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Abstract

Based on multisited fieldwork in Kigali, Rwanda, Belgium, and the Netherlands following the political crisis in Burundi in 2015, we explore decisions and plans for the future among Burundians in exile. In this way, we contribute to research about future making and social reproduction in families in a transnational social field affected by crisis. Adding to the literature, we show the specific effects of crisis on transnational families' practices and aspirations, such as parental efforts to prevent traumatic world views and the constant need for families to readjust their plans to ongoing crisis dynamics. We argue that as the violence has disrupted the migrant parents' hopes for a better future for themselves, they redirect their efforts towards their children's futures. We thus argue that not only future making practices but also aspirations should be seen as social and relational, particularly in times of crisis. In particular, the Burundians living in Rwanda, Belgium and the Netherlands seek to provide their offspring with the skills to become educated, social and moral beings, even it entails sacrificing their own lives and aspirations. Moreover, adding to debates on migrants' efforts to reproduce their own cultural values and practices in host societies, we find that the Burundian parents attempt to change what they perceive as a 'culture of hatred and vengeance' with parenting practices. As such, we argue that many migrant parents explicitly pursue social transformation through their children.

Keywords: anthropology, forced migration, conflict studies, transnational families, crisis, futures, kinship, Burundi, parenting

1. Introduction

On 25 April 2015, Burundi's president declared that he would run for a third term. In response, large sections of the population took to the streets to protest his decision that they

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saw as unconstitutional. The secret police and the youth militias, loyal to the ruling party reacted with violence, and in the following weeks the political crisis escalated, leading to a mass outflow of refugees. More than 400,000 people fled the country (UNHCR 2018). Of the refugees who left the capital, Bujumbura, some went to stay with friends or relatives in neighboring Rwanda, initially with the intention of staying a few weeks until the danger would blow over. Sometimes whole families left, and other times the children were sent away in order to protect them. Over time, around 32,000 refugees settled in urban areas, mostly Kigali and Huye (UNHCR 2018). The present crisis, however, not only affects those in Burundi or those forced to flee the country in anticipation of or in response to the violence, but it also affects Burundians who fled earlier conflicts in Burundi, now living in safety in Europe. They experience, as a father of four expressed, a 'war by proxy'.[1] Especially through ties with family and friends who remained in Burundi, the crisis echoes in their day-to-day, transnational lives.

In this article, we explore how the 2015 political crisis affects Burundians in various contexts of exile, seeing these contexts as part of the same transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Based on multisited fieldwork among Burundians in exile in Rwanda, Belgium, and the Netherlands, we explore how these men and women experience that their life courses and plans are disrupted by the political unrest, and how they seek to plan for and actualize better futures. Although the violence has disrupted—and often shattered—their hopes for a better future for themselves, they use various strategies to prepare their children for a better future, in this manner transposing their hopes and plans onto the next generation. These strategies include providing their offspring with a good education, as well as life skills and emotional skills so that they might be able to deal with the trauma of the violence that they and their country are experiencing. They aim through their parenting strategies to help their children to become good, moral persons.

Our findings contribute to the insights into processes of social reproduction in a crisis-affected, transnational social field. Specifically, we draw on and contribute to debates on family migration and transnationalism (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Foner 2009; Cole and Groes 2016). Although this literature mostly investigates how divisions of labor and inequality in the era of globalization affect families, we add a specific focus on the role of crisis in shaping transnational family practices and experiences (D'Alisera 2009). We argue that future making and social reproduction in refugee and other migrant families is strongly affected by crises in the homeland. For Burundian families in Kigali, the crisis caused them to adapt to transnational caregiving practices, with parents and children often living apart. The new care arrangements created challenges for both parents and children—a finding that resonates with the literature on transnational parenting (Parrenas 2001; Schmalzbauer 2004; Dreby 2006; Akesson, Carling and Drotbohm 2012). Adding to this literature, we show the specific effects of crisis on transnational families' practices, such as parental efforts to prevent traumatic world views (Masten and Narayan 2012; Pacione, Measham and Rousseau 2013) and the constant need for families to re-adjust their plans to ongoing crisis dynamics. Meanwhile, the Burundian families in the Netherlands and Belgium have been living transnational lives for decades. Although core family members often reside together, extended family members remain in the home region. Through the familial and other transnational connections, we observed that these families in Europe also had to cope with and respond to the worsening political

circumstances in Burundi—which often affected migrants' parenting practices in the host country and required adjustments in their transnational aspirations for the future.

In brief, we explore how through their children, people in various contexts of exile reorient themselves and make decisions toward their own and shared futures, thus bringing into focus processes of social reproduction in families in a crisis-affected, transnational social field. We argue that in this context of crisis, future making through children is not only about social reproduction, but also explicitly about pursuing social transformation. In other words, they are not simply concerned with securing the future of the values and practices for their offspring in a fluctuating context (social reproduction) but also with changing present values and practices in this context (marked by repeating outbreaks of conflict in Burundi) (social transformation). Through parenting strategies aimed at giving their children practical, personal, and moral skills to overcome crisis and become better persons in the future, they are attempting to change the future of their home country. In the words of an interlocutor, living in Kigali: 'I will teach them to forgive and never think of taking someone's life, no matter who they are. That is how I think of contributing to getting our country out of its curse.' (Esther,[2] Kigali, 2016).

