

PEACE BEYOND ENCAMPMENT

FUTURITY AND THE (RE)IMAGINING OF LIVEABLE GEOGRAPHIES AMONGST CONGOLESE REFUGEES AT MAHAMA CAMP, RWANDA

Nicolas Parent
Department of Geography
McGill University

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ABSTRACT

In technical discussions on resolving situations of protracted displacement, cross-sector stakeholders have largely focused on the implementation of UN ‘durable solutions.’ Within this framework, the future of refugees is largely limited to the pathways of local integration, resettlement to safe third countries, or voluntary repatriation (or, ‘return’) to their country of origin. Scholars of political science and international relations have extensively examined the limits and possibilities of durable solutions within the politics of an increasingly restrictive global migration regime. At the local scale, anthropologists and geographers have produced important case-based insight on successful and challenged attempts of durable solutions. While this research has been valuable in assessing the outcomes of this framework, this results-oriented approach has not sufficiently problematized the architecture of these solutions or how local, refugee-centric insight can strengthen them.

My doctoral dissertation, *Peace Beyond Encampment: Futurity and the (Re)Imagining of Liveable Geographies Amongst Congolese Refugees at Mahama Camp, Rwanda*, responds to this gap by situating refugees’ own sense of future within or beyond durable solution pathways. Drawing on insight from refugees who describe their encampment of over twenty-five years as increasingly unliveable, this research engages them to imagine spatiotemporal contexts outside the camp where they perceive life could thrive. Data for this research was collected in Rwanda (Oct. 2021-Feb. 2022), using a range of geographic and anthropological methods including focus groups, interviews, free listing, mental mapping, and observation. Textual peace agreement data supports the qualitative component of this project. Centered on the interdependencies of people and place

across spatiotemporal registers, cultural geography stands as the primary theoretical orientation of this dissertation, strengthened by the interpretivist sensitivities of anthropology and analytical wit of political science.

As a manuscript-based dissertation, each core chapter stands on its own, and as a collection, they speak to the broader themes and goals described above. Three chapters have already been published in peer-reviewed journals, and another is currently under review. Following the introduction which sets the goals, rationale, and case selection of the dissertation, Chapter 1 establishes synergies between the processes of displacement, encampment, durable solutions, peace, futurity, imagination, and utopia. The review component of the dissertation extends to Chapter 2, where I analyse nearly thirty years of African peace agreements and their commitments to forced migrants, establishing the state-of-the-art of African refugee protection and revealing lines of sight for subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, I show how return movements can destabilise fragile peace, underlining the importance of including refugees within the processes of repatriation and peacebuilding. To collect data on the lived experience and future aspirations of refugees, I then develop ‘ethnographic mapping,’ a methodology that combines ethnographic methods with mapping. I implement this approach in Chapter 4, the first fieldwork-based chapter. While mapping is shown to assist refugees’ imagining of future return, particularly in terms of spatializing needs, lingering trauma, issues of citizenship, and awareness on the limits of peacebuilding pose important constraints on refugees’ ability and willingness to imagine a return to the Congo. Chapter 5 asks refugees to reflect on the linkages of land and peace, leading participants to richly describe an agrarian utopia in which they would like to inhabit in the future. Before concluding, Chapter 6 develops the concept of ‘anti-sedentarism,’ a confrontation to sedentarist bias that tends to naturalise place-based identities. As the dissertation testifies refugees’

desire to inhabit spaces outside of the camp, this chapter brings forth a theoretical backbone to the broader claim that refugees ought to be centralized in the making of their own futures.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les discussions techniques sur la résolution des situations de déplacement prolongées, les acteurs intersectoriels se sont largement concentrés sur la mise en œuvre des « solutions durables » de l'ONU. Dans ce cadre, l'avenir des réfugiés est largement limité aux voies de l'intégration locale, de la réinstallation, ou du rapatriement volontaire (ou « retour ») dans leur pays d'origine. Les spécialistes des sciences politiques et des relations internationales ont longuement examiné les limites et les possibilités de solutions durables dans le cadre politique d'un régime migratoire mondial de plus en plus restrictif. À l'échelle locale, les anthropologues et les géographes ont produit d'importantes informations basées sur des cas sur les tentatives réussies et infertiles de solutions durables. Bien que cette recherche ait été utile pour évaluer les résultats de ce cadre, cette approche axée sur les résultats n'a pas suffisamment problématisé l'architecture de ces solutions ou comment une vision locale centrée sur les réfugiés peut les renforcer.

Ma thèse de doctorat, *Peace Beyond Encampment: Futurity and the (Re)Imagining of Liveable Geographies Amongst Congolese Refugees at Mahama Camp, Rwanda*, répond à cette lacune en situant le sens de l'avenir des réfugiés dans – ou au-delà – des voies de solutions durables. S'appuyant sur les idées de réfugiés qui décrivent leur campement de plus de vingt-cinq ans comme de plus en plus invivable, cette recherche les engage à imaginer des contextes spatio-temporels à l'extérieur du camp où ils perçoivent que la vie pourrait prospérer. Les données de cette recherche ont été recueillies au Rwanda (octobre 2021-février 2022), à l'aide d'une gamme de méthodes géographiques et anthropologiques, notamment des groupes de discussion, des entretiens, des listes gratuites, des cartes mentales et des observations. Les données textuelles sur les accords de

paix appuient la composante qualitative de ce projet. Centrée sur les interdépendances des personnes et des lieux à travers les registres spatio-temporels, la géographie culturelle constitue l'orientation théorique première de cette thèse, renforcée par les sensibilités interprétatives de l'anthropologie et l'esprit analytique de la science politique.

En tant que thèse basée-sur-manuscrit, chaque chapitre principal est autonome et, en tant que collection, ils abordent les thèmes et objectifs plus larges décrits ci-dessus. Trois chapitres ont déjà été publiés dans des revues académiques, et un autre est actuellement en cours de révision. Après l'introduction qui fixe les objectifs, la justification et la sélection de cas de la thèse, le chapitre 1 établit des synergies entre les processus de déplacement, de campement, de solutions durables, de paix, de futur, d'imagination et d'utopie. Dans le cadre du chapitre 2, j'analyse près de trente ans d'accords de paix africains et leurs engagements envers les migrants forcés, établissant la situation de la protection des réfugiés africains et révélant les lignes de mire pour les chapitres suivants. Au sein du chapitre 3, je montre comment les mouvements de retour peuvent déstabiliser une paix fragile, soulignant l'importance d'inclure les réfugiés dans les processus de rapatriement et de consolidation de la paix. Pour collecter des données sur l'expérience vécue et les aspirations futures des réfugiés, je développe la « cartographie ethnographique », une méthodologie qui combine les méthodes ethnographiques avec la cartographie. J'implémente cette approche dans le chapitre 4, le premier chapitre basé sur le travail de terrain. Ici, il est démontré que la cartographie aide les réfugiés à imaginer un retour futur, en particulier en termes de spatialisation des besoins. Cependant, les traumatismes persistants, les questions de citoyenneté et la prise de conscience des limites de la consolidation de la paix posent des contraintes importantes à la capacité et à la volonté des réfugiés d'imaginer un retour au Congo . Le chapitre 5 demande aux réfugiés de réfléchir aux liens entre la terre et la paix, amenant les participants à décrire richement une utopie agraire dans

laquelle ils aimeraient habiter à l'avenir. Avant de conclure, le chapitre 6 développe le concept d'« anti-sédentarisme », une confrontation aux préjugés sédentaristes qui tend à naturaliser les identités territoriales. Comme la thèse témoigne du désir des réfugiés d'habiter des espaces en dehors du camp, ce chapitre apporte une base théorique à l'affirmation plus large selon laquelle les réfugiés devraient être centralisés dans la réalisation de leur propre avenir.

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation is a collection of five full-length manuscripts, each making an original contribution to scientific knowledge. The aims and questions this dissertation addresses were set by myself, approved through the support of my supervisor Professor Jon D. Unruh at the Department of Geography, McGill University.

I am the sole author of Chapter 2, *Commitments to forced migrants in African peace agreements, 1990-2018*. This manuscript reviews a total of 177 peace agreements that make an explicit commitment to forced migrants in Africa, between the years of 1990 and 2018. All content analysis using open coding, computation, descriptive and statistical analysis using SPSS (IBM), interpretation of results, and manuscript drafting was conducted by myself.

I am the sole author of Chapter 3, *From exile to homeland return: Ethnographic mapping to inform peacebuilding from afar*. This manuscript draws on ethnographic and cartographic methods, developing ‘ethnographic mapping’ as a methodological approach that can prompt refugees to spatialize their understandings of peace, conflict, return, et cetera. All literature review, conceptualising of ethnographic mapping and its model, and manuscript drafting was conducted by myself.

I am the sole author of Chapter 4, *(Re)imaging the Congo: Mental maps and repatriation talk from Mahama camp, Rwanda*. This empirical contribution examines the process and outcomes of refugees’ imagination vis-à-vis repatriation. All field data collection, qualitative coding, map-making, interpretation of data, and manuscript drafting was conducted by myself.

I am the sole author of Chapter 5, *Of utopia: Congolese refugees and an imagined agrarian future in Rwanda*. As another empirical contribution, this manuscript outlines an imagined agrarian landscape that does not yet exist, as described by research participants involved in cultivation activities in and around Mahama camp. All field data collection, qualitative coding, map-making, interpretation of data, and manuscript drafting was conducted by myself. The architectural renderings included in this manuscript were produced on commission by Rija Youssuf.

I am the sole author of Chapter 6, *Anti-sedentarism and the anthropology of forced migration*. This theoretical contribution outlines important confrontations to ‘sedentarist thinking,’ the naturalising of place-based identities that tend to ‘lock’ people and communities to specific geographies. All literature review, reading and interpretation of ethnographic works, and manuscript drafting was conducted by myself.

All remaining elements of this dissertation were authored solely by me.

INTRODUCTION

The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist; a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain.

Ursula K. Le Guin, in *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973)

A BREAK FROM BAD HABITS

My initiation to the study of forced migration occurred some time in 2013. I had been living in Turkey for a few years by then, and the fiery social unrest of the Gezi Park protests still loomed in the air. Adding to the vibrating political climate was the incoming of refugees from Syria. Not far from my home, the adjacent neighborhood of Basmane was rapidly changing. Syrians were establishing themselves here alongside Kurds; both were the racialized ‘Other’ in the metropolis. Turks were divided on the issue, often aligning their ideological constructions around immigration based on political allegiances and religiosity. Through my work as a migration solidarity activist, teacher, and researcher, I oriented my energy towards questions of integration, where my principal area of research investigated Turkish risk perception towards Syrian refugees. A combination of different circumstances – deteriorating labor conditions, greater authoritarianism, and generalised curiosity for another adventure – pushed my partner Meryem and I to relocate in 2017. Soon after arriving in Lima, Peru, I began investigating the ever-expanding Venezuelan exodus in Latin America, doing so through the *Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico*. Here, Luisa

Feline Freier and I worked together extensively, documenting migration policy changes in the region. Despite her background in Political Science, a discipline that is often removed from the field, Luisa had a strong commitment to the collection of field data. And so, we did just that. In 2019, after around five years of juggling research work and full-time employment as a Geography and Environmental Studies high school teacher, I decided that I should begin my doctoral degree. Admittedly, this decision took a few burnouts and many supportive conversations with Meryem. “Maybe you’ll have one job and title where you can teach and do research,” she contended, and with my stubbornness softening from fatigue, her pragmatism prevailed.

“A dissertation must stand on its own.” This is a statement that was drilled into me from the first day I arrived at the Department of Geography, and certainly something that I honor here. Despite this, in introducing this major project, I must admit to myself and its readers that the work produced herein is not isolated from my wider story. The purpose of situating this moment of thesis submission within my story, marking the beginning of the end of the ‘doctoral chapter,’ is to make clear that I began this endeavour with happiness as the central premise, to break from these ‘bad habits’ that Le Guin (above) speaks of. I am happy to have freed myself from the seventy-hour work week, or from its resulting negligence of friends and family. I am sleeping more, and my rested lifestyle makes me a better partner. I think clearer now, and I’m able to engage with complex ideas with more sophistication. This bring me happiness, and it is not stupid. But what of other ‘bad habits,’ those that reproduce the normative stance that “only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting”?

I direct this question to academia, both in its pedagogical values and its production of knowledge. In the social sciences, and most certainly in forced migration scholarship, it appears that the more sinister sides of humanity have caught our curiosity. Questions of trauma, pain,

disaster, crisis, disorder, chaos, and oppression have come to define the landscape of academically interesting research. There is no doubt that we have learnt a great deal through this, not least through the unveiling of important counter-realities through the words, worlds, and experiences of marginalized individuals and groups. That said, in my experience speaking with refugees across five continents, what may seem academically interesting may not be locally relevant, or empowering for that matter. Are lines of investigation based on optimism, possibility, and futurity un-intellectual? Is the examination of imaginary and utopian spaces antithetical to critical scholarship? Is knowledge produced through the examination of pain, suffering, and evil more valuable in academia than that which centres of hope, joy, and satisfaction? To what extent am I bound to these ‘rules of the game’ if I wish to exist, in part, as a scholar? Despite my happiness in other areas of life, these are questions that haunted me in the earlier part of my doctoral degree.

