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Traces

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TRACES

Lidewyde Berckmoes & Marieke Maagdenberg

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Diary

I am sitting on the veranda, freshly painted red nails. The cat is blissfully sleeping on my lap, grateful for the early morning attention in the middle of the working week. Birds jump casually from bush to bush in the serene, lush garden. This time of year, everything is blossoming. Even the tulips from the Netherlands are starting to grow.

This peaceful image is forcefully interspersed by sound. Voices in Kirundi, French and English shout through the radios of the guards and me, competing for attention to their messages about violent protest in the city. Dull, loud blasts of grenades and gunshots intersect. They echo on the hills around us, making it impossible to identify their exact location. Too close, in any case.

For about two weeks I am confined to the triangle between my temporary home, UNICEF's office compound, and the house of an Italian colleague two streets up the hill in Bujumbura. A few times, I grant myself the luxury of getting a cappuccino in a French café downtown, located in the middle of the triangle ... despite hesistance after the news that someone had thrown a grenade at the bus stop just outside the café.

One day in the café, I meet up with my research assistant. She is downtown to try and secure documents for her and her younger brother to leave the country. Our conversation is emotional, although neither of us say much. Then I receive a phone call from an unknown number.

"This is..."

What follows is mumbling and a breaking voice. Another voice takes over, clear and factual: "Armand is dead... Armand is dead, the funeral is tomorrow."

It takes long seconds before I realise that I am talking to Armand's mother and, after, his older sister. My friend is dead. Many questions rage through my mind. The next day I try to break out of my confined triangle to reach the morgue of Kamenge's hospital: across the bridge and close to the protest's heart. Yet no taximan or friend dares to pass the roadblocks to take me there. In all honesty, I am unsure myself whether I dare to take the risk. In defeat, I leave Burundi on 11 May 2015. Sadness and guilt follow me home to Amsterdam. It is the beginning of a new project: TRACES, to understand the afterlives of war in exile.









TRACES

We experience life with all our senses. But when we research and document life, we are often forced to choose: Do we privilege sight or sound, image or word? In academia, we tend to privilege the written word. In art, the image thrives. Yet are resulting partial portraits of life and living not misleading, even alienating?

My witness experiences of the outbreak of a new political crisis in Burundi confronted me with the limits to understanding that are inherent to partiality. The view from the confines of our garden suggested a vastly different picture than the loud sounds of violence and protests that echoed in the city and resonated in the garden. I could talk with friends who lived in the *quartiers contestataires* (protesting neighbourhoods), but once we met downtown, fears and unknowns meant that our conversations were marked by silence. I could read news about

what was going on, but the veracity of their content was difficult to gauge. After I left Burundi, with less sensorial experiences at disposal, I started to feel even more uncertain about what reality was unfolding. More than impairing uncertainty, the '2015 crisis,' as the protests and governmental crackdown would come to be known, left me with a sense of sadness I struggled to understand. The future I had dreamed for my second home and my own efforts to contribute, seemed shattered. For a long time, it remained unsafe to return to broken Burundi, and so I wanted to learn from other people who live with its traces. I asked artist Marieke Maagdenberg to join me in this project. I hoped she could help narrate the stories to be shared. I knew her work as beautiful but raw at the same time. Her art are not projects of beautification and I needed to try understand life and loss in full complexity.

Yet paradoxically, on our journey to undo partiality and create fuller stories, we stumbled upon the protective merits of partial portraits. Young people wanted to participate, but often not fully. Were these TRACES of war?

Photo-ethnography

Marieke and I are not the first to embark on a photo-ethnographic journey. In the field of visual anthropology, ethnography and photography have long been entangled. At first photography was mostly used in the research process, for instance in exchange for food and information, but it seldomly appeared in the representations of findings. In the 1960s, increasing popularity of documentary photography and photobooks in journalistic and artistic circles gave new impetus to the use of photography in ethnography. Images increasingly found their ways into publications too. (Wright, 2018)

Of this time, one of the best recognized photo-ethnographies is Robert Gardner and Karl Heider's 'Gardens of War' (1968). It depicts a people in Papua New Guinea just before forced 'pacification' disrupted their ritual ways of warfare. The pictures in the book allow the narrative a force of life impossible to convey with words alone (Mead, in Gardner and Heider,

1968, p. VIII). 'Gardens of War' is also praised for how it combines text and images. Some images serve as illustrations and other times they present a narrative on their own. More recent examples also combine text and image in such evocative ways (see for instance, Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009).

