. The initial idea of the research was to work personally with each of participants in order to produce a written text that would both tell their story to the world and reconcile with their past traumatic experiences. However, the paper has met with several obstacles that have limited the work.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sexile*: Manolo Guzman defines it as the “the exile of those who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation” (Guzman, 1997, p. 227). The merging of the word sex and exile is a productive way of encapsulating the forced migration that LGBTQ+ refugees undergo. The word will be used in determined situations throughout the paper.

The participants were encouraged to do an exercise of reflection and introspection through a personal exploration of writing as a way of dealing with one's emotions.<sup>2</sup> They answered seventeen questions that aimed to bring a voice to their silenced story and to expose the reality they suffer.

### **3. LGBTQ+ PERSONS NOWADAYS: A DISTINCT ATTACKED MINORITY SOCIAL GROUP**

The situation that LGBTQ+ persons live nowadays is not a simple one. There are still 76 countries in the world that consider "same-sex sexual conduct" a crime and carry penalties that are supported by the law system of the country (International Commission of Jurists, 2011, p. 7). LGBTQ+ persons that seek asylum face an innumerable amount of "threats, risks and vulnerabilities throughout all stages of the displacement cycle" (Türk, 2012, p. 120), a reality that is worrying. They suffer violence worldwide in countries where there is, supposedly, legal protection for them.

Refugees are no exception to this ironic reality. It is the case that LGBTQ+ refugees find themselves in challenging situations in the places where they expect to be welcomed and find refuge. Türk explains how the persecution that they are escaping "is at times repeated in the country of asylum" (2012, p. 120) and often found in the very refugee communities where they stay. It is common that LGBTQ+ refugees will maintain their sexuality in secret in order to protect their integrity: "They usually keep a low profile in order not to attract discrimination and violence from other refugees, the local community or State authorities." (Türk, 2012, p. 128).

It is for these reasons that there is a necessity to recognize LGBTQ+ refugees as a distinct minority social group that suffers violence consistently. In her work "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugees Studies' to the National Order of things", Malkki (1995) she makes the following reflection about the diversity that exists under the group of people that we call 'refugees': "Forced population movements [...] involve people who, while

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for information about the process of contacting and working with the participants.

all displaced, find themselves in qualitatively different situations and predicaments.” (1995, p. 496)

It is important to distinguish LGBTQ+ refugees from the rest of refugees because they do not undergo the same circumstances as the others. The situation of a homosexual person in Morocco, for example, is very different from a person that escapes war in Syria. Their experiences and reasons to escape are likely to be substantially different. The first one is escaping violence and persecution as a result of a cultural, social, and political way of thinking. The second one is escaping violence and persecution as a result of a military conflict and political and ideological matters.

LGBTQ+ refugees constitute a group of individuals that “share a common characteristic” apart from the danger of being persecuted (UNHCR, 2002, p. 11). They generally escape for being who they are and who they love, and this adds an extra element to the pressure of escaping. They are not simply escaping a place but escaping a place that rejects them. UNHCR claims that they are identified as a social group. Thus, the need to address the concept of the LGBTQ+ refugee as a distinct matter is relevant inside the study of refugees.

Furthermore, Brazilian Doctor on Social Science and specialist on Gender Studies Isadora L. França affirms that they do not only face “grave human rights violations, threats to life and liberty and other forms of violence”, but unacceptance and discrimination (2017, p. 11). UNCHR exposes that there are always risks “to be subjected to torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment” for LGBTQ+ persons around the world. Therefore, such complicated situation demands better protection and understanding.

In conclusion, there is a necessity to recognise refugees who identify as LGBTQ+ as a social group that suffers violence worldwide and that has their rights violated (França, 2017). As Malkki puts it, “involuntary or forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of socio-political and cultural processes and practices” (1995, p. 496) . This means that the movement of groups of

LGBTQ+ people are the result of a larger problem that shows that something is not working well.

#### **4. STORYTELLING AS HEALING**

How do the politics of naming transform not only individual narratives of trauma, but also larger institutions that evaluate, label, minimize, treat, and potentially discard traumatic experiences?