At this juncture, I have found peace and answers to these questions. I realise now, and from a sincere reflection on almost a decade of research work, that academia has the bad habit of fetishizing evil. More than this, it embodies evil by revealing itself as a hostile, Hobbesian, and borderline sadistic space. As someone who deeply enjoys the research process and (perhaps surprisingly) looks forward to further integrating into academia, I refuse to allow its bad habits to make me sick with negativity. As an artifact of original knowledge, and the symbolic key to the gates of academia, this dissertation is a testament to my distancing from the bad habits I have the power to separate myself from. Instead of focusing on pain and trauma, this dissertation centres on possible worlds where refugees lead peaceful lives outside of encampment.

The main confrontation this work has received is that some of the conceptual approaches I employ – futurity, imagination, utopia – are apolitical. In teasing out this contention in different forums, be it through individual conversations, at conferences, or through peer-review, a central

thread linking the sum of these interventions is that while we are used to speaking about power and politics in the past and present temporal registers, we are less skilled at doing so within the future temporality. The most striking exception to this observation is future-looking ‘policy recommendations’ which make up no more than a footnote in the vast majority of research outputs. Politics of the future are less explicit and known than those of the past and present, and describing politics of the future through the politics of the past and present produces important dilemmas, particularly when these lived temporalities are especially difficult. This is something that some may find comforting, and others distressing. I place myself within the former camp, as did my interlocutors at Mahama camp. Congolese refugees here found little comfort in remembering their pre-displacement pasts, or by verbalising the limits of current-day encampment. This does not mean that their stories of violence, displacement, and trauma are occluded, or that I hesitate to provide scholarly commentary on the politics of humanitarianism and limits of encampment, amongst others. In fact, these are integral elements of this dissertation. However, I do distance myself from the academic pivot of pain and evil, attempting to integrate within my research practice long-standing calls to abandon damage-centric research (Calderon, 2016; Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2018; Tuck, 2009). This is done intently and the result of many years trying to identify and break free from personal, professional, and intellectual bad habits.

CASE OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

My first engagement with the case of Congolese refugees in Rwanda took place in the summer of 2015. As a tourist visiting East Africa, I had made my way to Rwanda, having heard that the ‘land of a thousand hills’ was a spectacular place. Travelling through the countryside on highway RN3, I came across Kigeme refugee camp. Already engaged in forced migration research, as indicated above, I decided to stop and scope out the area. I spoke with guards at the gate, explaining my

interest in visiting the area. After a few minutes, a Congolese man who overheard our conversation offered to show me around. The guards were reluctant to allow my access, but after some negotiation in Kinyarwanda with the generous resident, the gate lifted and I entered Kigeme. “Come back in half an hour, or we’ll come find you,” one of the guards said as I walked past them.

With a rather quick pace we managed to walk through a few neighborhoods, visit a local market, and speak to a few residents. Unlike the newer camps I had seen in Turkey, only traces of the original and highly organised site design could be observed. Buildings had been built onto with found materials and scrap metal sheeting. Life, laughter, and play oozed from this spatial patchwork, as did a morose discomfort, existential deficit, and fatigue. The Congolese man explained to me that many of his people had arrived in Rwanda in the 1990s, living across different camps and trying to make a life for themselves since then. Mixed feelings qualified his sentimental description of life at Kigeme, explaining that he was appreciative of Rwanda’s efforts in hosting them, but that despite this, it was now time to develop more sustainable solutions for Congolese refugees. He was particularly concerned about the future of the children of Kigeme.

The visit was short but stuck with me throughout the next few years. Two dimensions of Congolese displacement to Rwanda were particularly striking to me; first, the extent of their protracted displacement, where many had been living outside of the Congo for over twenty years, and second, how such a long period of their lives had been restricted to the camp setting. Indeed, most Congolese in Rwanda arrived in the mid-1990s, displaced largely by Rwandan Hutu extremists and *Interahamwe* who fled to Congo following their defeat by the *Front patriotique rwandais* (RPF, in English) led by now-President Paul Kagame. These *génocidaires*, responsible for the killing of an estimated one million Tutsi between April and July 1994, had entered Congo by posing as refugees during the Great Lakes refugee crisis. Sharing these camps with the Tutsi

who had fled violence, Hutu ‘refugee warriors’ silently organised and executed the killing of their neighbors. They then began to roam the countryside, allying themselves with the Congolese Army and indigenous self-defence forces (known as Mai Mai or Simba) to target Congolese Tutsi in the region. As a group with Rwandan heritage, migrating (mostly) to the Kivus across different periods since the 1800s, the Congolese Tutsi endured a citizenship crisis that still exists today, considered locally as foreigners, invaders, and profiteers (Van Reybrouck, 2015; Mamdani, 2016).

In 1996, a large number of Congolese from several parts of the Kivus – Bweza, Kahundu, Kalehe, Masisi, and Rutshuru, amongst others – began to flee to Rwanda, a displacement movement that contributed to a range of other factors prompting the First Congo War (1996-1997). Following their short stay at a transit camp near the border town of Gisenyi, many were then relocated to a more permanent camp in Mudende. Located near the Congolese border and Hutu positions in North Kivu, residents of Mudende were victims of massacres between August and December 1996. Congolese refugees were then relocated to Gihembe in 1997, a camp located far from the Congolese border and fifty kilometers north from Kigali.

At the onset of my PhD, I had decided on Gihembe camp as my research site. Wanting to explore the spatio-temporal linkages between pre-displacement pasts, experiences of displacement and encampment, and visions for the future, I believed that the multiple movements experienced by these refugees would bring something unique to the research. In the summer of 2021, following an environmental assessment indicating landslide risk in a section of Gihembe settlement, UNHCR and Rwanda’s Ministry of Emergency Management announced the closure of the camp. The mass relocation of Congolese began in a matter of weeks, where an estimated ten thousand refugees

were relocated to Mahama camp, Eastern Province, between August and October 2021.¹ Hastily seeking revised research and camp access permits for this new location, I arrived to Mahama in October 2021, just a few days before the last bus dropping off Congolese refugees arrived.

In my original doctoral research proposal, my primary aim was the examination of ‘imagined homeland.’ Specifically, I was interested in exploring how homeland is imagined in a refugee situation, and how these perceptions interface with needs and claims related to the process of voluntary repatriation (i.e., returning to the Congo). This proposal was largely based on current assessments on ‘durable solutions,’ where voluntary repatriation is largely considered as the most viable – and likely – solution to resolving situations of protracted displacement (Chimni, 2004; Hammond, 2014; Smit, 2012). Considering UNHCR’s active efforts to broker a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement with the governments of Congo and Rwanda since 2018 (UNHCR, 2021a), there was – and still is – a pressing need to locally examine how refugees perceive repatriation.

Different forces led to my expansion of this original focus area. Contextually, the reverberations caused through the relocation of Congolese from Gihembe to Mahama led to widespread community resentment of ‘durable solutions’ language. My interlocutors spoke of the many losses resulting from what they called a ‘forced relocation,’ their worsened living conditions, and feelings of starting over again rather than finding – at long last – a life outside of the camp. The combination of these difficulties, disturbing the relative existential peace they felt existed at Gihembe, and a new prioritisation scheme that now excluded the majority of refugees from WFP’s

¹ Mahama camp is a relatively new camp, founded in 2015 and described to me as a ‘state-of-the-art’ and ‘flagship’ camp. This camp was formerly inhabited exclusively by Burundians, but with many choosing to repatriate, many of the homes became vacant. As of 31 August 2022, Mahama camp has a population of 57,974, comprised of Congolese and Burundian refugees (UNHCR, 2022a). Exact number of refugees based on nationality is not publicly available.

cash-based transfers programme, led to feelings of abandonment and disbelief in the humanitarian sector. Very few individuals I spoke to believed that their lives in the camp could be improved, and the oppressive weight of apathy towards the present traversed virtually all of my engagements with this community. While certainly not neglecting this temporal register, and based on refugees' genuine interest in exploring futurity, I adjusted my project to focus on this temporality, still maintaining this interest in the 'repatriation option' but also inviting refugees to think freely and creatively about their ideal future. This change in my weddedness to the topic of repatriation was also the result of intellectual maturation, largely brought forth during the writing of Chapter 6, where I realised that there was silent sedentary bias in the exclusive examining of voluntary repatriation.

Many of the folks I met appreciated having the opportunity to speak about their future, often indicating that no one from organisations or the state had ever asked them what they wanted for themselves. Through talk, drawing, and mapping, their descriptions of a peaceful future led me to understand peace more expansively. Rather than the classic understanding of peace as the absence of conflict, peace was framed in existential terms like having enough to eat, being able to make plans, and feelings of motion in one's life and community. The camp, providing a space of relative safety, was unable to provide peace within these terms. In their dissatisfaction of life at Mahama as an extension of broader encampment, the camp-as-space revealed itself as rather unliveable. Intervening through a mode that de-centered this painful reality, my research instead tended to exploration of geographies that are considered liveable by refugees.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how refugees project themselves in spatio-temporal contexts outside of the camp. This research project answers to the following central question:

How do past experiences of emplacement and displacement, and current experiences of encampment, participate in the imagining of future post-camp geographies where life can thrive?

A set of four sub-questions seek to tease out specific dimensions of this central question:

1. Peace – Aside from classical understandings of peace as the absence of conflict, *how do refugees who've endured conflict constitute peace?*
2. Temporality – With interest in cross-temporality, *how do pre-displacement pasts, experiences of displacement, and extended encampment produce unique experiential positions that inform the imaging of peaceful futures?*
3. Refugee camps – Starting from the logic that refugee camps protect life with its mandate to provide a conflict-free environment for its residents, *to what extent do refugees having lived in camps for an extended period consider the camp as peaceful and liveable?*
4. Durable solutions – Given the political and institutional embeddedness in the production and reproduction of routinized immobility, *how do refugees' future aspirations intersect with the durable solutions framework that aims for lives with dignity, fulfilment, and subjective-collective actualization?*

POSITIONS AND SUBJECTIVITY

As a person with specific proclivities, ideologies, and identities, I cannot deny the integral role these factors play in the research process. This spans all stages of the research, from project selection through personal interest and experiences, research design through previous field experience and epistemological leanings, data analysis and interpretation through ontology and world views, and so on. This section outlines the filaments that connect my subjectivity to this research project. While it is written here, in this very moment, this effort to orient my positionality in relation to my research, people, and various contexts (spatiotemporal, cultural, political, et cetera) is nothing new. Through self-evaluation and self-reflection, I have tried – at times more successfully than others – to adopt a reflexive approach to scientific inquiry. I do this prior to outlining the dissertation structure, realising that before entering the core body of this intellectual work, it is important to outline how the various positions I embody can produce bias, misinterpretations, and limitations within the research process.

Beginning at my temporal context, I began doctoral studies in September 2019. All was beautiful, connections were being made, and I was greatly enjoying the intellectual ping-pong happening between friends, colleagues, and faculty. I had heard a doctorate is a deeply isolating pursuit and to expect loneliness. I didn't feel that, yet. With the arrival of coronavirus to Canada, and the lockdowns that followed, the isolation rapidly settled in. As a rather social person, my mental health deteriorated during this time. It did, however, give me a lot of time (and limited distractions) to read a lot. I found literature on utopia and futurity deeply liberating during this time, most importantly: *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstruction of society* (Levitas, 2013), *Utopia and organization* (Parker, 2002), *Human rights and radical social transformation: Futurity, alterity, power* (McNeilly, 2018), *Afrofuturism: The world of Black sci-fi and fantasy*

culture (Womack, 2013), and *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (Muñoz, 2009). After over a year delay, and months of participation (and persuasion) in both faculty-level and university-wide discussions on international fieldwork during the pandemic, I was given clearance to leave for Rwanda. I now felt like a future was opening up, and although my own experience of confinement was radically different than that experienced by encamped refugees, this prompted me to engage with the themes of utopia and futurity within this context. As witnessed through other fieldwork experiences, where refugees are seldom asked how they envision their own future, this was also based on my philosophy of human rights which includes the ‘right to the future’ (in the temporal-existential sense) and ‘right to futurity’ (in the imaginative sense).

Several identities participated in how I conceptualized and undertook my research. Conducting research in Africa, I accepted early on the difficulties, challenges, and issues related to the colour of my skin. As a white person, understanding colonial legacies in Rwanda and Congo was prioritised from the onset. This led to my understanding of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as pre-colonial social classes that, during Belgian colonialism, had been ‘ethnicized’; simultaneously, these alleged ethnicities were systematically racialized, first by political elites and eventually by Central Africans themselves. Reflecting on the devastating role white Europeans have had on this region, I did my best to adopt a revisionist approach, where a process of unlearning was often engaged when receiving new information. When writing about or around themes of race and ethnicity, I include much of what I have learnt from scholarship, regional experts, and people I have spoken with on the field. This does not mean that my assessments on these themes are exact or without errors; in fact, the cultural complexity of the region essentially guarantees alternative understandings of race, ethnicity, class, and other markers of differentiation. While a positive outcome of pandemic-related delays was the added time I had to read literature on the region’s

history, and particularly from African scholars (Mamdani, 2016; Moghalu, 2005; Nzungu-Ntalaja, 2003), I invite all confrontations, disagreements, and corrections to my understanding of these issues.