In TRACES, we hope words and images reinforce each other *and* present a narrative on their own too. Together they may convey a multi-layered story, closer to lived experience (Pink, 2003; Wright, 2018). Lived experience does not simply mean more complete or hailing multiple senses (Pink, 2003; Howes, 2003). It means leaving space for multiple interpretations and doubts, in recognition of the 'messiness' of everyday life (Ingold, 2018). Some people have described this characteristic of images as a weakness. Photo-ethnography, they conclude, "is a form that is open to too much interpretation. (Wright, 2018) In some ways, this points to a paradox, as images also suggest an at-face-value, which is absent for texts. There, the role of authors is easier to recognize.

In this project, the portraits and other images have been co-created and contain multiple

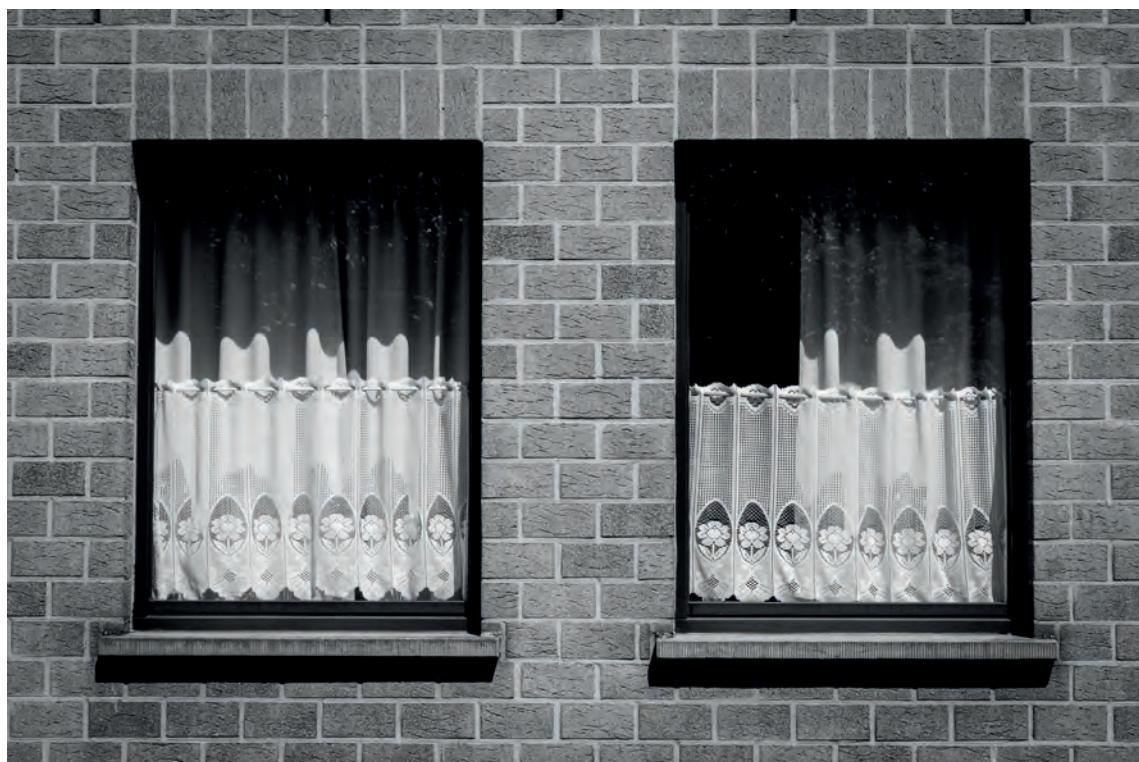
meanings. In the photo-ethnographic process, participants reflected on how they wanted to present themselves in response to, but also beyond the suggestions of the photographer or the questions and probes of the ethnographer. Marieke and the young people converged on how and where portraits were to be taken, informed by the conversations and interview with Lidewyde which preceded most photographs. The selection of photographs was done later by Marieke and Lidewyde, shaped by the ethnographic analysis of the findings, which in turn, was informed partly by Lidewyde's earlier experiences in Burundi.

To convey these multiple layers, 'War Sand' by documentary photographer Donald Weber (2018) was an important source of inspiration. In the photobook, Weber artistically explores the "physical remembrances" of war on Normandy's shores. With images, scientific and fictitious verbal narratives, and with comics, he presents a multi-layered story about the war's physical remnants in Normandy. It leads to a book that holds some place between documentary, dream and science. In TRACES, we share diary excerpts from research in Burundi and in Europe, quotes from recorded interviews and mobile phone text

messages, and photographs taken in the Netherlands, Belgium, Burundi and Rwanda. The time span between the first and last image is more than ten years - an appeal to the continuities across time and space. Together, we hope these multiple sources enable multiple perspectives and an open-ended ethnographic understanding. We believe this is fitting especially in this particular context, as the afterlives of war are also ongoing and undetermined.