We structure our argument as follows. First, we discuss the literature on transnational families, relating it to anthropological debates about futures in times of crisis. We point toward the need to explore the effects of conflict on families and the potential of comparing across continents. Second, we present the fieldwork that has made up the backbone of this article. Presenting the contexts of Burundians in Rwanda, Belgium, and the Netherlands, we discuss how we got access to our respondents and what themes we discussed with them. The remaining part of the article is largely structured according to the themes and sub-themes that emerged in our fieldwork. First, we discuss how parents felt increasingly immobilized by the crisis, in both continents. We show that they experience this immobility in large part in relation to their families. Second, we show how the importance of parents attach to education for making future plans and for social reproduction in situations of crisis, often entails making large sacrifices for their individual futures. Third, we discuss how parents attempt to manage the emotional strains of their offspring, so that they will become better moral beings. In the final sections before concluding, we relate these three strategies and experiences to the idea of social transformation, arguing that parents seek not only to reproduce their values and practices through their children (social reproduction), but to also to create a better future for Burundi and society at large.

2. On Futures, Social Reproduction, and Parenting

The past decade has seen a growing body of literature, particularly in the field of anthropology, investigating futures in times of crisis and displacement (Vigh 2008; Turner 2015; Cooper and Pratten 2015; Ramsay 2017; Berckmoes 2017). Most of these studies have focused on the individual seeking a place and future in the world. Many studies on African migration—including our own previous work—have such a focus, usually with young men as the primary subjects (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Jackson 2008; Turner 2015). The perspective in this article is slightly different, because, while we explore strategies toward better futures in times of crisis, the strategies and plans we identified,

are not purely individual, but also pertain to the family and society. These findings resonate with the work of Cole and Groes (2016), who in their edited volume on affective circuits in African migration argue that migration as 'social becoming' is intrinsically part of social relationships. Becoming somebody entails living up to social obligations, and short-term, self-interested practices are acceptable only when they are subordinated to the reproduction of the broader social unit. In other words: 'Ideally, an individual's achievement of personhood and the broader social regeneration of families intertwine' (Cole and Groes 2016: 11).

In the same vein, studies in transnational migration have long argued that refugee and other migrant decisions and aspirations are often not individual but should be seen as family decisions. Particularly, the literature on transnational families—families that live some or most of the time separated from each other (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002)—have foregrounded intergenerational relations to explain migrant decisions and aspirations, arguing that 'the first generation invests in the health and education of their children in the hopes of later returns' (Levitt and Jaworski 2007). This literature often reveals negative consequences for parents, children and other members involved in these families separated by national borders (Parrenas 2001; Fog Olwig, 2002; Gardner and Grillo, 2002; Parrenas, 2005; Dreby 2006; Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012; Baldassar, 2014; Rorh 2016; McCabe et al. 2017). Some studies have also demonstrated that some families do well despite the difficulties they encounter, and have argued for more strength-based approaches to uncover processes of resilience (Haagsman and Mazzucato 2014; Mazzucato et al. 2017; Berckmoes and Mazzucato 2018). As such, many families use social media and communication in general as a means to maintain affective circuits across distances (Carling et al., 2012; Baldassar 2014). Yet, as we have earlier explored, in the context of crisis, instant connectivity can also cause considerable emotional strain (Turner and Berckmoes 2020).

Studies about family migration and transnationalism are cognizant also of the possible enduring influence of transnational ties, often across generations (Foner 2009). A growing body of work explores 'the ways migrants honor, resist, or redefine inherited notions of social obligation as they reproduce, contest, and transform their social relations and cultural norms through different kinds of exchange, and they consider the ways other actors intervene in this process' (Cole and Groes 2016: 6). Whitehouse (2009), for instance, shows that Malian migrant parents in Congo-Brazzavile try to reproduce durable transnational identities through child-rearing practices. Most studies about such parental efforts, however, highlight resulting intergenerational tensions, particularly because of differences between practices and goals in the home country and in the new environment (Wolf 1997; Foner 2009; Salami et al. 2020).

Few studies have explored how conflict and crisis in the home country may disrupt or affect such processes of social reproduction (see for an exception D'Alisera 2009). Moreover, migrant families settled in Europe or the USA and those settled in the home region are seldom explored together, thus, limiting insight into similarities and differences across migration or exile contexts or in seeing how these multiple contexts are part of the same transnational social field disrupted by conflict and crisis. In this article, we further explore how families in different locations of exile respond to crisis in the homeland in relation to future making and social reproduction. Moreover, given the crisis, the question is whether and how families emphasize efforts toward social reproduction, or rather

pursue social transformation. We argue that interrupted life plans are pursued especially for and through their children, in search of alternative, better futures for their children and for (Burundian) society.