My compound identity of white foreign middle-class male had important implications for fieldwork. Congolese at Mahama recognised my relative power and often asked me to make claims on their behalf, speak to specific members of NGOs, and advocate for them on a range of issues in exchange for their participation in my research. This was incredibly difficult to manage at times, and I often found myself in moral dilemmas where I could find ethical precedence for and against this sort of *quid pro quo* reciprocity. I was clear about my role as a student researcher and my limited ability to effect change in their immediate environment. The vast majority of individuals I spoke with understood this, but the very few who insisted on a transactional arrangement were excluded from the research. In determining my role as either ‘participant-as-observer’ or ‘observer-as-participant,’ I realised early that the former would not be possible. In trying to become close to a few family settings, I was not able to perform certain activities because of my background as a white middle-class foreign male. For instance, I was not welcomed to cook for a range of reasons: (1) it is not my home and I should not disrespect African hospitality, (2) this is a task for women, as defined by the culture of Congolese households, and (3) individuals of my status and skin colour are assumed to hire cooks within their household when living in this region. In another example, it was not acceptable for me to speak to women, and particularly not in private or about subjects deemed sensitive by male heads of household. I therefore decided early on to adopt the observer-as-participant role, where observation takes precedence over participation. I also began to work with the direct assistance of two wonderful individuals, my field assistant D and interpreter E. Through this modality of community engagement, a certain distance between

myself and the community allowed me to engage with camp residents in a freer flowing manner. It is true that a level of intimacy was sacrificed, but this seemed like a fair trade off when considering the management of expectations and respect for community values. Fundamentally, the main question I continually asked myself was “am I setting expectations and unsettling individuals and the community?” D and E made up an important sounding board for this.

Personal politics also make up the connective tissue between my subjectivity and this research project. Those that know me will agree that I’m a political person, and there is no sense in hiding how this colours my intellectual work. As an activist for the better part of twenty years, I have been animated by collective solutions to complex global problems. Born in Canada to a white, middle-class, and educated family, I grew up with a highly individualistic outlook on life. Faith in meritocracy was inculcated at a young age, forming childish ideas that anyone – if they work hard enough – can be successful. I abandoned this cult when I was around fourteen years old, when I started volunteering at the Sierra Youth Coalition, the youth wing of the Sierra Club of Canada. When I moved to Turkey in 2012, I had the experience to living in a collectivist society, bringing me closer to spaces, practices, and the language of community. This shaped my political belief that problems should be resolved, first and foremost, through communal efforts. Readers of this dissertation may find that I focus perhaps too much on collectivist ideas and not enough on subjective experiences. I accept that there are limitations in this, but this work is also not phenomenological, and I trust readers will see that I have honoured individual subjectivity despite my intentional foregrounding of collective themes. Laying beneath this commitment to community is my political orientation as a philosophical anarchist. Unlike liberals, reformists, or technocrats, I do not believe the state and its capitalist extensions have any serious interest in resolving human suffering. Although I write from this position sparingly, it does come through in my weariness

towards state and Western-backed humanitarian actors, and my interest in how people constitute futures where the state lies at the periphery, if at all. This position also informs my opinion that no one is illegal, my own utopia consisting of a borderless world, and relatedly, my plans to grow into an abolitionist geographer who directly confronts the logics and practices of carceral territories such as refugee camps.

A NOTE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Completing a doctoral degree during a global pandemic is not an easy task. The lockdown effectively locked out important opportunities for in-person collaboration, the participation in events, and the opportunities to receive feedback in a real-time format that most can benefit from. While the mental load was often heavy and my creativity sometimes hampered, the pandemic did little to affect my productivity. From the early onset of the lockdowns, I shifted my focus towards completing theoretical work that included a thorough and deeply enlightening reading up phase. The situation became more difficult as the pandemic began to feel interminable and with the breeding thought that I may need to abandon fieldwork in order to complete my doctorate within my allocated funding cycle. This wasn't something I wanted to compromise, and in retrospect, I see my tenacity to hold onto the fieldwork component as one of my greatest successes during this doctoral journey. Thankfully, folks at the Department of Geography and Faculty of Science encouraged me to hold on despite this, providing me opportunities to 'state my case' to receive clearance for international research travel. This was a saga that lasted months through a mentally taxing process of having to navigate red tape and respectfully respond to administrative chaos on how to move forward with requests for fieldwork. Luckily, during a short lull in the number of Covid-19 cases, I was cleared to leave.

The coronavirus pandemic produced important implications in terms of conducting ethical research. As one interlocutor explained, “UNHCR gave us one mask when the pandemic began and now we need to buy our own. That’s why many of us don’t wear masks, we can’t afford them.” During my exchanges, public health concerns were always of great priority. Masks were consistently provided to research participants and there was near-constant difficulty in finding quiet, private interview settings with adequate ventilation. Luckily, Humanity & Inclusion provided this space on multiple occasions. Yet, despite this, masking proved to be a barrier between myself and my research participants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, facial expressions are an important component of trust-building. To adapt to this, I began to meet research participants outside of the research space where interviews or focus groups took place. Remaining socially distanced, a level of introduction and trust could be gained. Still, there were several occasions where research participants expressed their distaste to speak about their experiences through the intermediary of a mask, and particularly those who suspected the pandemic and its resulting public health measures had been blown out of proportion.

DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

This dissertation consists of a collection of manuscripts, known as a ‘manuscript-based thesis’ and a format that is accepted at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, McGill University. Each manuscript stands on its own, but together they accomplish the wider goals of this dissertation. The introduction has established these goals and has provided an overview of and rationale for choosing the case at hand. In the chapter that follows, **Chapter 1**, I will review the bodies of literature that I engage with, most notably, those of forced migration studies, peace and conflict studies, future and utopian studies, and sociocultural geography.

Chapter 2, *Commitments to forced migrants in African peace agreements, 1990-2018*, reviews peace agreements (N=177) that make an explicit commitment to forced migrants in Africa. The aim of this chapter is to show the nexus of peacebuilding and forced migration within my region of focus, unveiling the state-of-the-art if you will. A few key takeaways are important for the remainder of the thesis; notably, that repatriation continues to take more importance than other durable solutions, that protection is the highest (and employment the lowest) provision commitment, that freedom of movement is the highest ‘laws and rights’ commitment, and that land and property restitution and compensation are still grossly underrepresented within conflict termination. This chapter is published in *The International Journal of Human Rights* (vol. 26, no. 8).

Chapter 3, *From exile to homeland return: Ethnographic mapping to inform peacebuilding from afar*, describes the importance of including refugees within peacebuilding processes, exploring this through the lens of sustainable voluntary repatriation. Here, I develop ‘ethnographic mapping,’ a methodological approach that combines classic ethnographic methods with mapping. I argue that outputs from ethnographic mapping can speak to the technocratic language of peacebuilders. Through the spatializing of their understandings of peace, conflict, return, et cetera, this chapter contends that refugees could be more extensively involved in key humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding processes. This chapter is published in *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* (vol. 9, no. 1)

Chapter 4, *(Re)imaging the Congo: Mental maps and repatriation talk from Mahama camp, Rwanda*, is based on interview, focus group, and mental mapping data collected at Mahama camp. This chapter focuses on Congolese repatriation, employing an epistemology of imagination where the process and products of imagining are considered to generate important forms of

knowledge. The central take away from this chapter is that while refugees found mapping to be a better way to translate their imagination (i.e., visual > verbal), lingering trauma, persisting issues related to citizenship, and limited success of peacebuilding in Congo impose constraints on refugees' ability and/or willingness to imagine repatriation. Through some traces of an 'imagined community,' research participants suggest that they would like to be part of repatriation-related discussions currently occupied by UNHCR and the governments of Rwanda and Congo.

Chapter 5, *Of utopia: Congolese refugees and an imagined agrarian future in Rwanda*, makes a pivot towards a different durable solution, that of local integration. Straying from classic understandings of this solution, those that consider refugees' integration within established host community landscapes, research participants here imagine a future agrarian landscape that does not yet exist. This is a landscape that is qualified as an intentional community where subsistence and autonomy exist within a common property space shared peacefully between refugees and now-landless Rwandans. This is explored through the architectural, archeological, and ontological dimensions of utopia.

Chapter 6, *Anti-sedentarism and the anthropology of forced migration*, is a confrontation to 'sedentarist thinking,' the naturalising of place-based identities that tend to 'lock' people and communities to specific geographies. As Chapter 4 shows mixed results in terms of attachment and desire to return to the Congo, and Chapter 5 suggests that Congolese see themselves remaining in Rwanda within a space that does not yet exist, theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter point to the importance an anti-sedentarist reading of the Congolese refugee case. Instead of assuming that the Congo is their natural and most desired locale, scholars and practitioners are encouraged in this approach to recognise that refugees may want to build futures in new rather

than established places away from their homeland. This chapter is published in *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* (vol. 46, no. 2).

A discussion will then follow to explore how these chapters are linked to the broader goals of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

PEACE AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS

‘Peace’ is a notoriously evasive concept (Ishida, 1969; Jarstad et al., 2019; Munene, 2009), and even more so when it is put into a real-world (rather than idyllic) context. This is certainly the case when attempting to draw links between the idea of peace and the range of practices that are used to resolve situations of protracted displacement, namely through UNHCR’s framework on ‘durable solutions’ consisting of repatriation (i.e., the return of refugees to their country of origin), local integration (i.e., refugees remaining in their first country of asylum, usually through the extension of citizenship), and resettlement (i.e., refugees being transferred from first to third countries of asylum). In the case of repatriation, Adelman (2003, p. 274-275) outlines four positions on its relation to peace: (1) Hard I (“peace and refugee repatriation are necessary conditions of one another”), (2) Hard II (“refugee repatriation is not only a necessary condition of peace, but it helps bring about that peace”), (3) Soft I (“resolving the refugee issue, however it is solved, is a manifestation of peace”), and (4) Soft II (“refugee repatriation is a manifestation of peace”). From the position of human rights, the moral claim to global citizenry, and through an appreciation of transnationalism as a definitive feature of the 21st century, these positions could be extended to other durable positions; for example, peace and local integration are necessary conditions of one another (i.e., Hard I), et cetera.

In addition to the limits of such transactional, linear, and simplistic associations, the principal issue with establishing the link between durable solutions and peace in this way is that it is essentially devoid of politics. Specifically, it neither addresses ‘peace’ as a politicised concept, nor ‘durable solutions’ as a politicised process. Peace is most often understood through its negative connotation known as ‘negative peace,’ meaning the absence of war and where peace is “reduced to a concept only derived from the state of war, as if, so to say, war were the original and significant state of things” (Senigaglia, 2010, p. 29). As recognised by Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, & Strand (2014), the paradoxical overemphasis on war in peace studies demonstrates the extent in which this definition has been used by scholars, and importantly, how it has been adopted by state and humanitarian actors. Peace in these terms is rooted in (largely Western) assumptions on human nature, pointing to an alleged universal selfishness of ‘war of all against all.’² This is part and parcel of protectionist sovereignty claims and the territoriality of nationhood, along with contemporary articulations of what Beck (1992) calls ‘risk society,’ a sociopolitical and technocratic predisposition to plan and act for the future through the analysis and calculation of risks (see also, Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Franklin, 1998). This has effectively extended to how durable solutions can play out in practice, and particularly so in the case of resettlement.

In his apologist essay on the ways liberal states ‘legitimately’ select refugees for resettlement, David Miller (2020, p. 107) contends the following:

When a refugee quota is established, either unilaterally or through an agreement made between states, an estimate will have been made of the overall cost-benefit effect of taking in a certain number of refugees. Nevertheless, the state and its citizens still have

² The works of Thomas Hobbes (1968) and Thomas Henry Huxley (see Rupke, 2018) have been deeply influential in forming this imaginary on human nature.

a clear interest in selecting those refugees from whom they expect to derive the greatest benefit at least cost, using whatever metric of benefit and cost citizens deem to be relevant.