(Casper & Wertheimer, 2016, p. 62 and 63)

Life's traumas, whether major or simple traumas, create traces in the mind. These trauma traces, as physiological imprints or memories of past experiences, often dictate how we think, feel, and cope with life.

(Hayes, 2015)

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive.

(Felman & Laub, 1991, p. 78)

##### *1. The silence of LGBTQ+ refugees*

LGBTQ+ refugees undergo silence during their lives and along their journey when escaping to another country. Garcia Iglesias declares that some of them hide their sexual orientation or gender identity as a result of fear of persecution (2016). In fact, many of them may not even acknowledge their sexual and/or gender identity to family or friends. It can be also the case that to stay in the closet "in hostile environments" is the only safe option that they have (International Commission of Jurists, 2011, p. 287) (UNHCR, 2008, p. 5).

Consequently, most often LGBTQ+ refugees do not have the opportunity to express their emotions freely. They usually cannot speak about their situation with others because they cannot trust those who persecute them or because it is not accepted at a societal level. LGBTQ+ refugees suffer silence at a personal level which adds to the trauma of escaping. This leads to the inexistence of opportunities for LGBTQ+ refugees to express their emotions and thoughts.

Furthermore, when seeking asylum LGBTQ+ refugees have been told that they "could have avoided persecution by simply concealing their sexual orientation" (Türk,

2012, p. 5). The International Commission of Jurists considered this position unacceptable to assess the legitimacy of an asylum seeker: “it would be wrong to expect an applicant for asylum to live discreetly so as to avoid persecutory harm.” (International Commission of Jurists, 2011, p. 297). This is attack to the sexual freedom of the applicants and a statement that deteriorates and damages the person’s human rights. Apart from perpetuating the continuity of silence in the persons’ internal experiences.

As anthropology and gender studies Professor Gabriele M. Schwab points out in “On speaking from within the Void”, it is not rare to remain silent about experiences that relate to violence and trauma (Casper & Wertheimer, 2016). However, she continues to add, “too much silence becomes haunting”. This is why it is crucial for these persons to put into words what they have gone through.

## *2. Storytelling as healing in LGBTQ+ refugees*

As it has been explored in the previous section, LGBTQ+ refugees do not have the chance to live their sexuality openly, much less to talk about the emotions that the trauma they have lived causes in them. This section of the paper explores how storytelling can contribute to a personal healing in LGBTQ+ refugees. Several specialized authors bring reflections on this matter and consider storytelling as an effective mechanism when treating trauma.<sup>3</sup>

The paper focuses on the type of storytelling that meets with one’s past in order to resolve the trauma<sup>4</sup>. As Californian Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies Katherine Fobear says, “for many who have lived in silence most of their lives because of homophobia and transphobia” storytelling can become a way to “induce a sense of pride and accomplishment.” (2015, p. 103).

According to Hayes, “death, loss, stress, and grief can create trauma” and it is through art that it can be treated (2015, p. 2). Generally, art is a great tool to express

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<sup>3</sup> See especially: “Naming Sexual Trauma” (Fahs, 2016) and “Education and Crisis” (Felman, 1991)

<sup>4</sup> It is known that LGBTQ+ refugees are asked to tell their story as a way to prove their asylum case. (UNHCR, 2008)

feelings and emotions that are related to distress, disturb and pain. Refugees are no exception to this.

Australian anthropologist Arthur Saniotis and psychologist Farahnaz Sobhanian point out that “if the stories that refugees tell others involve the reclaiming of self, then such narratives may constitute a method of healing and reconciliation with the world” (2008, p. 2). Having this approach in mind, storytelling for LGBTQ+ refugees should be a plausible way of healing and alleviating the traumatic experiences that they have lived.

We can apply this notion to storytelling in LGBTQ+ refugees in the sense that it can reveal certain aspects of the mind of the writer that had remained invisible. If we understand storytelling as a mechanism to acknowledge concealed feelings and emotions, we can talk of writing one’s story as a therapy, a way of healing one’s traumas (Brison, 2013). Brison also notes that these narratives serve to grow a sense of empathy with “those different from ourselves” (2013, p. 26).