3. Fieldwork Sites and Methodology

We conducted multisited research among Burundians in exile in Rwanda, Belgium, and the Netherlands. In Kigali, Rwanda, we[3] did fieldwork shortly after the outbreak of violence (August 2015) and again in July 2016, exploring the family strategies of displacement, unpacking the decision-making processes of migration and exploring the ways in which refugees relate to possible futures in situations of crisis. Our[4] fieldwork in Belgium and the Netherlands, in 2016 and 2017, explores how Burundian families there experience the conflict and what it means for how they relate to future making. For all people we interviewed, we found that the crisis was experienced as disruptive and required them to reorient toward possible, alternative futures for themselves, their families and society.

3.1. Kigali, Rwanda

We have no exact figures on the composition of the Burundians in Kigali, but from our fieldwork it appears that the majority have come from Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, often—but not exclusively—from what are called 'les quartiers contestataires'. These are the parts of the city where demonstrations against the president's decision to run for a third term took place and where the police, the intelligence service, and the ruling party's youth wing—the *Imbonerakure*—have been particularly fierce in their crackdowns on the population—in particular, the youth. These are also the areas of Bujumbura that historically have been 'Tutsi'[5] and lower middle class. Most of our interlocutors have at least secondary education, and they speak good French and often some English. They had lived in houses with electricity, often had owned cars, and were either self-employed or worked in government offices, for nongovernmental organizations or private companies in managerial positions. In Kigali, they had refugee papers and the right to seek employment on a par with Rwandans, although several mentioned experiencing discrimination in the labor market. The Rwandan state provides primary schooling for free, and UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) provides basic health services for children under 12 and adults over 65 years. They receive no material or housing assistance and appear to live off remittances, savings from Burundi and family members who remain in Burundi to make a living, despite the dangers.

In August 2015, we interviewed 20 refugees in Kigali, using a snowball sampling technique. In July 2016 another 27 interviews were carried out. We re-interviewed 10 refugees from the first round a year later, which allowed us to explore how the length of the ongoing crisis had affected their plans and strategies for the future. In general, Burundians in Kigali live precarious lives—not only because they have unstable income and no idea of what the future may bring, but also because they fear spies from Burundi in their midst. Therefore, they are suspicious toward enquiries being made, which also meant that many refugees were reluctant to be interviewed. Compared with 2015, this seemed to be less of a challenge in 2016, perhaps because our presence in 2015 had not caused any harm, perhaps because the situation in Burundi had somehow

'settled down'. Author 2 who carried out the interviews—either alone or with a research assistant, who is a friend of Author 1—has many years' experience with Burundi and Burundian refugees. This made it easier to know how to pose questions in a manner that were not insensitive and to 'read' the answers given. Burundians themselves are very conscious of the fact that they never say things straightforwardly and of the necessity to avoid offending others through blunt questions or answers (Russell, 2019). The aim of the research was to explore how they anticipated futures in such uncertain times, and it was the interlocutors themselves who constantly brought the question of parenting to the table.

3.2. Belgium and The Netherlands

In Belgium, the number of Burundians is estimated to be around 10,000. Postcolonial migration from Burundi to Belgium dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when many students arrived on student scholarships. Some of these students remained in Belgium when violence erupted in Burundi in 1972. Most Burundians interviewed for this study arrived in the 1990s or 2000s during the civil war. Almost all of those who had arrived in the early years of the war fled persecution because of their political work and status in Burundian society, even though several participants entered Belgium as students rather than as asylum seekers (Turner 2007). With the present political crisis in Burundi, Belgium again is host to a large part of the political opposition, which includes actors from earlier cohorts as well as new arrivals. The present economic status of Burundian refugees and other migrants in Europe varies (Fransen and Ong'ayo 2010), but most participants we met would currently qualify as middle class in terms of employment and housing. Often, however, they were of elite background (*familles aisés*) in Burundi.

In the Netherlands, there are currently 3,307 first- and second-generation Burundians registered (CBS 2018). Burundians in the Netherlands arrived primarily in the 1990s and 2000s during the civil war. During the war, the Netherlands applied a categorical protection policy for Burundians, making applications for asylum relatively straightforward. Allegedly, many of the asylum seekers in the Netherlands were young when they arrived; they were children of the elite from Bujumbura who were sent to Europe for protection and study opportunities. Some research participants came to the Netherlands to reunite with family members who had already been granted asylum, often toward the end of the civil war, or had been resettled by the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) after spending years in refugee camps in Tanzania and elsewhere. Several participants who had first lived in the Netherlands, have moved to Belgium.

In both European countries, we conducted interviews with in total 66 respondents, among whom 35 were first-generation parents (19 in Belgium and 16 in the Netherlands). Respondents were approached in a variety of ways. Some respondents were contacted through connections we had with family members we knew from Burundi or Rwanda, others through researchers who have worked with Burundians in the past, and others again through diaspora organizations. The aim of this part of the research was to explore how crisis in the home country affected Burundians in Europe and their anticipated futures. Because of the relevance of transnational family relations to the men and women interviewed in Europe (iterative analysis), the themes of family and parenting soon became a standard part of the unstructured interviews and conversations.

Among the men and women whom we interviewed in Belgium and the Netherlands, some were opponents while others where supporters of the current government in Burundi. Most have permanent residence papers or Belgian or Dutch citizenship.