This is a problematic and legally treacherous assessment due to its divergence to states' responsibility towards the protection of vulnerable refugees as set out through the 1951 Refugee Convention. While unsettling, the underlying logic Miller points to has been widely adopted in Global North resettlement countries. This is most apparent in the use of non-Convention criteria in resettlement schemes, where receiving countries assess UN referrals of potential candidates against other criteria such as 'integration potential.' These criteria, legitimated under the premise of peaceful cohabitation, include level of education, occupational expertise, language, and religion. For example, Zagor (2019) has examined the cases of United States and Australia, pointing to the prioritisation of Christians in their selection of persons eligible for resettlement. In their study of resettlement selection criteria across several countries, drawing extensively on testimonials by civil servants, Brekke et al. (2021) reveal that in at least two countries – Germany and Australia – language may influence selection decisions. And while not exclusively a resettlement scheme, Øverlid (2022) has described the recent Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel program as 'selective generosity' oriented in racial bias in favor of white Europeans. Beyond the inherent problem 'integrative potential' criterion pose in terms of protection, blurring the line between refugees and economic migrants, these cases reveal explicit forms of discrimination that may amount to silent forms of structural violence within resettlement schemes. The balancing act between assessing refugees' vulnerability and their potential to integrate is markedly opaque within states' 'cherry picking' of eligible persons (de Boer & Zieck, 2020; Brekke et al., 2021). While UNHCR referrals to prospective countries of resettlement are based on a pre-screening

process centered on vulnerability and protection needs, considerations around integration are based on judgments centered on the potential for peaceful cohabitation between refugees and citizens. The formation of such judgements, leading to explicit state policies or subjective decision-making by case workers, remains a vastly understudied phenomenon. However, results from studies on the perception of refugees in resettlement countries may be part of the answer, pointing to important concerns in terms of perceived competition over tangible (e.g., employment, education, health care) and symbolic (e.g., values, culture) resources (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; Esses et al., 2005). With around 2% of the world's refugee population being resettled in 2021,³ one wonders if low figures of resettlement are simply a question of capacity, or whether states in the Global North are hesitant to increase resettlement caps in order to avoid a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972) based on the assumption that refugees will produce social conflict. In the case of Congolese refugees in Rwanda, UNHCR (2021) has acknowledged the limited role resettlement will play in resolving their situation of protracted displacement, diverting their efforts towards activities that promote self-reliance and inclusion.

While the limits of resettlement may not be fully explained through a reading of negative peace and its place in Western imaginaries,⁴ the war-peace binary is certainly inadequate in the examination of social cohesion within the context of local integration. Despite long-standing (and often Malthusian/deterministic) scholarship centered on resource contests that occur between refugee and host country populations (Agblorti & Grant, 2019; Jacobsen, 2001; Kibreab, 1997;

³ These are my own calculations, based on available data on UNHCR's 'Refugee Data Finder,' available here: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> (Updated 16 June 2022).

⁴ While I acknowledge that no 'one-size-fits-all' approach can adequately explain the phenomenon of restrictive resettlement, negative peace as the dichotomy between peace and war/conflict is fundamental to a certain worldmaking that has legitimated a range of projects deployed by the Global North under the veil of 'development,' 'progress,' and ultimately, 'pacification' of peoples deemed unruly, uncivilised, primitive, and violent, namely through slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism.

Martin, 2005; Salehyan, 2008), recent studies have shown the complexities that lay beneath social cohesion within these contexts. These studies, largely in the Global South, usually point to positive and mutually-beneficial relations between refugees and host communities, attributing peace-limiting (albeit not peace-crumbling) factors to structural barriers that limit the formalization of these relations in the long run, or material barriers resulting from an aid-dispensing humanitarian political economy that has been reticent to shift towards supporting development (Ferris, 2019; Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021; Polzer, 2011; Smith et al., 2021; Vancluysen & Ingelaere, 2020). In their impressive and critical review of peace-related terminology, Jarstad et al. (2019) propose three approaches to peace: (1) situational (i.e., peace as a structural, institutional, and aggregated social phenomenon in a given area), (2) relational (i.e., peace as a set of relationships between actors and groups), and (3) ideational (i.e., peace as an idea that changes its meaning across actors and groups). In the Rwandan context, research examining local-refugee integration strongly suggests relational peace between both groups. Alloush et al.'s (2017) study of three camps – Gihembe, Kigeme, and Nyabiheke – shows positive economic interactions between camp residents and local Rwandans in neighboring communities, leading to the emergence of new markets that benefit both parties. Similarly, Loschmann, Bilgili, and Siegel (2019) show that local Rwandans living in proximity to refugee camps are more likely to engage in wage labor that diversify the local economy, that women benefit from more self-employment through business, and that there is higher household asset ownership. In terms of education, Bilgili et al.'s (2019) research concludes that local children living close to refugee camps have higher schooling outcomes and positive views on refugees' impact on local education. Other work on Rwandan perception indicates that “those living closer to a refugee camp do not necessarily feel less safe, have fewer formal social networks, or have less trust in refugees, IOs or NGO” (Fajth et al., 2019: 15), and

that communities living closer have higher trust with refugees, signalling important findings relatable to intergroup contact theory (Christ & Kauff, 2019). These positive relations may in part be attributed to refugees' ideational assessments on peace, as Robinson et al.'s (2022) study on refugee well-being shows that positive community relations with their Rwandan neighbors is part of how they conceive 'the good life.' Yet, studies also show factors that undermine situational peace. These can be structural, where refugees' status as non-citizens and poor state bureaucracy leads to limited employment opportunities and exploitation (Chiumento et al., 2020; Easton-Calabria & Lindsay, 2013), or institutional, where accountability issues, material needs, and isolation in camps jointly managed by the state and UNHCR lead to family conflicts, lack of hope for the future, and sexual abuse and exploitation (Bermudez et al, 2018; Ho & Pavlish, 2011; Ingabire & Richters, 2020; Williams, Chopra, & Chikanya, 2018).

Repatriation, it is said, remains "the most favoured durable solution, not only for those hosting refugees but for many refugees themselves" (Hammond, 2014, p. 508; see also, Chimni, 2004; Smit, 2012). This is based on two related claims: (1) that refugees remain attached and committed to their homeland, wanting to return to the 'national order of things' (Malkki, 1995a), and (2) that refugees constitute a burden on receiving states. Long (2013, p. 2) problematizes this through the following:

Too often, repatriation has been presented as a 'natural' best solution to refugees' exile, when in fact the assumptions that underpin this claim — that people belong in a particular, fixed place — reflect the interests of the politically powerful in retaining the status quo international order, rather than the capacity of return to realize the rights of the displaced.

Bradley (2019, p. 155), on the other hand, evaluates the moral and normative value of repatriation along four lines of argument:

...first, that the right of return may serve as a means of upholding housing, land and property rights; second, that it may more broadly affirm and advance the equal rights of all citizens; third, that it embodies opposition to the perverse logics of ethnic cleansing and genocide; and fourth, that it may be an important form of redress for refugees.

Both perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and Bradley's (2005; 2013; 2014; 2019) extensive scholarship on repatriation addresses both the power asymmetries involved in repatriation discourse and the limits of repatriation as the optimal solution to protracted displacement, suggesting that "repatriation has not been a boon for peace processes" (2013, p. 6). Whether or not western states have unduly promoted repatriation as the ideal solution, or through UN agencies that consider it as the epitomic emblem of peace (Feller, 2009), the question of whether repatriation is considered a viable solution largely rests in the hands of refugees themselves.⁵ Studies on refugee decision-making as it relates to repatriation (see Omata, 2013; Muggeridge & Doná, 2006; Zakirova & Buzurukov, 2021) indicate that this involves an evaluation of the potential for positive peace, "a specific condition, in which the juridical end of a conflict means at the same time outlining the modality of their future relations" (Senigaglia, 2010: 29). This can include the restitution or compensation for lost housing, land, and properties, assured safety and legal immunity, access to shelter and livelihood opportunities, and justice mechanisms for the redress

⁵ There is important evidence, however, questioning the 'voluntariness' of voluntary repatriation in cases where UN-assisted returns took place when ground conditions for sustainable return were questionable (Bendixsen, 2019; Flegar, 2018; Gerver, 2015, 2018a).

of loss, violence, and trauma that potential returnees may have faced during displacement. Though in my own work (Parent, 2022), I show that – at least in African peace agreements – specific commitments ensuring such conditions for refugees remain low (for additional details, see Chapter 2). In the case of Congolese repatriation, UNHCR data shows that over a fifteen-year period (2006-2021), only 1,951 Congolese refugees living in Rwanda decided to repatriate.⁶ And while there lacks published research on why Congolese decide against repatriation, not barring assessments on the ongoing conflict within their country of origin and how this certainly plays a role in repatriation-related decision-making, Chapters 4 and 5 indicate that Congolese in Rwanda consider access to land for livelihoods and their recognition as citizens as key factors for them considering repatriation.

ORIENTING THE CAMP IN (UN)LIVEABLE GEOGRAPHIES

Since the end of the Cold War, migration policies have veered away from the humanitarian philosophy that underpinned sensibilities for refugee protection following World War II. Shifting away from a sense of obligation and expectation to act in favor of asylum (Goodwin-Gill, 2001), many states “introduced a wide range of measures designed to keep asylum seekers from reaching national borders” (Hansen, 2014, p. 258). Tracking from the previous section, it is rather clear that this has taken place, where the focus has now centered on “efforts to contain refugees in their region of origin” (Loescher (2014, p. 219). Known as the ‘settlement solution,’ the camp is an ever-expanding response to this changing tide within the global refugee regime. As Hovil (2014, p. 492-493) points out:

⁶ Data extracted from UNHCR’s ‘Refugee Data Finder,’ available here: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=RDmL6i>.

The settlement policy, therefore, has been one of the primary obstacles to allowing for de facto integration. It is effectively a holding exercise—a way of managing refugees until such time as they can be repatriated or, for a minority, resettled. Yet the protracted nature of many refugee situations, and the ongoing insistence that refugees must remain in camps (being driven by political and donor agendas) has meant that temporary solutions have evolved into quasi-permanent solutions, and refugees have been left heavily reliant on aid.

The perpetuation of this ‘solution’ is based on an assumption, mutually reinforced by state and humanitarian actors, “that people—human beings— who cannot be returned to full nation-state belonging should be obliged to wait for years or even decades for the solution” (Brun and Fábos, 2017: 180).⁷ This has led scholars to describe these spaces through the language of ‘warehousing’ (Smith, 2004) in sites of protracted encampment Malkki (2002) calls ‘vast zones of asylum.’ More broadly, camps have become part of broader ‘carceral territories’ (Gacek, 2022) that go beyond touchstone institutions such as prisons; places of containment, surveillance, and monitoring for populations deemed ‘surplus’ or as ‘externalities’ of contemporary violence (Moran, Turner, & Schliehe, 2018; see also, Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007).⁸ The influential work of Michel Foucault (1980; 1995; see also, Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991), drawing in the language of biopolitical order and governmentality, has thus become commonplace in how scholars examine refugee camps (Bulley, 2014; Diken, 2004; Hanafi & Long, 2010). In a more extreme – and more totalizing – form, the writings of Giorgio Agamben have become an extensive featured of camp studies.

⁷ This stems from sedentary logic, as I develop in Chapter 6.

⁸ For examples on how the ‘carceral turn’ has been taken up in forced migration studies, see Brankamp (2021), Giannacopoulos and Loughnan (2020), Simon (1998), and Vogl and Methven (2020).

This, in part, is due to his central focus on camps, as featured in *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (1998).

The principal claim held by Agamben is that the camp reveals the fundamental categorical pair of Western politics, “that of bare life/political, *zoē/bios*, exclusion/inclusion” (1998, p. 12). Drawing on the Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt, Agamben describes sovereign power as the ability to summon and put in place a ‘state of exception,’ a condition where there is a suspension of the juridical and individuals are stripped to ‘bare life.’ He describes the camp as such a space of exception, where refugees are effectively excluded from the *polis* through a denial of citizenship. This takes place by means of separating *zoē* (biological life) from *bios* (political life), where the latter is suspended and refugees are left with a bare natural life. The camp, then, is a totalising space, as claimed by Minca (2015, p. 81):

The camp ... is a site for the production of total space, of a new dialectics between order/disorder, where protection, care, custody, detention, eviction, displacement, forced identification and other forms of mobility constraint and population governance tend to merge and reflect broader strategies related to the changing welfare state, to issues of global health, to the militarization of everyday spaces, to the colonization of individual and collective bodies via biosecurity interventions. The camp is thus a true political technology, determining the actual practices of citizenship today, and governing motion, governing life in important ways.

A number of forced migration scholars have adopted this framework to understand the camp (Edkins, 2000; Brankamp, 2019; Hanafi, 2012), with others drawing in terminology that builds on

Agamben's *Homo sacer* to describe the violent emptiness of camp settings, such as 'death-worlds'⁹ (Mayblin, Wake, & Kazemi, 2019) and 'non-place'¹⁰ as the "loss of politics, the rise of the transaction over interaction, and the sad life of the lost traveler/citizen in the tragedy of contemporary civic life" (Sharma, 2009: 129).

But as Abushama (2021) points out, nodding to Said (1983), the overemphasis on overtotalization leaves little room for the examination of agency or resistance within camp settings. Scholarly efforts to undo Agambenian readings of refugee camps have largely done so within the case of Palestinian exile, contending that decades of protracted encampment have produced social (and political) worlds that are far beyond 'bare life' (Abushama, 2021; Oesch, 2017; Ramadan, 2012; Tuastad, 2017; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2017). As Ramadan (2012, p. 68) shows in his critique:

Studies of real-world refugee camps cannot be reduced to a formulaic reading of spaces of exception filled with silenced and disempowered *homines sacri*. Such readings risk losing sight of the complex sovereignties of refugee camps, and the possibilities of agency on the part of refugees themselves.

Others have tended to the qualifying features of the *polis* in Agamben's work, namely through a critical examination of its use of citizenship as oriented within a Western-centric logic of liberal democracy whereby political membership is defined through one's relation to the state, nationhood, or sovereign territory. As claimed by Owens (2009, p. 568), "with forced migration reaching record figures it no longer makes sense, if it ever did, to represent political subjectivity

⁹ This draws on the work of Achille Mbembe in *Necropolitics* (2019).