Finally, like other photo-ethnographers, we hope to reach audiences beyond academia and art. Images may be more appealing especially in this era of multi-media productions. But perhaps more importantly, the aesthetics of art photography, we hope, can compel people to look and listen to stories that otherwise remain unknown. Here, we learned from the photobook *S.A.P.E* by Héctor Mediavilla (2013). The book's beautiful layout and images provoke a desire to watch, listen, and perhaps even 'own' the Sape lifestyles represented in the book. In *TRACES*, we similarly try to tempt people through beauty: to see and listen to people and stories too often ignored.





Of Burundian heritage

Burundi, in the African Great Lakes region, is famed for the 1000 rolling hills and bountiful Tanganyika lakeshores. The altitude and sun make for a perfect temperature, enabling the production of many varieties of fruits and vegetables. The coffee beans are world class and the people are welcoming especially to visitors. But this country 'of milk and honey' is also notorious for repeated outbursts of ethnic and political violence: 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988, 1991, 1993-2005 and, most recently, 2015.

Our photo-ethnographic journey took place in 2016 and 2017 in the Netherlands and Belgium, one year after Burundi became enmeshed in a new political crisis. In the project, we sought to understand how war reverberates beyond the actual time and place of war. What traces does war leave in the lives of young people of Burundian heritage in Europe?

Over the course of two years, we met many young people of Burundian heritage. They are usually described as 'second generation' refugees and other migrants. Yet we soon saw that

differentiating 'first' from 'second' generation in the Burundian migrant context is of limited use at least to understand their lifeworlds. Many young people we met, were indeed born in the Netherlands or Belgium as children of refugees fleeing the civil war of 1993-2005. But many of their siblings and peers had arrived as toddlers and children. Some came more recently as teenagers or university students, while others identified as 'third generation' – having a grandparent of Burundian origin. We also met young people whose family histories are rooted in both Burundi and Europe, with travels back and forth when security allowed. And they all share daily experiences with newly arriving peers of Burundian origin – some, but not all, seeking asylum following the 2015 crisis.

In total, we conducted 66 interviews with parents and young people in the Netherlands and Belgium, though most of them in Belgium where a more sizable Burundian community resides. Formal interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in the language in which the interview took place, usually Dutch or French. The quotes presented in this publication have been translated by us into English. Most young people we met twice or more often, and with several of them, we have kept in touch through various social media.





"In Europe there are these struggles that awaken you and that make you want to know '*chez soi*', all the way to your ancestors, how they did it. Here I do not speak of the, the, the wise people, but of our God, before colonization, how was it then? In fact, it sends you back to your roots especially."

Young woman, 29 years
Belgium 2017



"I was 11 years old ... And so, me, little African, I came from Africa, alone in the class. There was another African but he was born here so, nothing to do [with me]. I was completely lost. And so, the thing that they tell you to integrate, you really have to integrate ... honestly, I think I did everything to integrate but it was difficult. The others did not want to integrate me, and at that moment I started to say 'no, Europe it is complicated, it is difficult ..."

Young woman, 28 years
Belgium 2017



"[Maybe I prefer Belgium, but] we are nevertheless very attached to Burundi because our father made us attach to it, to the country, since we were small."

Young woman, 23 years
Belgium 2017









"I am 23 years old, I am Burundian of course...I lived really, euh, I did not travel a lot in the rest of the world but I lived really between Burundi and Belgium. I went a lot of back and forth, euh because of the ... I don't know ... my, my life; things that happened."

Young woman, 23 years,
Belgium 2017



"We were supposed to return after [my father finished] the thesis, but in the end because of the troubles etcetera ... we euh ... we slowly settled in Belgium and, and, *voilà* ... In the end, we stayed."

Young man, 28 years
Belgium 2017











In the garden we see '*lenga-lenga*,' a nutritious green crop that grows in Burundi and surrounding countries. She tells us that their mother brought the seeds back from a visit to her lost Burundi.

Field notes
Belgium 2017



"Oh [my Burundian heritage] plays a role ... I have my little flag at my home, I have friends, I have regular contacts with my friends from Burundi, my family from Burundi, I have my uncle who is at my place now! So euh, it is 'everyday.'"

Young man, 28 years
Belgium 2017





In/visibility

Many of the young people we approach, seem enthusiastic about the photo-ethnography project. Upon our introduction of the project, one of the young women of Burundian heritage exclaims “finally, we exist!” (Belgium, 2016). Her enthusiasm is telling for her urge to share her story as a daughter of Burundian parents, born and raised in Belgium. Her interest in recognition also reflects the relative invisibility of Burundians in the Belgian public and mediascape, especially compared to the more numerous Congolese and Rwandan migrants and their descendants. The combination with photography appears to make participation in our research especially attractive. Photo-ethnography is fitting with the interest of the young, ‘visual’ generation, and is attractive in light of photography’s promise to reach audiences beyond the scholarly ones. It also has the potential to (re)present “memories, traumas, wounds, and imaginaries in particular ways, which might just serve to create, incite, entice, and coalesce collectives of their choosing” (Moyer and Nguyen, 2015, ii). At a time of youth when questions about identity and belonging prevail, photo-ethnography may thus have extra appeal.