Because traumatic experiences assault the language and the thoughts of the person, the only way to access and transform the affected parts of the mind is through indirect paths (Casper & Wertheimer, 2016). According to Schwab, literature is an art that allows that roundabout way to get to the trauma (2016, p. 121). It is in “No Other Tale to Tell’: Trauma and Acts of Forgetting in The Road”, in Casper and Wertheimer’s book (2016), that author Amanda Wicks illustrates how “the act of remembering and recounting structures *through* language what has occurred beyond language” (Wicks, 2016, p. 135). It is also important to keep in mind that literature and language enable the mind to go through processes that cure trauma.

However, as psychiatric epidemiologist Ilan Meyer states that “because sexual and racial minorities are regularly exposed to prejudice and stigma, they are at greater risk for mental and physical health problems, through the increase of psychological distress.” (2003) (as cited in Ghabrial, 2017, p. 43). Meyer here explains how these personal attacks form grave psychological problems in the minds of LGBTQ+ refugees. This information needs to be emphasized when working with LGBTQ+ refugees

because it is a crucial aspect that adds to the psychological weight that these persons carry, and therefore, it is also relevant when thinking about therapies and solutions.

### *3. Healing society through the stories of LGBTQ+ refugees*

The stories of LGBTQ+ refugees can help reshape the way we think as a society. Their stories speak clear and out loud about realities that some people do not want to know or hear. Therefore, it is a moral responsibility to engage with stories that challenge established truths about our world. It is relevant to quote Fobear here:

The potential efficacy of storytelling as a social justice resource informs my commitment to record LGBT refugee stories and to ensure that refugees voices and concerns are at the forefront of social change. [...] I explore how storytelling can be a powerful tool of justice for LGBT refugees that validates their truths and brings their voices to the forefront in confronting state and public violence. (Fobear, 2015, p. 104)

Fobear argues that storytelling becomes an agent for change that brings justice at a social level. It is clear that the stories about these refugees do not leave anyone unaffected. Janesick (2007) affirms too that “storytelling is an important social justice tool for marginalized communities.”

Together with these reflections about social change it is also important to make society aware of the often portrayed image of the LGBTQ+ community. As Türk confirms, there is hope to “change the way society labels and stigmatizes LGBTI people” (2012, p. 122). He remarks that we need to welcome differences and promote comprehension in order to accomplish this. In fact, he insists that the “acceptance and courage” we are aiming for are actually found in the very own LGBTQ+ stories we are talking about (2012, p. 122).

At the same time, there is a need to observe and denounce the jurisprudence that some asylum decision-makers may still favour. ICJ observes that because sexuality is not as detectable as race, nationality or religion may be, adjudicators can become fixated with looking for visible evidence that the asylum seeker is in fact LGBTQ+ (2011). There is a risk that they will “rely on their own stereotypes of how gay men or lesbian women look and act, threatening the impartiality of decisions.” (International Commission of Jurists, 2011, page 287).



Once more, the personal self-narrated real stories of LGBTQ+ refugees are a loyal way to contribute to the changing of diverse way of stereotyping and judging this group of people.

## **2. THE VOICES OF THE UNSPOKEN**

### *2.1. The stories of Adam, Alexander, Bruno, Timothy and Gabby*

After exploring how the theory of storytelling and writing can be used as a tool to help LGBTQ+ refugees heal the traumatic experiences they have undergone, this section moves into telling the real-life stories of five LGBTQ+ refugees: Adam (26), Alexander (20), Timothy (25), Bruno (21) and Gabby (28).

The following stories show the ways in which the persecution of LGBTQ+ people exists in the contemporary world. The participants expressed themselves differently and approached the exercise of telling their story in diverse ways according to their situation and personal attitude. The following is an overview of their answers that aims to bring a light to real struggles that LGBTQ+ people face nowadays as a result of political, social and cultural oppression to sexual diversity.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2.1.1. Adam's story

Adam is 26 years old and was born in Burundi. He had to escape not only because of his sexual orientation but because of the situation in his home country. In Burundi he was tortured and imprisoned for three months before he decided to escape. His father and some of his friends were killed. He had no choice. Adam's story shows the large variety of reasons why refugees escape, and it substantiates the complexity that is found in each of the cases. Apart from the violence, persecution and imprisonment that he suffered, Adam has not seen his family since they migrated to the neighbouring country, Rwanda, three years ago.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal conversations with the participants have been an important source of information apart from their questionnaires' answers, which in some cases were very brief. In the case of Bruno, all information has been taken from his use of oral storytelling and conversations with him.