¹⁰ 'Non-place' is to be contrasted with 'anthropological place,' sites of meaning and relationality. See Augé (1995).

in terms of state/nation/territory.” Along the same line, Sigona (2015) introduces ‘campzenship’ as a term to denote the varied sovereignties that exist within camp settings, straying away from a totalising and singular ‘sovereign power’ that denies refugees their subjectivity and the possibility of collective formations.

A range of alternative theoretical frameworks have been called onto to describe how power, meaning, agency, community, home, and resistance are exercised within refugee camps. Drawing on Arendt (1998), Singh (2020) expands typical readings on refugee agency – being able to act within conditions in which they live – with the concept of ‘world-building.’ Rather than consider agency within discernable expressions of power (i.e., political agency), world-building includes quotidian (mundane, banal) human activities and specific ways in which meaning is made visible within space. If these are visible to field researcher, he argues, they are also discernable by humanitarian and state figures. Alternatively, Ramadan (2012) draws on the idea of ‘assemblage,’ where an entity is produced through the interweaving of multiple components (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), and on ‘assembling’ as something that is constantly in motion, an ongoing project. Further, it is not something that is limited to camp space, but rather through ‘camp-society’ relations; how the camp forms broader host society, and vice versa. This relationship takes material forms that can be observed, as towns and villages coalesce around camps, producing local economies where the identities of ‘refugee’ and ‘citizen’ become entangled.¹¹

It is important not to let the focus on agency and empowerment depoliticize the condition of refugeehood. The camp has effectively transformed into somewhat of a paradoxical space: the underlying humanitarian logics of safety, protection, and provision which legitimate the

¹¹ It is wise to expand this, however, to larger spheres than the economy. At Mahama, for instance, marriage between refugees and local Rwandans is commonplace.

establishment of camps effectively exist within ‘materially bare’ spaces of control where mobility – physical, psychological, existential – is highly restricted. It is therefore wise not to succumb to the dangers that lie within cognitive dissonance (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956), producing new myths that romanticize camp experience to detract – ourselves, as researchers, and refugees, as inhabitants – from real suffering. The camp is both liveable and unliveable, a site where real bodies develop meaning and sense of place in close simultaneity with lack, desire, and unfulfillment. Or as Jansen (2016, p. 1) puts it:

On the one hand, camps exist under an increasingly permanent humanitarian bio-political governance, and on the other hand, inhabitants organise themselves in such ways that they create room for manoeuvre to build their lives and livelihoods inside them.

This assessment opens new to directions such as the ‘right to the camp,’ where the observed permanence of camps built under the premise of temporariness leads, over time, to manifested political identities which ought to be in charge of its governance (amongst other domains of social life), shifting the responsibility away from state and humanitarian actors through a model of refugee empowerment (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2017).

IMAGINATION, FUTURE, UTOPIA

There is tremendous transformative potential in utopia as a ‘state of mind’ (Reis, 2001) and, as shown in Bloch’s *The principle of hope* (1986), the propensity for humans to strive for a better life. Rwanda is a particularly interesting site to examine this, partially because the images resulting from the mediatization of its 1994 genocide is part and parcel – for some at least – of what a dystopia looks like: mass slaughter, rape, insecurity, and displacement. It’s important to examine

the forces that led to estimated 1 million – largely Tutsi – casualties between April and July 1994. Prior to colonisation, the social structure of the Rwandan Kingdom was largely defined by the classes of Hutu (active in agriculture), Tutsi (cattle owners and herders), and Twa (pygmy peoples engaging in hunting and gathering). Social mobility was possible within this system, where Hutu able to accumulate cattle could become Tutsi through *kwi hutura*, and conversely, Tutsi who lost cattle – through disease or debt, for example – could become Hutu through *gucupira* (Mamdani, 2016).¹² With cattle as an important symbol of wealth, the kings (*Mwami*) were generally Tutsi. A notable moment of colonisation, first by Germans (1899-1918), and then Belgians (1919 until independence in 1962), occurred in 1933 when Belgian authorities introduced identity cards classifying Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as ethnicities, effectively removing the social mobility dimension of the previous class-based system of social ordering. As Long (2012, p. 212) explains, “permanent racialized divisions were created within the population, allowing for Tutsi monopolisation of domestic Rwandan power.” This fuelled resentment within the Hutu majority, leading to the Rwandan Revolution where Hutu leadership took power upon independence, displacing hundreds of thousands of Tutsi to Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and then-Zaire between 1959 and 1964. This eventually led to the formation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by now-President Paul Kagame, a Uganda-based militant group largely comprised of Tutsi refugees. Armed incursions into Rwanda had a destabilising effect on Hutu leadership, calcifying hatred towards Tutsi and leading to the emergence of the Hutu Power supremacist ideology and *Interahamwe* paramilitary group during the 1990s. The genocidal violence began on April 7th 1994, the day after the Dassault

¹² Pottier (2002) notes, however, that social mobility through the *ubuhake* cattle contract was greatly curtailed during the rule of *Mwami* Kigeli IV Rwabugiri (1853-1895), where Tutsi administrators significantly expanded a feudal-like system across the region, effectively dispossessing Hutu of land that may have facilitated their social mobility.

Falcon 50 presidential jet carrying then-Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and then-Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down near Kigali.¹³

Fast forwarding to today, Rwanda is one of Africa's fastest growing economies with a high rate of women in politics, has near-universal primary school enrollment, and is largely regarded as a success in terms of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and post-conflict transitional justice (Bolocan, 2004; Waldorf, 2009; World Bank, 2022). The vision to build 'New Rwanda' is utopic in that it's anchored in "statements of alternative organization, attempts to put forward plans which remedy the perceived shortcomings of a particular present age" (Parker, 2002: 2). It is indeed based on, and formed through, the political imagination of those who laid victory over Rwanda in the aftermath of genocide: the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Tracking Appadurai's (1996a, p. 31) trifecta of imagination, this involves "ideas of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations." As Simon Turner (2015, 23) points out, the RPF's vision for Rwanda "is a revolutionary political project of creating a specific nation in a specific political image"; an image that is distinctly different than those deployed all over the world in 1994 (Norridge, 2019; Voets, 2021). At the least within political discourse, it is a decidedly decolonial image, where the RPF has attempted to delink colonial legacies from contemporary Rwanda by "reactivating multiple 'homegrown' activities of unity and reconciliation presented as seeped in pre-colonial tradition" (Purdeková & Mwambari, 2022, p. 22). This is the case of *gacaca* ('soft grass') courts, a traditional mechanism of community justice that was deployed following the genocide to both encourage community-level restitution, and to reduce the number of cases tried within official state

¹³ The Hutu government blamed this assassination on the RPF, although this has never been proven.

courts (Clark, 2010). It is also the case for *ubudehe*, a national system of socioeconomic classification that signals a desired return to precolonial class identification, and the related *gira inka* that redistributes cattle based on household and regional needs. Combined with a process of de-ethnicization that brought about the criminalization of divisive – or rather, any – opinions on ethnicity, these add up to the construction of a national imaginary of signs, symbols, collective history, and meaning that undergird an attempt at building an (imagined) national community around Rwandanity (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Hintjens, 2008; Purdeková & Mwambari, 2022).

The Rwanda of today is an ongoing project of the traditionalist view of utopia, a form which sets out with a blueprint of an idyllic society. As a range of scholars have noted, however, this is not a vision that is shared by all Rwandans. In particular, much has been written on the controversial implementation of *gacaca* courts and how these have limited community healing and restorative justice (Luft & Thomson, 2021; Nowotny, 2020; Thomson, 2011). Relatedly, the harshly enforced criminalization of expression on issues of ethnicity have been likened to a process of erasure (Burnet, 201; Purdeková & Mwambari, 2022; Rwafa, 2021). This is the utopia that is criticized by the likes of Arendt (1973), Gray (2007), and Popper (1945) as a form of totalitarianism. As Levitas (2013: 176) writes:

A frequent objection to utopia is that it demands perfection of its inhabitants, which is inconsistent with the necessarily flawed nature of real human beings. As we have seen, this feeds into the claim that utopia is dangerous: attempts to impose it will mean forcing fallible humans into the procrustean bed of an externally imposed system, resulting in totalitarian repression and violence.

Since the 1990s, a number of scholarly works have sought to rescue utopia, utopianism, and utopian thought from the trope that sees them as seeds for totalitarian violence. Sargent's (1994) essay 'The three faces of utopia revisited' considers utopia in simple and universal terms as the human phenomenon of 'social dreaming,' the projection of oneself in another space and time. Utopia is an 'impulse' to look beyond our experience (Bloch, 1986), and Levitas (1990) specifies this through the language of 'desire' for individuals and communities to live better. Goodwin and Taylor's *The politics of utopia: A study in theory and practice* (2009) align utopia to political optimism, a process that produces impressions of 'the good life' based on a critique of present-day institutions, propelling individuals to act within their immediate locale (i.e., utopian thinking has critical and creative functions). This critical dimension of utopia has been substantially developed by feminist scholars, those who have tended to questions of power in singular forms of utopia. Instead, utopianism is seen as something that is situated within local – along with collective/individual – realities, therefore being able to take varied forms within a given context (i.e., heterotopias) (see Sargisson, 1996; McKenna, 2001). In rather important ways, this has shifted the 'blueprint' model of utopia to one that instead frames it through the model of 'utopia-as-process':

In contrast to traditional utopianism, feminist utopianism is process- rather than product-oriented; involves multiple possible futures-in-process rather than a single, finished image; is emergent and contingent rather than totalizing and comprehensive; is situated in a critique of the mundane present to reveal opportunities for concrete action and gives the marginalized a voice rather than being dissolved into the homogeneous utopian society. (Hudson & Rönnblomb, 2020, p. 3)

Common to these works, then, is the democratization of utopia, as something that occurs ‘from below’ and in everyday life.

Utopia and its future temporality bear important linkages to afrofuturism and its position within the American diasporic reality, a literary project that has positioned historically marginalized Afro-descendants within futuristic landscapes of liberation (Nelson, 2002; Womack, 2013; Yaszek, 2006). In recent developments, there is increasing scholarly writing on the linkages between utopianism, afrofuturism, and the context of African postcoloniality, and especially, as a countercurrent to afropessimism (Anderson & Jones, 2015; Ashcroft, 2017; Samatar, 2017; Sarr, 2020). Within the introduction of Zamalin’s (2019: 1-6) *Black Utopia* lies the connective tissue of multiple concepts relevant here:

Black utopians and antiutopians detailed new visions of collective life and racial identity. They outlined *futuristic* ways of being ... They speculated on the ideal conditions for fulfilling human *desire*, while exploding its extant meanings. Human potential was given a new lease on life. Justice was transfigured. They theorized what was scientifically improbable and a new black citizen that seemed impossible ... Perhaps because of this, we are told today that utopian thought should be dismissed. For critics, it is either politically immature or morally dangerous ... Nonetheless, what unites virtually all utopian thought is the conviction in an ideal society that diminishes suffering, fully realizes human potential, and pushes the boundaries of what seems possible. Embedded in this dream is *hope*, which exists in the stuff of daydreams of everyday life ... the major reason utopia is a fruitful site for political theory is precisely that it lives on the precipice of *human imagination*, beyond the border of the possible.

Utopia is a laboratory for our most radical desires and mines the recesses of our darkest longings. [emphasis added]

Utopia consists of an assemblage of hope, desire, and imagination. The liberative power of imagination is recognised within the realm of immobilized people, as something that “accompanies the ‘journey’ in all its tempos, suspensions and directions [where] we can imagine ourselves being or becoming mobile, we can cross material borders and make mobility possible where it does not seem to be the case” (Cangia & Zittoun, 2020, p. 645). The imagination is a site where desire and hope can be inscribed, and when projected in the future, forms the bedrock of utopic construction. To return to Appadurai (1996a), these utopias are the combination of symbolic projections (images), worldmaking and its existential linkages (imaginaries), and shared visions expressed within social fields (imagined communities). Recognising the contention that recent work on refugee imagination risks depoliticising past and present experiences of exile, or denying the realities of current emplacement by focusing too much on otherworlds (Brun, 2001; Lems, 2016), the utopian method does not deny past or present. For instance, Levitas (2013) identifies three modes of utopia: (1) the ‘architectural mode,’ which includes the description and design of good society, its relations and institutions (i.e. the utopia *per se*); (2) the ‘archeological mode,’ excavating ‘fragments’ and ‘shards’ – through history and experience – to locate the social and political origins of the architectural mode; and (3) the ‘ontological mode,’ concerned with the subjectivity of utopian agents, and specifically, how ‘the good life’ is constituted. Utopia is therefore not devoid of the past, because the past informs present conditions which, in turn, prompt us to dream of and act for a future that is deemed better. In other temporal play, this assemblage can include memory and its wisdom (Reis, 2014), where (for some), it is nostalgia of a better past

– how things once were – and its immateriality in the present that forms the pillars of an idealised future.