4. Getting 'Stuck' in Exile

A first, common theme in our fieldwork—both in Rwanda and in Europe—was the idea that the conflict increasingly 'immobilized' the Burundians in exile. With time passing, people felt increasingly 'stuck' in exile, or for those in Europe, again stuck. In other words, while our interlocutors were largely protected from physical violence, the violence continued to put restrictions on their and their families' plans and futures.

We met Agnes in her comfortable living room in Kigali, sitting on the sofa in front of a flat-screen television. She explained how she sent her children to stay in Kigali with friends, shortly after the violence broke out in April 2015, while she and her husband stayed in Bujumbura in order not to lose their incomes:

> So, our choice was to move the children (*faire fuir nos enfants*) while we remained, believing that the situation would improve quickly. But after a while we realized that things did not happen the way we had anticipated (Agnes, Rwanda, 2016).

In February 2016, Agnes followed her children. She no longer had any work because the authorities were targeting her health clinic, and the couple believed that the children could not continue living with another family without 'motherly affection'. Her husband, an accountant with his own firm, remained in Bujumbura, providing for the family:

> My husband, he is the head of the household. We need something to live off, our children need to be able to pay school fees.[6] So, to be head of the household is to choose between life and death. He said, as long as I am still alive, I must sacrifice myself for my family (Agnes, Rwanda, 2016).

Agnes's story is typical of many Burundian refugees whom we met in Kigali. Seeking refuge in Kigali was a complex process that involved assessing the potential dangers and risks of staying put and weighing these against the loss of livelihood options and property by leaving. Often these decisions were made gradually and involved steps back and forth, as the crisis developed in unforeseen ways.

During the first fieldwork in August 2015, nothing seemed certain and there still was some hope that the conflict would come to an end soon, which meant that some refugees were contemplating returning due to the harsh living conditions and the lack of future prospects in Kigali. Most Burundians were biding their time and looking for signs of improvement or deterioration before making up their minds about whether or not to return (Turner 2020). It was also common for parents to cross the borders regularly in order to visit and provide food to their families in Kigali.

On the second visit in July 2016, however, the situation had changed. Open violence had disappeared from the streets of Bujumbura and the number of killings seemed to have fallen, yet control of movement appeared to be stricter. The result was that a large number of family fathers (and sometimes mothers) decided to give up crossing the border

and remained with their families in Kigali. Others assessed that remaining with well-paid jobs or businesses in Burundi was the best option for the family. Agnes' husband belonged to this second category, but he no longer spent his weekends in Rwanda, and when he did occasionally visit, he no longer brought goods with him. Esperance, who is not as well off as Agnes, lives in a village outside Kigali. She has rented a small place where she lives alone with her toddler. She explained that in order to make ends meet, her husband used to bring beans and rice from Burundi where the food is cheaper. Now the police and the militia accuse you of 'feeding the rebels' if they stop you, she explained. So now her husband brings cash only when he visits one weekend a month (Esperance, Rwanda, 2016).

Meanwhile, in Belgium and the Netherlands, most Burundians did not experience a direct threat to their nuclear family. Nonetheless, several participants explained how they played a key role in helping family members who remained in Burundi to secure safe ground abroad. These attempts were usually accompanied by a certain sense of guilt: 'I am in safety (*dans l'abri*) but my family is not' (Samuel, Belgium, 2016).

A poignant example was given by Alice, who, since her flight to the Netherlands in 2002, had been providing for several orphaned children from her family in Burundi, among whom was her sister. Frightened by the news about the political unrest and distraught about rumors that ethnic genocide might ensue, she urged and financially supported the children to go to Kigali for a 'holiday' in the summer of 2015. When the unrest did not appear to pass, the children decided to return to Bujumbura, despite the risks they might face in Burundi. Alice had to accept their decision; she was not able to cover their costly living expenses in Kigali, yet she remained in constant fear for the children's well-being.

Although in this case boys and girls of all ages were 'sent' to Kigali to keep them safe, most often the family members who were being helped to flee were adolescent boys. They could be approached for recruitment, by both sides, and the police might interrogate, imprison, or torture them. An example of this was provided by Françoise:

> A week ago, for example, a nephew of mine was arrested, and is still in prison . . . you are just being arrested because you participated in. . ., they think you participated in the demonstrations or whatever, and you'll be killed. It is just the reality (Netherlands, 2016).

By searching the phone numbers of people in higher positions, followed by paying bribes to police officers in charge, she was able to help her nephew escape from prison. When we spoke to her a few weeks later, the boy was still in hiding though, contemplating how to cross the border unseen.

Although these parents themselves have lived in a safe country for a long time, they were nonetheless drawn into decisions about flight and stay. They also experienced a feeling of getting stuck themselves, again. Several participants in Belgium and the Netherlands explained that they had to cancel their plans for travel and stay in Burundi. Some parents lamented that this meant that they would miss out on important rituals such as burials of loved ones. Other parents put their investments in houses and development projects on hold, and postponed or annulled their plans to permanently return to their home country:

> In fact, lately everything changed! Before, with [the boy's father, of African but not Burundian descent], we said to each other, early or late we would like to, well buy us a house. He had liked Burundi a lot. . . . But now as we have seen what

> happened [i.e. referring to crisis in Burundi] we said 'Ahh, there is no stability! In Africa it always continues. Today all is good, you go invest all your savings, after you come back home, *bang* there is nothing!' ... So, we decided, the first house we will buy, we will buy here (Alida, Belgium, 2016).