Yet throughout our research, time and again, we also observe that the young participants seem fearful of the visibility implied by photography. More than once, young people who initially agree to participate, cancel their appointments or simply do not show up. In my previous ethnographic research projects, I regularly encountered people changing their mind about participation. Yet, the frequency with which it happens in this project is remarkable. Once, we travel from Amsterdam to Louvain-la-Neuve for an interview appointment – a seven-hour

return trip. Yet, again, we find no-one at the meeting point. After several unanswered calls, we take pictures of running geese instead. We struggle: Are these running geese trying to tell us something? Is it ethical to try and reach people who are fleeing us? Following standard ethical protocols, prior to the interviews and photographs, we describe the purpose of the project and ask for consent, explaining the possibility to leave questions unanswered and withdraw from the project. Yet, notwithstanding formal approval and procedures, the hesitance expressed by many of the young people during the research makes us wonder when 'informed consent' is actually reached. How should we deal with the almost palpable doubts and fears we encounter? These fears may well be grounded. We know from research in conflict-affected contexts that there is crushing uncertainty and terror, and that it is not always possible to predict the way danger wanders (Taussig, 2009; Berckmoes, 2014). Finding middle ground, on multiple occasions the young people we meet are willing to share their stories, but ask to remain unrecognizable in the photographs. Others share photographs of their homes and of themselves, but prefer not to share their stories. Some open up in private interviews, yet avoid and pretend not to know us when we meet each other in public or at diaspora events. Finally, after the interviews, quite a few ask us to efface parts of their stories or photographs, as in hindsight, they feel that it may be better to not share all.

Our aim is to create fuller portraits, yet the young people seem to hold their partial portraits dear. For us, the puzzle becomes understanding this dual investment in visibility and invisibility. And to (re)present the silence in this co-created narrative. For instance, in publications we omit names or replace them by pseudonyms, we uncouple the interview quotes and pictures, and we sometimes refrain from using certain pictures, to increase the degree of anonymity.





"Hello. My parents do not think it is a good idea for me to just tell my story so tomorrow[is interview] will not take place. Greetings [name]"

Email from young woman
Belgium, 2017

We are visiting the parents and youngest brother of a friend I first met in Bujumbura in 2009. We are talking about their experiences in Burundi in 2015. The father was arrested, released, and then they decided to flee. It is not the first time the parents find themselves in exile. They show us a family photo album which holds a family portrait taken in a Burundian refugee camp in Tanzania in 1994. It portrays the father, mother and seven children. At the time, the youngest son was not yet born.

Later that day we make a new family portrait, and painfully realize that this time *only* the youngest child is present. Where are the seven siblings? They live scattered all over eastern and southern Africa. Now over 18 years old, policies do not allow them to reunite in Belgium.

Field notes
Belgium 2017







"I reflected and would prefer the interview not to mention ethnicity because it is still fresh in the minds of people it is merely 20 years I think it is not a good idea otherwise I really enjoyed it."

Text message from young woman
Belgium 2017



Touchez par Ous





"Good evening. Here are the photos I feel are important for the project. Also I would like to ask something that is important for me: It is just that I do not want you to write about [...] It is for personal reasons. You can just write [...]"

Email from young man
Belgium 2017





"Where we lived, in fact, there was a center for refugees that had not been there before ... And one day they asked me: 'Why don't you speak Kirundi [the language of Burundi]?' And I answered: 'Well, because I don't feel like it.' And then they said: 'But why not? Because you don't remember or because you, you say that in Europe you should only speak, euh, you only speak French?' And then I felt ashamed. I really felt ashamed. I thought: 'My God, how can you deny who you are?'"

Young woman, 28 years
Belgium, 2017



"Well I never had euh, since I, since I grew up here, I never had big difficulties of adapting myself. I have the same 'codes' as people here. I have seen the same cartoons, I have eaten the same things, so euh ... *voilà*. Well clearly, arriving at secondary [school] one feels certain difference euh... with the others, or the others make you feel it also, euh but otherwise no ... ?"

Young man, 28 years
Belgium 2017









Diary

I meet up with Laurent in front of a refugee registration centre in Kigali. Laurent looks thin and muscled. But his wide smile and open face betray an optimism I remember from when we first met in Bujumbura in the summer of 2010. Laurent has with him a small bag with two pairs of sandals. One is for me. "Do you remember?" He hints at his promise of a few years ago, when, to pursue his dream to become a successful businessman, he went to Uganda and learned the craft of making leather sandals. He had sent me a message that I would never again have to worry about buying sandals.