PREAMBLE TO CHAPTER 2

The previous literature review has tended to three major themes examined within this dissertation: durable solutions, encampment, and refugee futures as defined through imaginative processes and utopian visions. The following chapter steps outside of the camp context and that of refugee futurity, focusing on the context within their country of origin where conflict continues to limit the durable solution of voluntary repatriation. As has been argued in the previous section, according to states, humanitarian and development actors, and refugees themselves, voluntary repatriation remains the most likely solution to end situations of protracted displacement (and thus, encampment) (Chimni, 2004; Hammond, 2014; Smit, 2012). However, scholars have shown time and again that – amongst other factors – refugees will not consider return unless they believe their safety will be ensured and that livelihood opportunities will be available upon return (Omata, 2013; Muggeridge & Doná, 2006; Zakirova & Buzurukov, 2021). Relatedly, literature points to the importance of land and property restitution and compensation as key elements to (a) considering return in the first place, and (b) sustainable return that won't lead to new cycles of displacement (Anderson, 2011; Leckie, 2007; Unruh, Frank, & Pritchard, 2017).

Closely tracking these observations, the following chapter examines a central dimension of conflict termination: the drafting – and subsequent signing – of peace agreements. While definitions for 'peace agreement' remain elusive (Bell, 2006), negotiations aimed at transitioning from a situation of conflict towards one of peace often involve several parties, communities, and groups. In some cases, peace agreements address the topic of forced displacement, establishing commitments towards those who wish to return to the area they were displaced from, either

internally (in the case of internally displaced persons) or externally (in the case of refugees and asylum seekers). When considering the above factors that may affect a refugee's decision to repatriation, it is interesting to examine the precise content of these commitments. At the very least, it can help situate the extent in which an adequate setting of return is being planned for within conflict termination processes.

The following chapter does this through the identification and analysis of peace agreements that make a direct commitment to displaced persons. Given the geographical focus of this dissertation, it solely focuses on agreements within the context of Africa (excluding MENA). Considering the temporal focus of this dissertation, where refugees at Mahama camp were displaced during the 1990s, the following chapter limits its examination to those agreements signed between 1990 and 2018. In total, 177 peace agreements are analysed, responding to the search queries 'Africa (excl. MENA)' and 'refugees and displaced persons' on the Peace Agreement Database (PA-X).

COMMITMENTS TO FORCED MIGRANTS IN AFRICAN PEACE AGREEMENTS, 1990-2018

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ABSTRACT

This article presents data on peace agreement commitments towards forced migrants on the African continent (excluding MENA) from 1990 to 2018, resulting from the analysis of 177 peace agreements responding to the search queries ‘Africa (excl. MENA)’ and ‘refugees and displaced persons’ on the Peace Agreement Database (PA-X). This article presents preliminary results from four thematic categories: (1) return, reconstruction, rehabilitation, reintegration, and resettlement (5R), (2) provision commitments, (3) rights and law, and (4) land and property. Initial probing and statistical testing of the data revealed several trends. Notably, most 5R commitments were made towards the return of forced migrants. From twelve provision variables, physical protection was the most common provision commitment, followed by relief support. Where commitments to laws and rights related to forced migration remained relatively low, these results suggest that peace agreements in this region seldom take a rights-based approach to displacement. Commitments to land and property compensation and restitution were also marginal, confirming that these issues remain occluded within the realms of conflict termination and the transition towards peace. A brief discussion of these results is followed by an outlook of future research pathways.

KEYWORDS

Peace agreements; forced migration; refugees; Africa; PA-X

INTRODUCTION

Forced displacement stands amongst a myriad of tragic outcomes born out of conflict and violence. Based on the most comprehensive publicly available data at the time of writing, over 40 million people are internally displaced (IDPs), 20 million are refugees or in refugee-like situations, and nearly 3.5 million are asylum seekers with pending cases (UNHCR, 2021). These figures do not include repatriated persons returning home, stateless persons, or the vast number of irregular or unregistered forced migrants. Of the regions of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa both produces and hosts one of the highest numbers of displaced persons. From the figures provided above, 43% of IDPs and 35% of refugees worldwide in 2018 were located in this region, with many others travelling intra-continentially to North Africa and extra-continentially to Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. Sub-Saharan Africa also hosts a number of large-scale and protracted armed conflicts, notably in Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2018, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program reported 59 active dyadic conflicts, with 22 (37.3%) located in sub-Saharan Africa (Pettersson, Höglbladh, & Öberg, 2019). These inevitably produced new events of forced migration and lengthened the duration of exile for previously displaced persons.

While there is little doubt that mass displacement is an externality of violence and persecution, research suggests that forced migration can itself lead to conflict. For instance, refugees and displaced persons have sometimes surfaced within the wider discussion on ‘spoilers’ (Loescher, Milner, Newman, & Troeller, 2007; Milner, 2009; Perera, 2013), understood in the peace literature as people or groups that impair peace processes or who stand to gain from the destabilisation of fragile peace (Stedman, 1997). In extreme cases, ‘refugee warriors’ have taken up arms and used camp settings as spaces for recruitment and the strategic planning of attacks (Adelman, 1998; Robinson, 2013; Perera 2013). In calls to problematise and advance theory on

this, scholars have identified structural factors, historical experiences, group motivation, and post-conflict ground level conditions as important drivers of the refugee spoiler issue (Lebson, 2013; Leenders, 2009). The lack of formal recognition, restitution, and recovery of housing, land, and property (HLP) abandoned through displacement, for instance, can lead to serious refugee grievances, particularly when faced with secondary occupants and ex-combatants upon return (Anderson, 2011; Leckie, 2007; Unruh, Frank, & Pritchard, 2017). As demonstrated by Bradley (2013), voluntary repatriation can also have peace-crumbling impacts when large and disorganised return movements put additional pressure on scarce resources and fragile post-conflict institutions. Yet, where repatriation continues to be largely considered as the most favourable ‘durable solution’ by both states and refugees themselves (Chimni, 2004; Hammond, 2014; Smit, 2012), accounting for it in the conflict termination process remains paramount.

Peace agreements play an important role in this process as technical documents that outline a formal, usually non-binding, contract between parties with the principal aim of terminating conflict. Once signed, they are symbolic of a shared commitment to negotiation, compromise, and settlement. While no precise definition for peace agreements and their constitutive parameters have been agreed upon (Bell, 2006), world-leading institutions have made laudable efforts to collect and classify peace agreements. These efforts have led to the development of two important databases, the Peace Agreement Dataset (PA_D) of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Pettersson et al., 2019) and the Peace Agreement Matrix (PAM) developed by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (Joshi, Quinn, & Regan, 2015). While these databases share similar features, parameters determining the inclusion and exclusion of peace agreements have been different. Here enters a new peace agreement database, PA-X, developed at the University of Edinburgh (Bell & Badanjak, 2019). The lead researchers of this database define peace agreements

more broadly, as “formal, publicly available documents, produced after discussion with conflict protagonists and mutually agreed to by some or all of them, addressing conflict with a view to ending it” (Bell & Badanjak, 2019, p. 2). PA-X definitions, then, “deliberately avoid linking the question of whether something is a peace agreement to a predefined concept of what the peace agreement tries to resolve” (ibid). The result is a database that is an inclusive and comprehensive census of peace agreements worldwide. More than this, PA-X offers cutting edge features that allow users to sort and isolate peace agreements with its advanced search parameters. Moving beyond the simple – albeit important – classification of peace agreements, these unique features will certainly help drive important research on the specific content of peace agreements, an area of scholarly inquiry that has garnered much attention in recent years (Ansorg, Haass, & Strasheim, 2016; DeRouen, Ferguson, Norton, Park, Lea, & Streat-Bartlett, 2010).

This article makes further strides in this direction, by presenting preliminary results from the analysis of peace agreements consolidated on the PA-X database. Results presented here respond to a research gap marked by a general lack of systematic analysis of peace agreements’ commitment to the welfare, safety, and rights of forced migrants. The aim of this article is to present preliminary, largely descriptive, results on commitments made to forced migrants in African peace agreements from 1990 to 2018. The next section of this article outlines the methodology used to conduct inductive content analysis of the peace agreements retrieved from the PA-X database. Then, results from the analysis are presented. This article concludes with a short discussion of these results, and then draws out potential pathways for the use of the dataset in future research.

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis, whereby qualitative data – typically textual, but can include auditory and visual material – is converted to a quantitative/numerical form, has become a widely-used methodology in the social sciences (Coe & Scacco, 2017; Krippendorff, 2013). Generally speaking, this approach consists of assigning ‘codes’ – markers indicating specific themes, tone, content, subject matter, etc. – to ‘units’ of qualitative data. Due to the slippery nature of the content analysis methodology, Elo & Kyngäs (2007) stress that researchers should report the process of data analysis with as much detail as possible. As such, the following steps represent key benchmarks in the analysis of peace agreements extracted from the PA-X database: (1) sampling, (2) determination of units, (3) coding, (4) categorising, (5) computation, and (6) reporting of results.

Sample determination was a relatively straight-forward process. Using PA-X and its advanced search options, 177 peace agreements responding to the queries ‘Africa (excluding MENA)’ (*region*) and ‘Refugees/displaced persons’ (*category*) were selected for further analysis.¹⁴ Without the ‘Refugees/displaced persons’ (*category*) exclusion criteria, the ‘Africa (excluding MENA)’ (*region*) search query for this period returned 529 agreements. Conveniently, the output generated through PA-X only presents specific portions of peace agreements based on your search criteria; in this case, specific articles and paragraphs related to forced migration. While ‘units’ of analysis can be single words, sentences, paragraphs and so on (Robson, 1993), it was decided that each peace agreement would be treated as a single unit. This research design choice was based on the study’s aim to describe general trends and patterns in peace agreement commitments to refugees and displaced persons, over a long period and across a sample (N=177)

¹⁴ Data extracted from PA-X (version 2) on 30 January 2020. Available online at: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/search>.

considered relatively large for textual analysis.¹⁵ Based on these considerations, and following Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl's (2009) guidance on the risks of over – or wrongfully – ‘quantising’ qualitative data, it was decided from the onset that codes would be applied (and later computed) on a binary basis, where ‘1’ meant that a code was mentioned within the peace agreement and ‘0’ meant that it wasn't. Open coding was used through two full readings of the dataset (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In total, 198 preliminary codes were established inductively. Following preliminary coding, two additional coders were introduced to the research. Using the protocol established by Coe & Scacco (2017), a randomly selected 20% subsample (36 agreements total) was used to discuss, revise, and widdle down the preliminary codes. In addressing the issue of intercoder reliability (Saldaña, 2006), two questions guided this effort, based on Stemler's (2000, p. 3) discussion on data reliability, where ‘stability’ and ‘reproducibility’ can be respectively explored by asking “can the same coder get the same results try after try? [and] do coding schemes lead to the same text being coded in the same category by different people?” Through this process, a codebook was developed, including a total of 61 codes. Through group discussions between coders, code categories were established based on empirical and conceptual considerations from the relevant literature on peace and conflict.¹⁶ The final codebook included the following categories: (1) return, resettlement, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (henceforth ‘5R’),¹⁷ (2) state/party recognition, (3) provision commitments, (4) development, (5) programming, (6) institution-building, (7) ground conditions, (8) land and property, (9) prohibitions and restrictions, and (10) law and rights. Once the final codebook developed, the full

¹⁵ This approach is proposed in Coe & Scacco, 2017.

¹⁶ This follows guidance from Dey's (1993) approach to content analysis.

¹⁷ This category is based on the 4Rs Framework as described by UNHCR (2003). 4Rs includes repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. The 5R category includes resettlement as it was often discussed or introduced in parallel with the remaining ‘Rs.’

dataset was coded. As previously discussed, each code was computed in binary form depending on whether they were mentioned within each peace agreement. The computed data, in Microsoft Excel format, was then exported to IBM's SPSS software for preliminary and descriptive analysis. Based on these findings, key priorities in the peace and conflict literature, and in respect for publication word restraints, only four categories were retained for advanced descriptive and statistical analysis: (1) 5R, (2) provision commitments, (3) law and rights, and (4) land and property. Notably, histograms, correlation coefficients, frequency, and cluster analysis were used for this.

CATEGORICAL AMBIGUITIES AND CLARIFICATIONS

Given the scale at which this article works from (i.e. the African continent, excluding the MENA region), it is important to clarify categorical and conceptual ambiguities that appear across peace agreements in this region. The first is related to the distinction between types of forced migrants. In some cases, peace agreements employ terminology that is widely accepted by the international community. For instance, agreements from the South Sudan peace process use the term 'internally displaced persons' and is differentiated from 'refugees', as does the Dar-Es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region (2004) and its specific reference to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee. Conversely, the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement does not make such a differentiation between refugees and IDPs, using 'all displaced persons' instead. In another case, the 2005 Naivasha Agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Government of Sudan refers to 'internally and externally displaced persons', where the latter can be assumed to mean 'refugees'. In other cases, such as the *Dialogue Inter-Togolais: Accord Politique Global* (2006), 'displaced persons' are differentiated from refugees, and thus it can be

assumed that this is a reference to IDPs. However inconsistent and confusing this may be, Fagen (2009) explains that this is common within peace processes, where overlap between IDPs and refugees is often assumed because of their shared circumstances as ‘war-affected persons’. Providing a different assessment, Koser (2007) points to regional concerns and region-specific use of language. An example he discusses, relevant here, is the use of ‘*sinistrés*’ within the 2000 Burundi Agreement, a locally-used term designating all displaced, regrouped, dispersed persons, and returnees. ‘Refugee’ is used most consistently across peace agreements, denoting persons who have been displaced outside of the territorial limits of their country of origin. However, while all countries within the region under study are signatories of the 1951 Convention and its refugee definition, the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa expands this definition and has been applied inconsistently within national legislations (Wood, 2014, 2019); as such, absolute consistency for the use of ‘refugee’ designation should not be assumed. While it would be practical (and useful) to establish terminological consistency within distinct peace processes, the logistical and conceptual hurdles of accomplishing this at the continental scale are simply beyond the capacity and scope of this article. And so, while respecting the categorical name selected by the PA-X curators (i.e. ‘refugees/displaced persons’), the author uses ‘forced migrants’ as all-encapsulating of both IDPs and refugees. Unless indicated, readers should assume that the data provided herein is discussed holistically and inclusively of both types of forced migrants.