Alida's example is illustrative of the importance of transnational ties and aspirations for many Burundians in Belgium and the Netherlands. Although living in Europe, they were planning for a possible future in Burundi for a variety of reasons, such as the cost of living or avoiding retirement homes. However, the crisis blocked their transnational flows and aspirations, effectively immobilizing Alida and her husband in Belgium and forcing them to invest in a future there.

In brief, the crisis obstructs future planning and social reproduction with Burundi as a space of interest. It forces people to reorient and redirect their future-making strategies to the context of exile. For Burundian refugees in Kigali, the physical security of the nuclear family, and in particular the children, were central to their choices and plans about migration and mobility. The difficult, ongoing and adaptive decisions about whether to stay or go, and who should stay or go, were based on predicting immediate and long-term futures not only of the involved individual but in particular of his or her children. Moreover, remaining in Rwanda entailed that mobility became increasingly more limited, with exile slowly becoming a more 'permanent' condition. This experience of increasingly getting 'stuck' was also described by Burundian parents in Belgium and the Netherlands, most of whom had been there for years, even decades. Struggling with how to be of help to children of the family left behind, and with how to reshape their own bond with their home country, aspirations for visiting or building a life for themselves and their children in Burundi had to be postponed or annulled altogether.

5. When Education is the Future

In general, the parents we spoke to see education as the means to be able to foresee a long-term future and hence 'be someone'—as the means of social reproduction. However, they also believe that education may also prove to be transformative, as it may prepare their children to help their country out of the repeating deadlock of ethnic hatred, which is often perceived to be the result of ignorance. Therefore, they put immense effort into securing their children's education, in Burundi, Rwanda, and Europe, even though it sometimes means they have to sacrifice their own individual, possible futures.

In Rwanda, parents expressed that one of the most tangible ways in which displacement affects life plans is when education is disrupted, and families with children had to revise the plans that they had made for their children's education.

Clement lived in Huye, near the border with Burundi, because rent and the cost of living were lower than in Kigali. In order not to lose her job, his wife had returned to Burundi. Three of his children stayed in Huye with him, while one was with friends in Kigali. Clement said that he had recently been back to Burundi with his children so that they could sit for the national exams in their home country. Why run such a risk, we asked. 'If I don't, they will miss out on a whole school year' (Clement, Rwanda, 2015). At this point in time—almost four months after he had originally left Burundi—he was expecting that the situation could calm down any time soon, and the family could return

home, and he did not want to lose a whole year's school fees. In this manner, he was able to postpone the choice of permanent flight or return, keeping the children safe in Rwanda while letting them keep up with the Burundian education system.

As weeks turned into months, however, Clement and other parents had to revisit their strategies for education and enrolled their children in Rwandan schools. Often, they would enrol them in private schools in order to ensure the quality. For our respondents, the heavy investment in their children's education was often expressed in terms of self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice found its expression in two ways. First, the person who has to stay in Burundi in order to provide for the family is sacrificing their own comfort and putting their lives at risk for the family. As Agnes paraphrased her husband in an earlier quote, 'As long as I am still alive, I have to sacrifice myself for my family' (Rwanda, 2016). Claudette put it more dramatically when she claimed that her husband was 'giving his blood for the family' (Rwanda, 2016). Second, those who follow the children into safety in Kigali miss their jobs and their social relations. Esperance talked of immense boredom, living on her own with a young child, and neighbors whom she does not trust, while Agnes claimed that she misses her professional life as a nurse in charge of a clinic.

In Belgium and the Netherlands, education was also central in parental narratives about their migration experience. Parents saw their children's education as one of the main positive aspects of their move to Europe. Elvis, who arrived in Europe during the recent outbreak of political unrest in Burundi, saw the opportunities for his children in terms of education as a rare source of light in an otherwise bleak situation. Asked about how he would describe his role as a father in exile, he answered,

> We wish [the children] a good future. In any case, it is at least that which I have gained. Because I told myself, at least here, she will follow a good education that is not discriminatory! (Elvis, Belgium, 2016)

Contemplating how he would secure this 'gain' for his children in the future, given his own hope and wish to return to Burundi as soon as possible, he continued,

> I think I will leave my family [here], uh, so my fam... Well either everything goes well and we will go back together, or I will ... I will travel back and fo... I have always followed politics and I really have a role [i.e. am able to make a difference], I do not know if tomorrow I will abandon that! But still, for the children I wish them a good future, I believe [their future] will be okay because they go to school, they are being guided, they are comfortable here. Here at least people have great respect for children! Children really ... a child is a king here! (Elvis, Belgium, 2016)

The quote above shows that Elvis is torn between his ambitions of making a future for himself through making a difference in Burundi and his ambitions on behalf of his children's futures. In the quote he cannot finish his sentences, as he tries in words to reconcile these two opposing futures.