A few months ago, he also texted me. He had just arrived in Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda's Eastern Province. His texts were short, he wrote then, because his fingers hurt; pained through torture in Burundi.

We spend a few hours at the centre, where he also meets with one of the lawyers present to document the human rights violations that refugees experienced in Burundi. After their interview, I meet him outside for a walk. I ask him what happened in Burundi. Laurent recounts the events of that fateful night, mimicking the knocks on the door that broke the late evening silence, the intimidating questions posed at his doorstep, and his own answers of innocence, in vain. He had sensed trouble from the first knock on the door. The *imbonerakure* youth militia suspected he was supporting the rebellion outside Burundi's borders because of his frequent travels – for business. They summoned him to step into their darkened car, not allowing him to properly dress, and drove off to one of the secret prison sites rumoured to have mushroomed in Bujumbura since 2015. The experience was nightmarish. He thought he would die. But his family managed to pay for his release, after which he escaped to Rwanda. Speaking in a soft, bitter voice, he adds that he is contemplating to join the rebellion. Then more belligerent: "If they do this to me, imagine what they may do to women and children in Burundi!"

"How does your mother feel about this?" I ask him, knowing how close he is with his mother. He tells me that he has not told her. She had begged him earlier to stay away from soldiering, a career that has run in the family for generations. His late father too, on his deathbed, asked him not to pursue soldiering; too many family members lost their lives soldiering in Burundi's crises.

Lidewyde
Kigali, Rwanda 2017





War repertoires

Many of the young people we meet strongly identify as Burundian. They wear jewelry and dress that remind them of Burundi, and at home, have Burundian flags and other artifacts at display. They take pride in being able to speak Kirundi, an official language in Burundi, and otherwise lament their loss of this intangible piece of heritage. Even young people with long-dating heritage, three generations down, show interest in reclaiming their roots. The work of spoken word artist Gioia Kayega, or Joy Slam – of Belgian, Italian and Burundian descent – is meaningful in this regard. She vocalizes aspirations of belonging to the Burundian social field in her poems. She describes her gratitude and attachment despite Burundi being a country of, “according to some, a million problems” (2016, translation LB).

Experiences of exclusion and difference as black and African play a role in their sense of identity and belonging. Furthermore, scientific literature about family migration emphasize the possible enduring influence of transnational ties, often across generations (e.g. Foner, 2009). Some of these studies highlight parental efforts in reproducing transnational identities. For instance, Bruce Whitehouse (2009) explores how Malian migrant parents in Congo-Brazzaville adapt child-rearing practices to try reproduce durable transnational identities. Similarly, some Burundian parents involve their children in fundraising and charity projects to forge a sense of connectedness with their home country (Berckmoes and Turner, 2021). To understand how such sense of connectedness continues to inform the daily

practices of migrants and their descendants, anthropologist Cati Coe (2013), who studies Ghanaian migrant families, draws on the concept 'cultural repertoires' of USA based sociologist Ann Swidler (1986). Cultural repertoires, she says, are like toolkits of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action. Sometimes used reflexively and sometimes more consciously, these repertoires are flexible and adaptable, always applied in situations that are not exactly like the situations before. In brief, the concept helps to understand and identify how migrants and their descendants enact, sometimes in slightly transformed ways, strategies of action similar to those of people in the home country.

Thinking of the paradox of in/visibility we encounter in our photo-ethnographic journey, we wonder: the avoidances, whispers, silences, gaps, and the apparent fear... , are they expressions of cultural repertoires? Cultural repertoires affected by war. The instances remind me of the "elusive tactics" I encountered among young people growing up in the aftermath of war in Bujumbura, Burundi (Berckmoes, 2014). Elusive tactics appeared as adaptive responses to the unpredictability and insecurity people experienced there. Young people employed the tactics to protect themselves against suspected, latent dangers, or to leave options open and invest in hope. An illustration may be found in my fieldwork encounter with Laurent, in Bujumbura in the summer of 2010. Laurent, then a student, had 'confessed' to me that he had misrepresented his age on our first meeting. He tried to explain to me why: *"That is how you grow up, because Burundians are like that. There are Burundians who want to get to know you because they want to hurt you, just like there are*

Burundians who want to get to know you to do you good. But you cannot know it beforehand. ... That is exactly why, when I grew up, my mother told me to tell a few lies the first time I meet someone."