There is also a need for clarifying the use of ‘return’ and ‘repatriation’. In some cases, return is used within the context of both refugees and internally displaced persons (e.g., 1997 Conakry Peace Plan; 2004 Ziguinchor Agreement; 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement). In other cases (e.g., 2003 Sun City Agreement), return and repatriation are used simultaneously, pointing to two

distinct processes attached to two distinct categories of migrants (i.e., IDPs and refugees, respectively). Given that return is often used as a synonym to repatriation within practitioner and scholar spaces, but not vice-versa, the author has chosen to use this term throughout this article. In cases where specific reference is made to refugees (not IDPs), return should be assumed to mean repatriation.

Despite the above ambiguities, most categories within this article are clear. The land and property category includes commitments to refugees and displaced persons within the boundaries of restitution and compensation of land and property. This category also includes commitments to establishing institutions specifically tasked to facilitate the claiming of land and property, and/or establish procedures for their arbitration in the event of disputes. The laws and rights category includes commitments to implementing, upholding, or reiterating responsibility towards specific rights and their legal footing. Those included are the rights of asylum, family reunification, freedom of movement, citizenship, non-discrimination/equality, and voting. References to the international human rights regime, the 1951 Refugee Convention, or the 1967 Protocol are also included in this category. The provision category includes all coded variables specifying a commitment to the delivery of material or service-based support to refugees and/or displaced persons. The provision of physical protection, legal protection, documentation, building materials, shelter, employment, education, camp management, logistic support, financial support, psychological support, and relief support are included in this category. For the remaining elements of the 5R category, reconstruction, resettlement, rehabilitation, and reintegration all follow the definitional guidance provided in UNHCR's *Master Glossary of Terms* (2006).

RESULTS

Return, resettlement, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (5R)

While return, resettlement, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction are distinct concepts, content analysis found that these terms were most often listed and discussed together within peace agreements; hence why these codes were then classified under the ‘5R’ category. From 1990 to 2018, most 5R commitments were made towards the repatriation of refugees and/or return of internally displaced persons (129 agreements, or 72.9% of total agreements). This was followed by resettlement (58, or 32.8%), reintegration (48, or 27.1%), rehabilitation (35, or 19.8%), and reconstruction (27, or 15.3%). Figure 1 shows the cumulative number of peace agreements committing to each of the 5Rs across the study period. To further probe the data, correlation coefficients were generated to explore the relationship between 5R variables. Given the primacy of return in the peace agreements under examination, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata’s designation of the 1990s as the ‘decade of repatriation,’ and the relevance of this decade within the academic literature (Black & Koser, 1999; Harrell-Bond, 1989; Mertus, 1998), correlation coefficients were generated for three time periods: 1990-1999, 2000-2018, and the full study period (Table 1). From 1990 to 1999, peace agreement commitments to return were negatively correlated to reconstruction (RETUR x RECON) and rehabilitation (RETUR x REHAB) commitments ($p > .05$). Conversely, reconstruction and rehabilitation (RECON x REHAB) had a moderate positive correlation ($p > .01$) during this period, meaning that if an agreement made a commitment to reconstruction, it usually also committed to rehabilitation efforts, and vice versa. A similar correlation ($p > .01$) was also established between commitments to resettlement and rehabilitation (RESET x REHAB). Throughout all time periods, the correlation between resettlement and rehabilitation, and between reconstruction and rehabilitation, remains

positive at a statistically significant level ($p > .01$), exhibiting only minor changes in their Pearson correlation coefficients. In the case of return and rehabilitation, while these are negatively correlated between 1990 and 1999, the relationship between these variables changes to a minor positive correlation between 2000–2018 ($p > .05$ for both). In the case of four relationships – RETUR x REINT, RECON x RESET, RECON x REINT, and REHAB x REINT – absence of significant correlation for the 1990–1999 time scale was followed by a weak positive relationship ($p > .01$) for the 2000–2018 period. There appears to be no statistically significant relationship in commitments to return and resettlement.

Figure 1: Histogram showing the cumulative number of peace agreements mentioning R commitments, 1990-2018 (N=177).

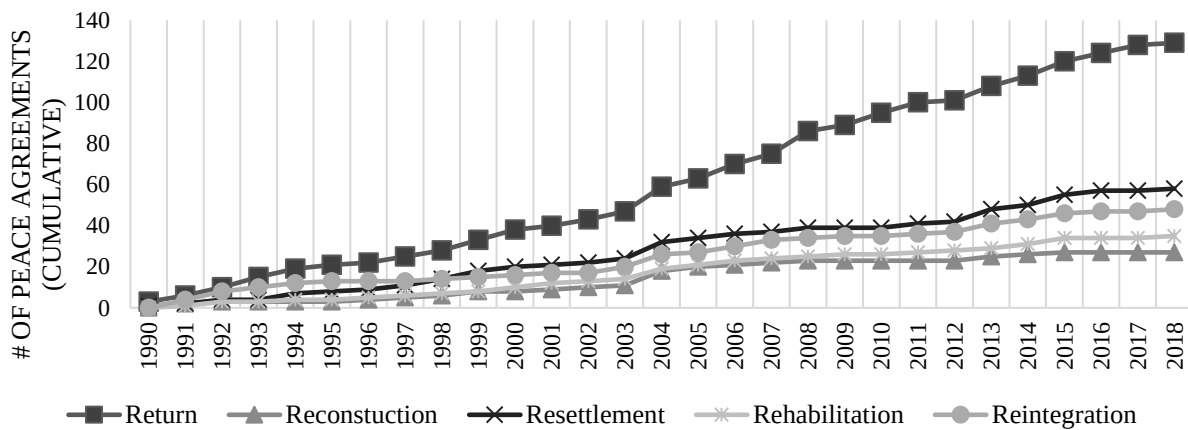


Table I: Correlation coefficients between 5R variables across three timescales

	1990-1999 (n=47)		2000-2018 (n=130)		1990-2018 (N=177)	
	Pearson	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson	Sig. (2-tailed)
RETUR x RECON	-.324*	.026	.036	.685	-.070	.355
RETUR x RESET	-.253	.087	.131	.137	.020	.794
RETUR x REHAB	-.324*	.026	.218*	.013	.079	.293
RETUR x REINT	.246	.095	.275**	.002	.264**	.000
RECON x RESET	.225	.128	.360**	.000	.322**	.000
RECON x REHAB	.548**	.000	.508**	.000	.515**	.000
RECON x REINT	.054	.717	.268**	.002	.207**	.006
RESET x REHAB	.575**	.000	.480**	.000	.500**	.000
RESET x REINT	-.258	.080	.248**	.004	.106	.160
REHAB x REINT	-.067	.654	.256**	.003	.168*	.025

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Provision commitments across conflict and agreement types

The provision category includes all coded variables specifying a commitment to the delivery of material or service-based support to refugees and/or internally displaced persons. In total, this category includes 12 provision variables. Physical protection was the most common provision commitment, mentioned in 36 agreements (20.3% total). This was followed by emergency relief support (14.1%), legal protection taking the form of immunity (6.2%), logistic support primarily for voluntary repatriation (4%), the provision of shelter (4%), support for the replacement of official identification documents (3.4%), financial support through cash transfers (2.8%), additional resource allocation to the management of refugee or IDP camps (2.3%), and the provision of educational opportunities (1.7%). The three lowest commitments in this category were the provision of building materials (1.1%), psychological support (1.1%), and opportunities for employment (0.6%).

Interested in how provision commitments differed across both conflict and agreement type, two tables were developed (see Tables 2 and 3). As both conflict and agreement type codes were already integrated within the PA-X database, their respective definitions were consulted via the PA-X codebook (version 2) available online (Bell et al., 2019). Government conflicts (n=92, or 52%) and intrastate agreements (n=138, or 78%) took the largest share for both agreement identifiers. In respect to conflict type, physical protection maintained its place as the most committed form of provision for both ideological or political disputes (government conflicts) and conflicts between non-state groups (inter-group conflicts). For intrastate disputes over territory (government/territory conflicts), commitments to relief support (14.5%) exceeded physical protection (12.7%) by a small margin. Peace agreements related to inter-group conflicts only made commitments to four forms of provision: physical protection, relief support, shelter, and

employment. No provision commitments were made in the case of agreements aimed at resolving or terminating territorial disputes or conflicts. Likewise, no provision commitments were made in peace agreements involving two or more states (interstate agreements). For inter–intra agreements, usually addressing internationalised internal conflicts, provision commitments were made exclusively to physical protection, legal protection, and relief support. Peace agreements aimed at resolving local issues within a given country (intra-local agreements) also committed to few provision commitments, notably physical protection, relief support, education, and shelter. Intrastate agreements made up the bulk of all peace agreements (78% of total), but 10 out of 12 provision commitments were mentioned in less than 10 agreements of this type; the exception being physical protection (28 agreements, or 20.3%) and relief support (22 agreements, or 15.9%).

Table II: Provision commitments in peace agreements, across conflict type, 1990-2018 (% per type)

<i>Provisions</i>	<i>All</i> (N=177)	<i>Government</i> (n=92)	<i>Government/ Territory</i> (n=55)	<i>Inter-group</i> (n=23)	<i>Territory</i> (n=7)
Physical protection	20.3	27.2	12.7	17.4	0
Legal protection	6.2	8.7	5.5	0	0
Documentation	3.4	3.3	5.5	0	0
Building materials	1.1	1.1	1.8	0	0
Shelter	4	3.3	5.5	4.3	0
Employment	0.6	0	0	4.3	0
Education	1.7	1.1	3.6	0	0
Camp management	2.3	2.2	3.6	0	0
Logistic support	4	6.5	1.8	0	0
Financial support	2.8	1.1	7.3	0	0
Psychological support	1.1	1.1	1.8	0	0
Relief support	14.1	16.3	14.5	8.7	0

Table III: Provision commitments in peace agreements, across agreement type, 1990-2018 (% per type)

<i>Provisions</i>	<i>All</i> (N=177)	<i>Inter</i> (n=5)	<i>Inter-intra</i> (n=14)	<i>Intra</i> (n=138)	<i>Intra-local</i> (n=20)
Physical protection	20.3	0	28.6	20.3	20
Legal protection	6.2	0	7.1	7.2	0
Documentation	3.4	0	0	4.3	0
Building materials	1.1	0	0	1.4	0
Shelter	4	0	0	4.3	5
Employment	0.6	0	0	0	5
Education	1.7	0	0	2.2	0
Camp management	2.3	0	0	2.9	0
Logistic support	4	0	0	5.1	0
Financial support	2.8	0	0	3.6	0
Psychological support	1.1	0	0	1.4	0
Relief support	14.1	0	7.1	15.9	10

Considering physical protection and relief support constituted the two most common provision commitments, correlation coefficients between these two and the remaining variables were generated (Table 4). A statistically significant ($p > .01-.05$), yet weak positive correlation, was established between physical protection and eight other variables: shelter, employment, legal protection, education, camp management, financial support, psychological support, and relief support. In respect to relief support, data shows that this commitment was statistically correlated with nine variables. Significance of these correlations was higher than those between physical protection and other variables, where relief support was correlated to eight variables at $p > .01$ significance. Despite the significance, these correlations are still considered weak given the Pearson correlation coefficient under .400. Overall, physical protection and relief support exhibited the strongest correlation (.359, $p > .01$).