Several parents who had fled crises in Burundi in previous decades recounted similar experiences as those of Elvis. Sarah and her husband Patrick, for instance, explained that they tried to keep their heads low during their asylum-seeking procedure because they cherished their children's education and did not want to jeopardize it. Patrick explained

how they endured being given a temporary visa in Belgium, to not endanger their children's education:

> we made little noise, we would not argue and demand answers. We told ourselves as long as the children are at school, we will let bureaucracy do its work (Patrick, Belgium, 2016).

They also decided to stay rather than return to Burundi after the end of the civil war, despite the sacrifice it meant for their own career possibilities: 'So after, we stayed without papers, yes. We stayed here without papers for all that time, but as the children went to school, we told ourselves to calm down. . .' (Patrick, Belgium, 2016). Letting go of their own active role in shaping a future society in Burundi, or Belgium for that matter, and experiencing discrimination and a sense of failure, they redirected their aspirations toward their children.

As mentioned earlier, some Burundian parents in the Netherlands had moved to Belgium after securing their papers, often because they had heard that education in Belgium was better. Douce, for instance, explained that she and her husband felt moving was a sacrifice that they had to make for the sake of their children.

> I told myself, 'Hey! Okay I am older than my children. In the future if they need a diploma, it has to be of high level.' . . . So, with my husband we talked and we said, okay we have to go where . . . how do you say, 'education is better than everything else' (Douce, Belgium, 2016).

When Douce says, 'I am older than my children', she is implying that her time has passed; that she has fewer options and rights to change her life for the better. Her strategy is to sacrifice in the present so that in the future her children will have the option to take a diploma 'of high level'.

In brief, for our respondents, in decisions regarding cross-border mobility or remaining in the country of exile, the best possible education to build better futures weighs heavily. Parents' own aspirations have to make place for their children, as parents feel the children will have a better chance or more right to pursue thriving futures. In the process, many feel they have to sacrifice their individual futures, given the negative consequences of remaining in exile on their social and professional lives, as well as the emotional and financial costs of enduring the bureaucracy, discrimination and temporary visas in the country of exile.

6. Emotions, Memories, and Imaginations

Apart from providing education, parents did their best to prepare their children for a better future by protecting them from trauma and by sharing stories and moulding their children's memories and imaginations of Burundi.

In Kigali, of great concern to the parents was the fact that their children had witnessed violence. Agnes explained that she had to protect her children and seek refuge not so much because her children could be attacked directly but because witnessing the conflict—'hearing the explosions of bombs and grenades'—might result in their developing a

'heart of stone' (*un cœur dur*) (Agnes, Rwanda, 2016). Esther shared similar concerns. She explained how they left Bujumbura very early in the crisis because they lived in an area where they had witnessed a violent arrest of a known opposition member and where grenades had been thrown very close to their house.

Although Esther and her family left before the violence became widespread, her children had seen a woman who was hit by a grenade in their street. Even after arriving in Kigali, her second child would not let Esther out of sight—even when attending class. For a long time, her children felt uncomfortable with the sight of men in uniform. Esther recounted how a traffic officer in Kigali had stopped her and asked to see her driving license and the vehicle's documents. Her child in the back seat had pointed his toy gun at the officer, who fortunately had understood the situation and told the child not to fear. Upon reprimanding the child, he had answered 'but that's what one does in Burundi' (Esther, Rwanda, 2016). Similarly, when Antoine arrived in Rwanda with his three children, his 3-year-old had said, 'Watch out Daddy! The police want to kill you' (Antoine, Rwanda, 2015).

Besides fearing that witnessing the violence might have traumatized her children, Esther—like many others we talked to—was also concerned because the children no longer had fond memories of Burundi. In order to maintain some kind of minimal hope for a future in Burundi, however bleak the options for return seemed, she needed to keep the fond memories of Burundi alive in her children.

> My children say, 'Maman, do you remember that?' and I answer, 'Yes, but you must not keep that in your heads. It's evil'. We try to talk about the good things in Burundi: the lake, the beach (Esther, Rwanda, 2016).

In Belgium and the Netherlands, parents also mentioned the need to protect their children against the emotional and psychological effects of witnessing violence. This concern was mostly related to indirect witnessing, or what in the literature is known as 'secondary' or 'vicarious traumatization' (Weingarten 2004). News about violence in Burundi reached the parents and children primarily through social networks and communication technology such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and online news fora (Turner and Berckmoes 2020). Nella explained that her 7-year-old son was really keen on following the news with his parents, although he did not really understand it:

> [My son] is following closely … since it started, my son said, 'Mommy, why do the police kill people?' Oh my God! What am I going to answer? (Belgium, 2016)

Some parents, such as Eloi, advised the children not to follow the news: '[I tell them] just be realistic and not follow any rubbish speeches' (Netherlands, 2016). Other parents would be more careful about when and where they listened to news about Burundi, or no longer shared news they received from Burundi with their children. For instance, Françoise, whose nephew was in trouble, decided to keep this fact to herself, in order not to trouble her husband (Dutch origin) and children.