(In, Berckmoes, 2014)

Pointing to the role of his mother, Laurent hinted at elusive tactics being transmitted through parenting. Harsh lessons learned through war and betrayal were passed on to protect new generations against latent danger. In the Netherlands and Belgium, we learn that parents implicitly and explicitly instill similar strategies for self-protection in their children. For instance, parents warn their children that sharing personal information is best avoided. More implicitly, some parents show examples of not standing out or not speaking up when wronged by powerful institutions, like in situations of discrimination in the labour market or at school.

Also for this photo-ethnography project, a number of young people we approach, reveal to us that their parents advised them to withdraw from the project, worried about unforeseen troubles it may or may not bring. In light of the new political crisis in the homeland, war repertoires are furthermore reiterated in the extended family, who compel the young people to hide themselves and silence their voices. A transnational campaign fuels and strengthens these messages with threatening media speeches, intimidating tweets, and surprise visits by government representatives to diaspora events. Their message is two-fold; that the protests were unlawful and those participating criminals, and second, more hidden, that

people in the diaspora should remember that their family members and friends in Burundi are not out of reach for government reprisals. This last message resonates strongly with experiences of parents and grandparents who lived through earlier crises. For instance, one of the parents we interview in Belgium, shares how he lost his father in similar circumstances during the 1993-2005 civil war:

"For instance, euh, me, my father was killed in October 1996 ... He had stayed in the village. When we left the country we told him that it was very, very dangerous to stay in the country, but he said that he ran for years and years, and that he felt no need to really move again. But on a good morning the military found him in the village, and they literally cut him into pieces. So that really destabilized me! I learned of his death, I could not even go to the country, it was impossible. We barely knew and managed to recover his body for a quick burial, because nobody could even go to the cemetery."

(Father, Belgium, 2016)

Young people are aware of these past experiences and therefore responsive to the warning of their elders. Indeed, many parents and others compel the young people to not speak their mind in public. They hope to keep the family safe, but also want to protect their children from "getting stuck in the mud of the histories of the old" (father, Belgium, 2016). Meanwhile, these veiled threats weigh heavy on the young people's shoulders.



"It could have been us those young people there! ... I think it is our duty to do something from here to support those young people ... who are getting themselves killed everyday."

Young woman, 28 years
Belgium 2017







"My father told me clearly: 'Listen, you are not in Burundi, ... so the moment you implicate me, it will be good that you stop, *quoi*. Because I am in Burundi I risk my life, but you, in Belgium, you don't risk anything.' And my aunts, even those who are not in Burundi, told me: 'Listen [name] honestly you exaggerate, think of your father.' And it is true that at that moment I told myself, 'Okay, stay calm.'"

Young woman,
Belgium 2017











"Well, when you look at my history and all, the fact that only recently I know my ethnicity and all, and finally I understood that I had known [about ethnicity] because I understood from other people ... well from other Burundians who identified me as such!"

Young woman, 29 years



"We had enough of all those pictures circulating on WhatsApp of dead young people in the streets of Bujumbura."

Young woman, 29 years,
Belgium 2016







Diary

Once in a while I hear from Laurent. He sends me text messages asking my news and shares snippets of information about his life as a rebel. It is cold in the Congolese Kivu mountains. Life is difficult. He is on a mission in other African countries to find funding ... Then I hear nothing for a long time, until the beginning of November 2020, when he sends me the following text message:

"...I was wounded but my authorities wanted me to return to the forest[,] given that I had not yet healed I was obliged to desert."

An even more difficult life of hiding follows.

message from Laurent,
DR Congo 2020



"Yes, in 2016 [I] was in Rwanda. Burundi, pfff, I did not go. As I said euh we had done those protests against euh [president] Nkurunziza and suddenly I was afraid. I told myself, no, don't take any risks, you never, it can snap any moment. And then especially [as] there are pictures of us circulating a little bit everywhere on the media. So I told myself: 'No, do not take any risks, stay in Rwanda, those from Burundi who want to see you, they will only have to cross the border in fact!'"

Young woman,
Belgium 2017

Doing heritage differently

With time passing, we learn of the struggles the sense of connectedness with Burundi and accompanying feelings of responsibility may bring. One or two of the young people turn a blind eye early on in the crisis, fearing that acknowledging the violence in Burundi might compel them to come into (armed) action themselves. Other young people appear to struggle with what is sometimes called a 'worry burnout.' They explain to us that they feel overwhelmed by the continuous confrontation with the brutalities, which are vividly displayed, shared and re-shared on social media. They sometimes feel forced to withdraw from social media, or simply stop following the news (see also our work on 'reticent diaspora', Turner and Berckmoes, 2020). For a few, care and concern lead to acute psychosocial problems, reminiscent of problems identified in the context of the transgenerational transmission of trauma in the aftermath of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities. Research with survivors' offspring

has shown that legacies of violent pasts may lead to vulnerability to severe psychosocial problems, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, anxiety, phobias, guilt and separation problems (Rakoff, 1966; Danieli, 1998). Some of the young people tell us that they lost a friend whose distress about the crisis culminated in her taking her life.