#### 2.1.2. Alexander's story

Alexander is 20 years old and was born in Uganda. Like Adam, he left Uganda as a result of a political problem and because of his sexual orientation too. Consequently, he has not been able to return to his home country since 2017, when he escaped to the Arabic countries. For more than two years now, he has faced a long journey of fear, persecution and deception all by himself. No one helped him. Although the situation he is living as an asylum seeker in Greece is not the one he wished for, he is sure he cannot return to his home country.

#### 2.1.3. Bruno's story

Bruno is 21 years old and was born in Uganda. He was arrested by the police when he was at a disco with his partner in his home country. He was taken to the police station and was going to be sent to prison for seven years when he managed to escape. He hid in the woods for six hours until he was found by a friend of his partner who helped him escape to Turkey. In Turkey, the persons that had helped him enter the country asked him to pay an enormous amount of money that he did not have. He was then slaved and tortured. After three months of hard work he managed to get the money to jump on a small boat to Greece. Bruno stayed in a camp in Lesbos for eight months while he waited for the resolution of his case. At the moment, he has been given the refugee card and has a job in the city. However, it has been more than a year since he waits for his resolution to be solved and has no assurance about his future.

#### 2.1.4. Timothy's story

Timothy is 26 years old and was born in Uganda. He finds himself in Greece at the moment, where he is waiting for his asylum resolution. Little information is known about his story.

#### 2.1.5. Gabby's story

Gabby is 28 years old and was born in Uganda. She was raped when she was thirteen and forced to get married when their parents discovered she was pregnant. She was part of an abusive and violent marriage for twelve years until she was caught having a romantic relationship with a woman in secret. Gabby was then persecuted by friends

and family, including her parents. Consequently, she had to leave the country and abandon her three children in Uganda in order to save herself. She finds herself in Greece at the moment, where she works taking care of a blind elderly man while she waits for her asylum resolution. The latest information that Gabby has received is that if she cannot bring further proof about her case, she will be deported next February.

## *2.2. Connections with the theory*

In this part of the paper there is a reflection on the stories of Adam, Alexander, Bruno, Timothy and Gabby in relation to the theory that has been exposed previously. For the sake of clarity, this part follows a thematic division. Each section explores a topic related to the theory and is illustrated by the real-life experiences of the participants.

### *2.2.1. Family persecution*

As it has been seen in the first part of the paper, LGBTQ+ refugees suffer persecution from different agents. As Kintu (2017) exposes in her book about Uganda's harsh laws on homosexuals, the church can constitute an important operator of anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs and actions. A more surprising agent against people of diverse sexual orientation and identities can be the family of said persons. In Uganda, it is normally the case that LGBTQ+ women are more affected by family attacks than other members of the community.

After investigating on this issue, UNHCR affirms that "LGBTI youth and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are at particular risk of physical, psychological and sexual violence in family and community settings." (2015, p. 1). One of the participants of the research lived this on her own skin. Gabby personally confessed how she was forced to marry and was subjected to rape, violence and persecution from close members of her village and her own family. She was married to her husband for twelve years, in which she had to cope with recurrent rape, one miscarriage and physical violence.

However, her case is complicated because most of the violence she suffered was not public. The International Commission of Jurists acknowledges that it is "harder for women who experience harm in the private sphere to obtain asylum." (2011, p. 288).

Gabby's current situation confirms ICJ's affirmations about private violence in women: if she is not able to provide more evidence of the persecution that she suffered in Uganda, her case will be rejected and she will be deported.