> I really keep thinking 'OK, focus you are here, you are here, you have to be here, for your family'. But it stays in the back of your mind (Netherlands, 2016).

In this case, Françoise's strategy was to keep the two spheres of her life—the suffering of her kin in Burundi and her family in the Netherlands—separate in order to spare the latter. Similarly, Alida explained that her son 'does not even know! . . . This is not the moment. He should stay with the image that Burundi is nice, beautiful, so that even if we return he has that image' (Belgium, 2016).

To sum up, parents in Belgium and the Netherlands were eager to both protect their children from images that might be potentially traumatizing and to cultivate a more positive image of Burundi. This was a challenge, however, as violence in the home country seemed to follow the families in exile through memories or through news reporting and social media communication. For the refugees in Rwanda and in Europe, then, despite having secured safe ground, violence was entering their everyday and intimate lives. By influencing the images and recollections of Burundi, parents hoped that they could increase the possibilities for their desired futures, marked by return or transnational life.

7. From Social Reproduction to Social Transformation

In a crisis-affected transnational social field, we found that future making through children, which is often studied in the context of social reproduction, is also explicitly geared toward social transformation. Particularly for Burundians, confronted with yet another cycle of conflict in their home country, the pursuit of change through their children is a substantive motivation in their future-making strategies.

In Kigali, when asked what she could do to change her future, or at least to affect her hopes, Esther answered that she was not able to do anything except teach her children to be better human beings.

> I don't see what I can do. If everyone is crying and nothing happens, I don't see any option. Only the education of my children: I teach them to do good and forget evil, teach them to forgive those who have harmed others—but also to keep praying because God teaches us to forgive and to love. To no longer hold a grudge, never think of revenge, because I believe that all that is caused by people who have held a grudge. Therefore, I will teach them to forgive and never think of taking someone's life, no matter who they are. That is how I think of contributing to getting our country out of its curse and how the children will know how to go about it, once they return to our country (Kigali, 2016).

For Esther, children are the link to a better future. She believes that her contribution to removing the 'curse' of her country and creating a place where people can live together without rancor is through bringing up her children the right way. The first step toward this is to avoid that the children would grow up with what Agnes calls a 'coeur dur', a heart of stone, due to their traumatic experiences. People like Esther and Agnes believe that if the children are protected from traumatic experiences and reminded of the beach and the lake, and are brought up as faithful Christians, the next generation will have the potential to create social transformation and peace.

In Belgium, many Burundian parents held similar aspirations for societal change. Their concerns were especially related to their children's understanding of Burundian history in

general and ethnicity more specifically. Some parents preferred not to talk about ethnicity and violence, also as a way to foster a more peaceful society:

> [Knowledge about crises is] what is ruining Burundi now . . . if they had not . . . if what happened in the past, if they had not informed us or informed the people in power, but let them live like [I let] my child, well there would not have been rancour. The more information, the more false information . . . the more siding with one side or the other . . . it always creates rancour, and that is not necessary if you are here and look at the future. (Douce, Belgium, 2016)

Parents' efforts to foster a better society also translated into activities aimed at instilling a certain engagement with the economic development of their home country.[7] Some parents would subtly remind their children of their legacy and family ties in Burundi, for instance by passing their children the phone when they spoke to family members back home. Others more actively involved their children in volunteer activities geared at charities for Burundi. Micka and Louise (in their early 20s), for instance, were asked by their mother to organize charity events to collect donations for development projects. Another mother explained such efforts in her own family as follows:

> I hope [the children] will study well (*fassent de bonnes études*) and that if possible, they will go back to the country to develop the country as well, if possible. That I would like very much, otherwise, because if everybody quits the country . . . uh, it is still necessary that we develop our country as well, before everything else (Asta, Belgium, 2016).

Notably, not all parents in Europe felt that they should or could pass their own ambitions on to their children. Two fathers we spoke to in Belgium felt that they had to try and integrate their family as much as possible in their host country's society in order to stimulate their children's individual development instead. They thus adapted their own lifestyle to that of Belgian families, mimicking for example 'holidays like European families'. Other parents believed that although they would like to transmit their own commitment to Burundi to their children, they had little say on it. One father felt incapacitated because he had not been successful in his own life:

> We are a sacrificed generation, and they are a generation that is climbing a bit, we let them . . . because us, how can they identify with us, seeing that we haven't even found jobs? No, they have to look elsewhere . . . voilà (Patrick, Belgium, 2016).

Another father explained: 'The school was stronger than me. The school . . ., with three children, it was stronger than me. So, I was obliged to let it go' (Tharcisse, Netherlands, 2016).

The sacrifices that these parents have made in light of crisis and exile provoke them to extend their future ambitions well beyond Burundian society:

> I hope therefore that they will study at the university and then that they have a good education and keep their eyes open. Not focus on Belgium and the Netherlands only, be open internationally: you find a job in London, you go to London; in Australia, you go to Australia; you find in Thailand, you go to Thailand. You do your job, start a family, you will not focus on marrying the

> person who is of this or that origin necessarily, no. You find a Dutch you like, a Thai you love a lot, you marry her, and you start your family, *you start your society* and you . . . voila, it is okay. So, being open! (Patrick, Belgium, 2016, emphasis ours).

