Democratic Republic of the Congo

Congolese Context
The history of the Congo is long, complicated, and bloody. The South Kivu region, home to incredible biodiversity as well as the city of Bukavu and the Maman Shujaa Center, has seen a lot of the worst. After the Rwandan genocide, Hutu refugees fled to the region, which became the center of an armed rebel insurgency. Bukavu was attacked many times during the two Congo wars between 1996 and 2003, the second of which was allegedly the deadliest war since WWII.;
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Our Experiences
Praxis facilitated a mutually beneficial relationship: volunteering for World Pulse and contributing in a small way to make these women bloggers’ words accessible to a wider audience allowed us to gain translation experience and strengthen our global involvement.

The Maman Shujaa
The Maman Shujaa (“hero women”) Center is located in Bukavu in the eastern DRC. The digital empowerment training hub, created for and by women, offers a safe space, vital digital literacy workshops, and opportunities for women to connect with one another as well as participate in community activism.

World Pulse
World Pulse is a global organization that empowers women through digital media. By creating media centers around the world, World Pulse helps people connect and share their stories with the rest of the world. Today, nearly 60,000 women and allies from more than 190 countries connect via World Pulse. Many centers are in rural and/or conflict-ridden areas. Story-sharing helps many women not only develop literacy and internet skills but also open up their communities to the wider world and forge bonds across borders.

The Process
Translation has a lot to do with ethics and authenticity. Before thinking of equivalent words, the translator must strive to fully understand the meaning of the original text — and must also accept that perfect translations don’t exist. If, after brainstorming, weekly group review, and revisions, we are still unsure, we ultimately have to use the resources we have to make a decision.

Most of the time, we translated Maman Shujaa blog posts from a generally colloquial French dialect to English. These blogs are eloquent, expressive, and brave, but the dialect — along with the cultural and experiential divide — makes it hard to know whether we are always understanding and truly representing their messages. This is particularly important here, since many blogs are sensitive in nature and require great courage to write. In April, we set out to translate an American creative writing resource into French. This course was the first time many of us translated at all, and it’s harder to translate into a language of lower comfort, so it was a challenge, but thanks to persistence and incredible faculty support, we pulled it off!

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