### 2.2.2. Social marginalisation

If the case of most LGBTQ+ women is the suffering of violence in private, the case of LGBTQ+ men is, among other sorts of difficulties, social marginalisation. As Longjones and Wambere claim:

In most cases, gay men are made a mockery of and are a laughing stock each time they go to seek services. All of this is the result of ignorance, putting aside a code of conduct in favour of religious beliefs, misperceptions about sexuality, and considering anything out of the norm to be a crime. (2018, p. 500)

Because Bruno is homosexual, his social life in Uganda was affected in serious ways. This happens because homophobia and anti-LGBTQ+ thinking are strongly established in the Ugandan society (Ireland, 2013) that Bruno could not be socially accepted or live a 'normal' life back in his home country. Despite the "extreme social ostracism and official discrimination" that LGBTQ+ people have to go through, Ugandan Courts affirm that this group of people are "entitled to universal human rights guarantees" (International Commission of Jurists, 2011, p. 28). The reality in the country is certainly another. Bruno survived until he was arrested by the police and had to escape. He explained how the police practised electrocutions to people under arrest. This can also be considered a form of "institutional [...] homophobia" inside society (Ireland, 2013, p. 49).

In addition, LGBTQ+ refugees often find anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes in the countries where they seek asylum. When Gabby was asked how the other refugees treated her in the camps she said: "Yes I was different, they was treating me bad and I had to hide my status from everyone in camp" (Answer to question 11, see appendix C). This shows the rejection and violence that LGBTQ+ refugees face even in the places where they are expected to be safe. Once more, as Türk (2012) previously explained, discretion is needed in order to avoid social discrimination.

### 2.2.3. Silence

Apart from having to hide their sexual identities, most LGBTQ+ refugees do not have the chance to talk about the emotions they face. The refugees that answered the questionnaire gave negative answers when asked if they had anyone to talk about their feelings with when they escaped. Adam added to his answer: “that [not having someone to talk to] is a serious matter I am facing right now” (answer to question 6, see appendix C).

Another kind of silence is found in Timothy’s case. He was not able to answer the questionnaire. It should not be forgotten that if the traumatic experience is kept in silence for too long, it haunts the affected person (Schwab, 2016). It is in these cases that the necessity for psychological aid is most important. UNHCR also argues that LGBTQ+ refugees “can be reluctant to talk about such intimate matters, particularly where his or her sexual orientation would be the cause of shame or taboo in the country of origin. As a result, he or she may at first not feel confident to speak freely.” (UNHCR, 2008, p. 17). This reflection could also explain Timothy’s silence regarding the questionnaire.

Nevertheless, Timothy’s issue could not be resolved due to obstacles in long-distance communication and my own gap of professional psychological knowledge. Although a friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere was provided at all times when carrying out the interviews and conversations, Timothy’s incapacity to answer the questions could also be explained by the grave psychological problems that he suffers as a LGBTQ+ refugee.

### 2.2.4. Psychological health

The continuous and diverse ways in which LGBTQ+ refugees are attacked cause them heavy psychological disorders (Meyer, 2003). Although not psychologically assessed, the five participants are most likely to suffer from psychological concerns since the experiences they have lived meet Meyer’s descriptions. The psychological health of refugees is linked to the previously explored problem of silence in LGBTQ+ refugees because it contributes to their psychological trauma.

A clear illustration of this is found in Adam's story. He explicitly expressed his necessity to talk about how he feels with someone and denounced the current situation of refugee camps. His experience in Moria camp, in Lesbos, Greece, was brutal. As many journalists have already investigated, Moria camp is one of the camps that meets the worst circumstances and treatment of all. The overbooking of refugees, the constant fights, and the bad living conditions that are found worsens the psychological health of the refugees that stay there. Adam denounces how his mental health "keeps worsening", how he gets "anxiousness, stress, flashbacks..." and how one is "always trying to keep yourself safe" there (personal communication, 14 March, 2019).

In relation to question 6 of the questionnaire as to whether he had someone to talk about emotions and feelings with, Adam explicitly called for psychological aid: "No, that is a serious matter I am facing right now. After the torture and the violence I've been through i think i [*sic*] need to talk to someone and help me to improve my situation.". Then, in question 14 as whether his sense of identity had been affected, he answered: "After à [*sic*] long journey of different matters, you are affected either you like it or not". Adam's confessions about his situation and his feelings point to future necessities and solutions for him and for others that find themselves in this situation.