In sum, for many exiled parents, children represent the only hope for a changed and better, future society. By telling children how to behave toward others, sharing information about the past in specific ways, or by stimulating an open world view, parents attempt to reproduce their own ideals about a better world. At the same time, possibilities to excel in such parental pursuits are continuously challenged by the difficulties posed by conflict and exile.

8. Conclusion: Pursuing Futures and Social Transformation Through Parenting

With this article, we contribute to research about future making and social reproduction in families in a transnational social field affected by crisis. By exploring the decisions and plans of Burundians in exile in relation to their children, we show how for many, parenting has become a means to access and a site to influence the future (Smith 2013; Huijsmans 2016).

Parents who recently fled the conflict were increasingly experiencing limitations on their mobility and had to continuously readjust their transnational family caregiving arrangements accordingly (Berckmoes and Mazzucato 2018). For those who left Burundi a long time ago, the present crisis confirmed and reinforced their experience of being stuck. The crisis forced the parents to reorient toward the country of exile as a space of interest for future making. Some studies in the literature have found that such instability in settlement may exaggerate refugee children's vulnerability to psychosocial problems (Fazel et al. 2012).

Although for our respondents, similar conclusions would be too early to draw, parents were conscious of the need to address the emotional well-being of the children. In Kigali, parents were especially concerned about protecting their children from developing a 'heart of stone'. In Europe, parents had to consider how to protect their children from vicarious traumatization (Weingarten 2004). For both groups, being in or having fled to a space of relative safety did not automatically entail avoiding the emotional costs of violence in their intimate lives. In response, parents in Kigali and Europe were trying to foster their children's positive memories of Burundi. Such positive memories were also seen as necessary to maintain any hope for a possible future in Burundi. Efforts to actively promote transnational identities among offspring is regularly noted in the family migration literature (D'Alisera 2009; Whitehouse 2009). Yet as D'Alisera (2009) warns, while parents may seek to instill a sense of pride and link to their homelands, negative images that circulate in the host country may be difficult to overcome and can lead to intergenerational conflict and alienation.

In addition, from our conversations, the children's education was a strong and palpable means through which Burundian parents in exile sought to actualize aspirations for the future. Both formal education and informal education in the family environment were believed to strengthen their children's individual life chances as well as promote a better

Burundian or global society. In particular, parents hoped to influence the next generation's world view as one of openness and without (ethnic) hatred.

Notably, parents feel that their various acts of parenting and pursuing better futures require a sacrifice from them. In Rwanda, one parent is 'giving his blood' by remaining in Burundi, whereas the other sacrifices her social and professional being. In Belgium and the Netherlands, sacrifice often started with their initial flight. With the new outburst of violence, hopes for improvement are, again, being transposed to the next generation. These findings resonate with findings about negative consequences of transnational family life for parents, children, and other caregivers involved (Parrenas 2001; Schmalzbauer 2004; Dreby 2006; Akesson, Carling and Drotbohm 2012). We found, however, that even when core family members reside together, crisis in the home country can create a sense of loss and sacrifice amongst migrant parents.

In brief, we argue, first, that future making should not be seen as individual but as relational and social, particularly in times of crisis. Although much migration literature acknowledges that migrant decisions and aspirations are not individual and should be seen as family decisions, we claim that, in addition, the aspirations themselves are relational and social. In other words, we shift our focus from the sociological fact that individual practices are the result of social pressures—such as argued by Cole and Groes (2016) when they state that becoming somebody entails living up to social obligations—to a more existential argument. Becoming someone is not just about 'being' but also 'being with' and 'being part of' family and kin, and in that context, making meaningful futures for the family and society at large.

Second, we have argued that hope and future making can be intergenerational and that 'becoming' thus can be transposed onto the next generation. Through parental strategies, the Burundians living in Rwanda, Belgium, and the Netherlands try to create better futures by providing their offspring with the skills to become educated, social, and moral beings in the future.

This relates to our third conclusion, where we have observed that parents attempt to change what they perceive as a 'culture of hatred and vengeance' through their children. In contrast to some literature on transnational families (Whitehouse 2009), we find that in times of crisis, future making through children is not simply about pursuing social reproduction. Although Vertovec (2006) already showed that migrants' transnational practices lead to deep-seated social transformation, we add that these are not simply unintended consequences, but that in times of crisis, many migrant parents explicitly pursue social transformation—peaceful societies—through their children.

Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

Endnotes

1. Translated from French; the authors translated all quotes to English for the interviews originally conducted in French or Dutch.
2. Names mentioned in this paper are all pseudonyms, intended to provide anonymity to our participants.
3. Author 2.

4. Author 1.
5. Although reference to ethnic identity in Rwanda is taboo, this is not the case in Burundi. Admittedly, some Burundians are not comfortable telling about their ethnicity, but many have no problem with it. Likewise, it is common to see reference to ethnic labels in public discourse. We have therefore chosen to use the terms Hutu and Tutsi where we find it relevant.
6. She had chosen to send her youngest children to a private school, while the oldest were attending college.
7. We found this particularly in Belgium.

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