Yet like in the poem lines of the young artist of Burundian heritage, the transgenerational legacies of war do not need to define the young people we meet: *"In reality, the place I am from defines me less than what I do"* (Joy Slam, 2016). Rather, the question is how the young people perceive and employ the legacies in their own daily lives.

Transnational family literature often highlights that young people's own ways lead to intergenerational strain between parents and children. This may result from tensions between custom and different demands in the migration contexts. Often to the disappointment of migrant parents, children may turn away from the home country. In JoAnn D'Alisera's study (2009), for instance, she finds that young Sierra-Leonean Americans struggle with the prevalent, violence-riddled images of Sierra Leone in the USA. For some young people, this

leads to attempts to distance themselves from their 'wounded homeland.'

Yet unlike D'Alisera's interlocutors, for many young people we encounter, the re-emergence of political violence in *their* wounded homeland seem to heighten their interest in claiming the Burundian transnational social field as their own. With the outbreak of the 2015 political crisis in Burundi, young people are directly confronted with their parents' and family's distress about these events. The relapse into crisis shows the young people how deeply they feel connected to peers in Burundi: youth like them, only born and/or raised in a different place. Various young people we meet, translate their distress and questions about belonging into political or civic action. They participate in protests against the violence in Burundi. The wish to come into action is also at the birth of the youth group '*Jeunesse Ubuntu*' in Belgium (JUB). One of the first ambitions is to raise awareness of the crisis in Burundi. Yet they want

to avoid stepping in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, who, either in Burundi or in exile, have not managed to shake off the shackles of division and war. Instead, some members explain, they simply want to call upon political leaders to stop fighting, to allow for a more peaceful reality:

“As a general objective, JUB, an organisation independent of ethno-political belonging, seeks to create a space for reflection and action to promote the Rule of Law in Burundi, in alignment with the aspirations and needs of the citizens of Burundi.”

(Facebook page, October 2018, *my translation, LB*)

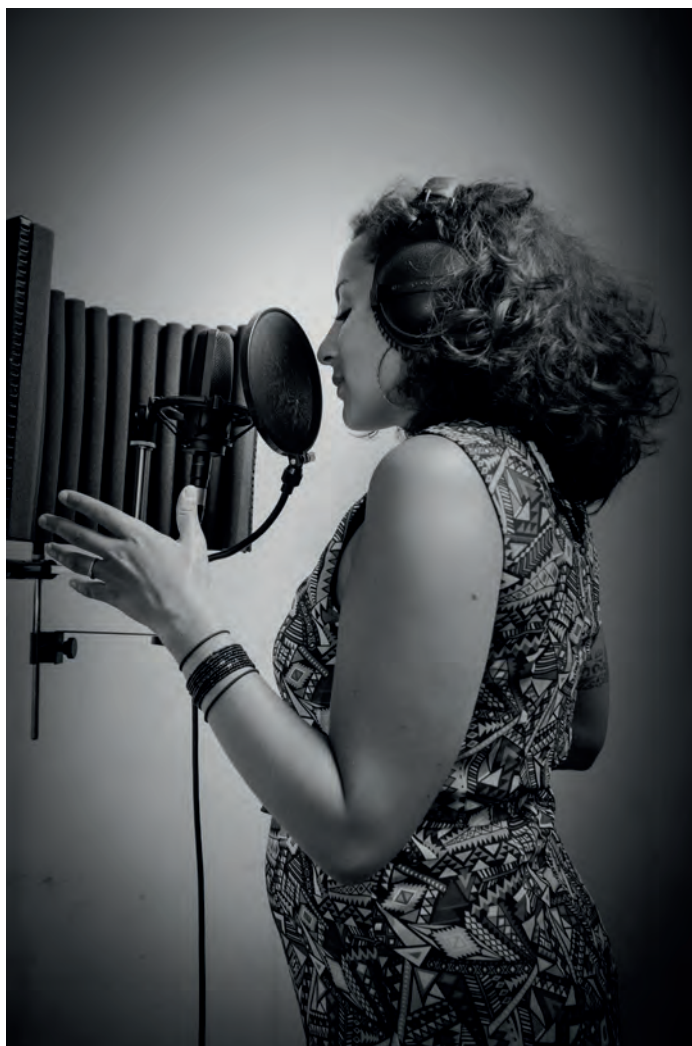
They also seek to strengthen their members' sense of connectedness to their roots through connecting with peers and by sharing experiences.



"It is more for me that, that I wanted to stay [in the Burundian dance group] because ... in fact in a way the dancing allowed me to say that ... knowing the dance; it allows me to say that I am a bit Burundian even though I grew up here [in Belgium]."