### *2.3. Final reflection*

After connecting the experiences of the participants to the theory that the paper explores, there is no doubt that the harsh reality that LGBTQ+ refugees encounter around the world is recurrent in our contemporary society. Their stories meet with family persecution, social marginalisation, silence and other factors which build up to serious psychological disturbance. The respondents expressed their need to find treatment for their traumatic baggage.

The process of exploring and aiming to a personal healing through storytelling has contributed to the achievement of two relevant objectives: bringing visibility and social consciousness about a minority group that is under attack, and providing a space and an atmosphere for the refugees to be listened to and to be witnessed through the telling of their stories. Laub's and Felman's theory of witnessing is relevant here.

Felman puts into words the way that storytelling helps people who have suffered trauma:

Enable them for the first time to believe that it is possible, indeed, against all odds and against their past experience, to tell the story and *be heard*, to in fact address the significance of their biography -to *address*, that is, the suffering, the truth, and the necessity of this impossible narration- to a hearing “you” and to a listening community. (Felman, 1991, p. 41)

Furthermore, a final evaluation was done with Gabby to assess how she felt along and after the process of remembering and telling her story. In emotional terms, she claimed that there was no psychological rest taken out of the exercise, however, she did feel that someone cared for her and that she could collaborate to a larger cause. Her final reflections bring a closure to the contribution that these stories can have on a personal level and on society itself.

Nevertheless, the theory that explores personal healing through storytelling has been harder to prove through the participants' stories than, for example, the persecution they suffer. Although there is a need for a solution at an emotional level in LGBTQ+ refugees, the work that has been done with the participants in this paper has not been enough to categorize it as healing.

As it has been exposed before, there are several factors that play an important role in the lives of LGBTQ+ refugees in relation to trauma that need professional help. Therefore, new ways of thinking about the psychological issues of LGBTQ+ refugees have to be explored in order to come up with contextualised and meditated solutions. This cannot be done without taking into account that LGBTQ+ refugees are a minority social group that needs individual and specialised professional treatment.

This was out of the paper's reach.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

The present paper has explored the complicated reality that people that undergo forced migration face and has recognized LGBTQ+ refugees as an attacked minority social group. There has been an emphasis on the silence that LGBTQ+ refugees undergo as one of the central struggles that they face in terms of personal issues. In many cases, even in the countries of refuge, LGBTQ+ refugees have to conceal their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and are asked to provide evidence to prove their fear of persecution. In this sense, LGBTQ+ refugees tell their story as a mere tool for their asylum case. This is why there is a need for this group of people to embrace storytelling in a different light and use it as a way to connect with their emotions, healing the traumatic experiences they have lived.

In addition, this paper has brought the idea that LGBTQ+ refugees can also heal society from prejudices, stereotypes, and insensitivity. The participants' stories bring consistence to the theory that has been exposed and serve to prove how the persecution of LGBTQ+ refugees around the world is a serious matter that needs solution. Several authors such as Janesick, Fobear and Türk have stated how visibility and consciousness are at the front of social change and how storytelling is a relevant tool to achieve societal progress.

The present dissertation has served to break with the lack of representation and silence that these persons withstand, without falling into a view that victimizes the affected persons, at the same time that it has helped to illustrate the theory and to humanize the image that is portrayed of them. The stories of the participants expose the



reality that LGBTQ+ people live nowadays and they also serve to denounce the lack of emotional work that is done when refugees seek asylum.

Authors such as Hayes, Brison and Schwab have exposed storytelling as a method for personal healing. However, this has not been obtained in the participants due to problems with communication and lack of professional knowledge.

Furthermore, there has been a critical reflection on the notions of family persecution, social marginalisation, silence and psychological health in relation to the theory and the experiences of the participants. These reflections open a debate for future solutions.

To conclude, the findings of the research emphasize the need to find a space where LGBTQ+ refugees can express their emotions, and to treat their psychological issues with specialised professional help. This is a key notion that needs to be taken into account in further research on the psychological and emotional health of LGBTQ+ refugees.

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## 5. APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Contacting and working with the refugees

Contacting the refugees that participated in the research was made possible through a peer of mine who had been working in a refugee camp in Greece. Before starting to work with them, the first thing that had to be done was to clarify the purpose of the

paper and the role the participants had in it. It was important to let them know that the exercise needed a level of personal engagement that required effort from them. For example, dealing with personal questions about their sexuality and their past. Because there was no knowledge on the psychological problems that refugees undergo neither no professional tools or methods to treat trauma, they were invited to produce any sort of written text that would connect them to the inner feelings and bring some rest to the pain.

A relevant matter that needs emphasis is the notion of communication. Communication with the participants was difficult for two reasons: long distance communication and their literacy level. Because the five participants find themselves in Greece at the moment, it was impossible to talk face to face with them. A weekly face to face meeting would have been the ideal, but because of problems with communication, the work that could be done was limited. In addition, the level of literacy that the participants have is not of high standards. The five of them are, generally, persons that have little education and struggle with English. This had a repercussion in terms of what approach and direction their writings would take.

Finally, this led to the writing of a questionnaire of seventeen short, simple questions that aimed to awake feelings that may have been buried or silenced. Although all five participants were receptive and agreed to answer the questionnaire, only three sent their written answers: Adam, Alexander and Gabby. In the case of Timothy, when asked, he expressed that “it is difficult to talk for me” (personal communication, March 20, 2019). On the other side, Bruno, who seemed to be the most excited at the beginning, in the end never answered the questions but used oral storytelling as his way of expression.

## Appendix B

### The questionnaire

1. How old are you now? Where are you from?
2. When did you have to leave your country and why?
3. Did your family know about your situation?
4. Did someone help you to escape? Were you alone?
5. Where did you go?
6. Did you have anyone to talk about your emotions and feelings with?
7. What made you keep going and not give up?
8. During your journey to Greece did someone help you, or people lied to you and asked you for money?
9. How did you get to Greece? Did you arrive on a small boat?
10. How did you feel when you arrived in Greece? Were you relieved or scared?
11. Did you feel that you were different from the other refugees in the camp? How did they treat you?
12. Was it hard to prove that you escaped your country because of your sexual orientation?
13. Do you think that if you weren't LGBT you would have an "easier" life?
14. How has the journey that you've been through affected your identity/who you are?
15. Which is the hardest moment you have lived as an LGBT refugee?
16. Do you feel safe in Greece? How do you feel now?
17. Do you have hope?

## Appendix C

### The participants' answers

Adam's answers

1. 26 years, from BURUNDI
2. I left my country in February 2016 because of political issues
3. No, my family doesn't know about me. Right now they are in neighbourhood country (RWANDA) in a camp (Mahama Camp)
4. yes my uncle helped me to escape the country by crossing the border
5. RWANDA, after to UGANDA
6. No, that is a serious matter I am facing right now. After the torture and the violence I've been through i think i need to talk to someone and help me to improve my situation
7. I've been in serious matter, my father was killed, also some of my friends killed, and me being tortured and jailed for 3months. But I keep faith that one day things will change in my country, so I don't give up
8. During my journey in Greece UNHCR welcomes me but I still have a long journey, cause a part from the safety they gave me, many things need to be done.
9. I arrived to Greece by sea on a small boat
10. It was a disappointment, life was very tough in Moria camp, fights everyday, living in bad conditions, always trying to survive
11. All i can say about this question is that the way you enter the camps is not the same when you leave there, my psychological health keeps worsening, anxiousness, stress, flashbacks, ...always trying to keep yourself safe
12. they always postpone my interview, so I have all the proofs
13. I don't know
14. After a long journey of different matters, you are affected either you like it or not
15. The settlement in Greece is still an issue
16. Safe yes, I feel like my future is uncertain