Young woman
Belgium 2017













"[The crisis of 2015] affects me ... Friends who call me to say that especially economic situation does not go well! In terms of, of human losses, no, no. But in economic terms, yes."

Young man, 28 years
Belgium 2017

Good evening!
How are you
?

Good evening

I had the interview
[for resettlement] today

How are you?
How did it go?

Yes it is going well thanks
I passed the interview well
tomorrow I will do the medical test

Ohhh That's good
...What will be tested?

Yes I am very happy
I don't know I think it is an x-ray

Okay. And when do you expect the
results of the interview,
or they already gave the results?

I already have the results here I passed

Even better 🙏🙏🙏

Thanks...
It was bad at work

Yes[?]

I am very happy maybe my dream of becoming
a great business man will become true

Diary



Laurent had set up a business again, this time together with a Congolese Banyarwanda leader of a befriended rebellion in Goma, the border city in eastern DR Congo, next to the Rwandan town where Laurent resides. Yet due to mounting tensions between Rwanda and DR Congo, it has become difficult to travel to and from Goma, causing the business to fail.

Meanwhile, Laurent's relatives' efforts to help him secure a visa for resettlement to Canada, appear promising. It allows him to dream of a succesful future again. When we meet in Kigali, a few months after our message exchange reflected here, he tells me that he is now just waiting for his visa to arrive: "Next time we will meet in Canada."

Laurent
Rwanda 2023





Afterlives

It has been 9 years since the protests and violence started on Bujumbura's streets, April 2015. International attention for the crisis has waned, sanctions have been lifted, and refugees in neighboring countries are pressured to return. Yet, in Burundi, a friend describes to me, "it is [still] the law of the jungle, where the most powerful have full monopoly" (Text message, man, 38 years, Burundi 2022). Violence towards critical voices continues, and poverty is deepening in the already extremely poor country.

Some of the young people we met in 2016 and 2017 in the Netherlands and Belgium continue to carve out connections with the Burundian transnational social field. A few of them get the chance to visit their beloved country again, for family visits and otherwise. Many seek to 'do heritage differently'; through identification with 'Africa' instead, or by paying more attention to social and cultural – rather than political – aspects. In their own ways, these young people seek to re-generate their TRACES. Not as tainted by war, but as a tribute to their roots.





"I have the cultural codes from here but at the same time I am not really from here, because also on the other side, someone comes and define me, so I am not really you see ... Between both, ok! ... I am black."

Young woman, 28 years
Belgium 2017













"In the future a bit far, I would like to invest in Africa, and in Burundi, in my [creative arts] domain. So on my level, even if it is not very high ... but even so, it is okay."

Young woman

23 years, Belgium 2017









About the authors

Lidewyde Berckmoes is trained as an anthropologist and Africanist in Amsterdam and Leiden. She has been working as a researcher on conflict and its afterlives in the African Great Lakes region since 2005. Currently, she holds a position as associate professor Regional conflict in contemporary Africa at the African Studies Centre Leiden of Leiden University. She is also a mother of two beautiful daughters of 3 and 5 years old. They remind her daily of the importance of familial heritage and its (undetermined) callings.

Marieke Maagdenberg is an artist and photographer. She studied at the Fine Art Academy of Utrecht. Since 2005, she has been working as an art teacher, photographer and painter. With her photography and paintings, Marieke is attentive to the effects of revealing, obscuring, enclosing and excluding, playing with the sense of alienation and isolation. She likes to keep her distance with the camera, but at the same time to get close by making an intimate portrait. Over the course of this project, Marieke became a mother of two. Her sons aged 4 and 6 are her great loves and a grateful subject. In the coming years, she wants to specialize in documentary photography.

TRACES presents their first collaborative work. The project was a dream come true for both. Lidewyde was drawn to Marieke's art and photography, which to her conveyed the poetry of life as well as its rawness – both often lost in academic representations of war and its afterlives. For Marieke, the invitation to collaborate was an opportunity to try out new ways of working, while introducing her to new worlds, struggles and people.

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Acknowledgements

Initially working towards a book publication, time passing and the global corona pandemic inspired us to make a website to respond to the multi-sited, mobile lives and livings of those most concerned with TRACES. But then again, as mobility often entails the loss of tangible traces of heritage, we felt that a book was needed as well.

Thanks to the African Studies Centre Leiden of Leiden University, TRACES can now be (temporarily) accessed as a web-based exposition and a traceable, printed book. We are particularly thankful for the encouraging feedback of the anonymous reviewer, and the help from the publishing team, Harry Welsh and Machteld Oosterkamp. We also thank Michael van Bergen for his invaluable support in preparing this manuscript, and for encouraging us all the way.

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