17.Hope yes,But still have a long journey in front of me

Alexander's answers

1. I'm from Uganda. I am 20 years old
2. Almost 2 years, Bcoz of political problem and of course because of my sexual orientation too
- 3.No they don't know even I don't know about them
- 4.No one, yes I was alone
- 5.Arabic Arabic countries
- 6.no
- 7.Some countries have H. R. W, than mine, and my life can change and help others  
I need change
- 8.They lied me and had bad situation during my journey, lot of money lost
- 9.with a small boat and many difficulties on our way.
- 10.\* I was happy to reach safely  
\*scared coz of the situation that I met
- 11.Yes, I tried to make myself busy all the time, like teaching others what I know after getting an occasion
- 12.yes of course
- 13.LGBT, don't get it well what is it!
- 14.Lot of things affected me coz many troubles that i passed through,
- 15.LGBT don't get it well, what does it mean??
16. Better than staying in My country.
- 17.Yes, Whenever I still alive still have hope.

Bruno's answers

A partial transcription of Bruno's oral narration of his story is provided below in order to show the emotional tone in which he expressed himself.

“There are two reasons why I left my country. First of all, I left my country because I am orphan, I don't have family, I was alone. It was very complicated

to me. They tell me I was too young, my age was too low. I don't have a space to stay. Do you understand? The second reason, on my country they don't accept for my sexuality. That is a problem, they catch you, they put you to prison sometimes, sometimes all life, sometimes 12 years. The time I decided to leave my country, one day I was out with my partner. We were out, to a disco, just to enjoy. In the bar, we were upstairs. It was just a part of the boss and the manager, we were there. But the police were coming. They arrested everyone there, they put handicap. It was really very bad. Almost three days where everyday beating, it was bad dear. I don't want to remember this." (Personal communication, 18 April, 2019)

Timothy's answers

No answers to the questionnaire.

Gabby's answers

1. I am 28 years old. I am from Uganda
2. I left my country November 2017 ,I had to leave my country because I am a lesbian. At that time I was 26 years old and I was very scared
3. Yes they know
4. Yes my girlfriend and her unko helped me to escape  
I escape from Uganda to turkey from turkey to greece
5. Turkey
6. No
7. Am mother whenever I fill like giving up I think about my children. I have 3 children, 2 boys and 1 girl, they are in Uganda now
8. Someone helped me and I paid 800 dollars
9. I came by tube boat
10. When I arrived in greece I was filling good, I was scared at the boat because I don't know how to swimm



11. Yes I was different, they was treating me bad and I had to hide my status from everyone in camp
12. Yes it's very hard them to believe and they gave me first rejection. Even the doctor who helped me in camp he have been to Uganda because of him I got all the papers I needed that time and I pray for him everyday
13. No
14. The journey of my life was very hard since I was 14 until now
15. Is the moment I use to go to hospital, if you tell them that your lesbian they don't work on you and I hard to take 60 tablet so that they can concentrate on me
16. When I left the camp to the city things was hard , but now is better, sometimes I fill uncomfortable, because if you ask same help from a man want to take advantage on you so it's not easy
17. Yes I have hope

#### Appendix D

##### Extract from Gabby's additional text and final answers<sup>6</sup>

This is my past, there is a joy and sad, I was 14 years old it was evening my dady send me at nearby soap to buy suger, on my way back the man raped me, after one month, My mother released that I was pregnant, my father and mummy decided to force me to marry the man, I was in marriage for 12 years, My husband torched me physically and emotionally , one day he beat me and I lost my pregnancy for 8 months, and that day I decided to go back to my parents but my dady take me back to my husband's house. (Personal communication, 4 April, 2019)

##### Gabby's final answers

1. How did you feel after answering the questions?

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<sup>6</sup> Gabby's original text with spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors untouched.

I don't fill good

2. Did you feel released?

No

3. Did you feel that someone cared about your story?

Yes

4. Do you think that if you tell your story you can help other people that have lived the same as you?

Yes I really want to help but I have nothing, i only a dive them and to not lose hope

5. Did it feel good to share your emotions with someone?

Yes

6. Was it easy to remember all that you have lived?

No , if I keep remember that moment I fill bad and sometimes I cry

7. How do you feel now?

Am happy that I have a job but I miss my children's so much I can't concentrate. But for living in Greece am happy