Table IV: Correlation coefficients of physical protection and relief support against all other provision commitment variables

	<i>Physical protection</i>		<i>Relief support</i>	
	Pearson	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson	Sig. (2-tailed)
Physical protection	1	--	.359**	.000
Legal protection	.219**	.003	-.034	.655
Documentation	.138	.067	.372**	.000
Building materials	.079	.297	.264**	.000
Shelter	.186*	.013	.334**	.000
Employment	.149*	.048	.186*	.013
Education	.260**	.000	.324**	.000
Camp management	.206**	.006	.266**	.000
Logistic support	.042	.538	.001	.990
Financial support	.253**	.001	.322**	.000
Psychological support	.212**	.005	.264**	.000
Relief support	.359**	.000	1	--

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

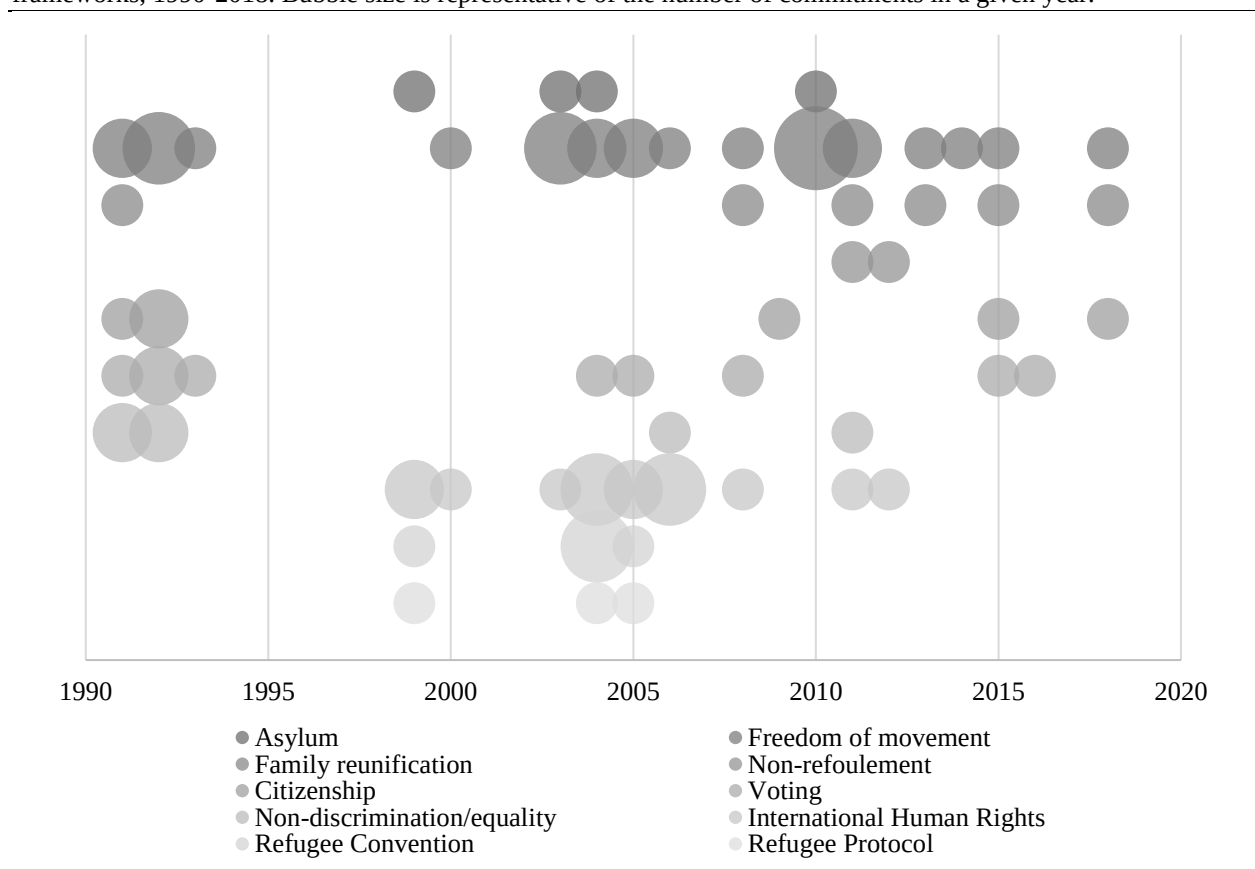
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Commitments to law and rights of forced migrants

Commitments to laws and rights related to forced migrants remained relatively low across all 177 peace agreements. The right to freedom of movement had the highest level of commitment, appearing in 26 agreements. The right to non-refoulement had the lowest level of commitment,

appearing in 2 agreements. Within this range were the following rights, with the number of agreements in parentheses: asylum (4), family reunification (6), citizenship (6), non-discrimination/equality (6), and voting (9). Five agreements mentioned the 1951 Refugee Convention, of which three also mentioned the 1967 Protocol. References to international human rights when discussing displaced persons were made in 15 peace agreements. Peace agreement commitments to the rights of forced migrants are plotted across time in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Distribution of African peace agreement commitments towards specific rights and international legal frameworks, 1990-2018. Bubble size is representative of the number of commitments in a given year.



Despite there being relatively few commitments to the rights of forced migrants, two-step cluster analysis was employed to tease out potential interlinkages between rights and law variables. Auto-clustering using Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) was used to visually plot out clustering options. It was determined that a four-cluster approach was most optimal for

interpretation, also demonstrating good cluster quality with a 0.9 silhouette measure of cohesion and separation. As Table 5 shows, the first cluster, accounting for 74% of the dataset, involves no rights, suggesting that peace agreements involving refugees and IDPs seldomly take a rights-based approach to forced migration. The second largest cluster, representing 9.6% of the dataset, includes all rights except citizenship. Freedom of movement is present in three of four clusters, and the only right included in the third cluster. This is unsurprising considering its position as the right most committed to across all peace agreements in this study. The fourth cluster is comprised of freedom of movement, family reunification, and a grouping of civil and political rights variables (citizenship, voting, and non-discrimination/equality).

Table V: Cluster composition, rights and law variables.

	<i>Cluster 1</i> (74%)	<i>Cluster 2</i> (9.6%)	<i>Cluster 3</i> (8.5%)	<i>Cluster 4</i> (7.9%)
Asylum	--	✓	--	--
Freedom of movement	--	✓	✓	✓
Family reunification	--	✓	--	✓
Non-refoulement	--	✓	--	--
Citizenship	--	--	--	✓
Voting	--	✓	--	✓
Non-discrimination/equality	--	✓	--	✓
International Law/Human Rights	--	✓	--	--
Refugee Convention	--	✓	--	--
Refugee Protocol	--	✓	--	--

Land and property

Content analysis results suggest that consideration of land and property issues, and more specifically when devising plans for the safe and peaceful return of forced migrants, has not been an object of great importance in the peace agreements under examination (Table 6). Commitments to the restitution and compensation of forced migrants' land appeared in seven (4%) and eight (4.5%) agreements, respectively. Nine agreements (5.1%) committed to the restitution of property restitution, compared to eight agreements (4.5%) that committed to compensating forced migrants for lost or occupied properties. Only 5.1% of all peace agreements committed to establishing

institutions specifically tasked to facilitate the claiming of land and property, and/or establish procedures for their arbitration in the event of disputes.

Table VI: Frequency of land and property variables
across peace agreements, 1990-2018 (N=177).

	Frequency	Percent
L&P inst. building	9	5.1%
Land restitution	7	4%
Land compensation	8	4.5%
Property restitution	9	5.1%
Property compensation	8	4.5%

In total, 20 agreements (or 11.2%) mentioned at least one of the five coded variables. As shown in Table VII, a number of these peace agreements were part of common peace processes.

Table VII: Commitments to land and property restitution, compensation, and institution building across peace agreements, 1990-2018

<i>Peace process – Country/ Entity</i>	<i>Agreement name</i>	<i>Date signed</i>	<i>L&P inst.</i>	<i>Land rest</i>	<i>Land comp.</i>	<i>Prop. rest.</i>	<i>Prop. comp.</i>
Mozambique process in the 90s – Mozambique							
	<i>Protocol III- Principles of the Electoral Act</i>	1992-03-12	✓	--	--	✓	--
	<i>General Peace Agreement for Mozambique</i>	1992-10-04	✓	--	--	✓	--
Mali-Azawad Inter-Azawad peace process – Mali/Azawad							
	<i>Pacte National conclu entre le Gouvernement de la République du Mali et les mouvements et fronts unifiés de l'Azawad consacrant le statut particulier du Nord au Mali</i>	1992-04-11	--	--	✓	--	✓
FRUD process – Djibouti							
	<i>Accord cadre de réforme et de concorde civile</i>	2000-02-07	--	--	✓	--	✓
	<i>Accord de Réforme et de Concorde Civile</i>	2001-05-12	--	--	--	--	✓
Arusha and related peace process – Burundi							
	<i>Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi</i>	2000-08-28	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute peace process – Eritrea/Ethiopia							
	<i>Agreement between the Government of the State of Eritrea and the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia – Algiers Agreement</i>	2000-12-12	✓	--	--	--	--
Darfur-Sudan peace process – Sudan/Darfur							
	<i>Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement on the Conflict in Darfur</i>	2004-04-08	--	--	--	✓	✓
	<i>Darfur Peace Agreement (Darfur-Sudan peace process)</i>	2006-05-05	--	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD)</i>	2011-05-31	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Process – Burundi							
	<i>Contract of peaceful cohabitation (neighbourhood Teza ii of Kamenge), Burundi</i>	2004-06-30	--	✓	--	--	--
African Great Lakes: Regional Process – African Great Lakes							
	<i>Dar-Es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region</i>	2004-11-20	✓	--	--	✓	--
	<i>Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region</i>	2006-12-15	✓	--	--	✓	--
Sudanese peace process – Sudan							
	<i>Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) – Cairo Agreement</i>	2005-06-18	✓	--	--	--	--
Uganda peace process – Uganda							
	<i>Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M</i>	2007-05-02	--	✓	✓	--	--
Kenya peace process – Kenya							
	<i>Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation – Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission</i>	2008-03-04	✓	--	--	--	--
Kenya Local Agreements – Kenya							
	<i>Mabanga Peace Accord</i>	2011-10-21	✓	--	--	--	--
Zimbabwe post-election process – Zimbabwe							
	<i>Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No 20) 2013</i>	2013-03-19	--	--	✓	--	--
Nigeria-Plateau State Process							
	<i>Declaration of Intent (by the Fulani Dialogue Steering Committee)</i>	2013-05-19	--	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Declaration of Intent and Signatures</i>	2013-07-10	--	✓	✓	--	--

DISCUSSION & OUTLOOK

The aim of this article is to present preliminary, largely descriptive, findings on commitments made to forced migrants in African peace agreements from 1990 to 2018. These findings are drawn from content analysis data of 177 peace agreements, retrieved from the PA-X database and responding to the search queries ‘Africa (excluding MENA)’ (*region*) and ‘Refugees/displaced persons’ (*category*). This article has focused on presenting results from four categories of coded data: return, resettlement, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (5R), provision commitments, law and rights, and land and property.

In respects to 5R commitments, results confirm the bias of return/repatriation as the most favoured (or in this case, committed to) durable solution (Chimni, 2004; Hammond, 2014; Smit, 2012). While this discrepancy is clear in the number of commitments to return as opposed to resettlement (n=129 versus n=58), there are almost no commitments to local integration – the third of UNHRC’s durable solutions – which is only mentioned in two peace agreements. The division of 5R commitments into three timescales allow us to track changes in how these variables are correlated through time. Return and reintegration, for instance, exhibit no statistical correlation during the 1990s but are positively correlated between 2000-2018. Signposts in the literature suggests this could be linked to greater recognition for the principle of ‘sustainable return’ at the end of the twentieth Century, particularly following several failed experiments in repatriation (Arowolo, 2000; Black & Gent, 2006; Crisp, 2000), increased funding towards post-return reintegration (Macrae, 1999), and the UN Refugee Agency’s shift towards an integrated approach in post-conflict situations (UNHCR, 1999, 2004). Upon surveying specific peace processes where commitments were made to both return and reintegration, it is also interesting to observe that most

included a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) dimension. This is the case for the peace processes in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. While DDR – a programme with origins in the 1980s (Ayissi, 2021) – comprises strategies aimed at the reintegration of armed groups into civil society, the more recent and related process of DDRRR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement) is aimed at returning foreign-bound armed combatants for reintegration within their country of origin. Although the specific sections and articles under study here refer explicitly to forced migrants, a curious question arises of whether or not the all-encapsulating language of DDRRR has been used within the context of commitments towards victims of displacement. As such, beyond the above proposition that greater appreciation for sustainable return explain the interlinkages between return and reintegration, mere changes in language used in the drafting of peace agreements may also play into this.

Concerning the provision of material and service-based support to forced migrants, physical protection was the most common provision commitment, followed by relief support. These were unsurprising results considering both protection and emergency relief aid constitute the main priority areas of the international refugee and humanitarian regimes, respectively. In a few cases, such as peace agreements related to the South Sudanese Civil War and those of the ongoing protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both relief support and physical protection of forced migrants were committed to in tandem. Here, where priorities of the humanitarian regime are considered as part and parcel of those of the refugee protection regime, or vice-versa, we see the expression of what Betts (2010) calls the contemporary ‘refugee regime complex’, where priorities across refugee, human rights, security, and development regimes are increasingly nested, parallel, or overlapping. With provision commitments centring mostly around

issues of physical protection (20.3% of all agreements), it is interesting that commitments to the right to asylum were marginal. Perhaps the reason that only four peace agreements commit to the right to asylum reflects post-Cold War changes to the international protection regime, where migration scholars have remarked that policies and responses to forced migration underwent a notable shift from providing asylum to facilitating containment, securitisation, and criminalisation (Goodwin-Gill, 2001; Hansen, 2014; Loescher, 2014). If this is the case, it is not necessarily at odds with the – seemingly contradictory – result of agreements’ commitment to the right to freedom of movement, as this right was largely discussed within the context of voluntary repatriation, an international preference that Mertus (1998, p. 345) considers is largely the result of “State’s unwillingness to provide for and protect refugees.”

Lastly, rather limited commitments to land and property compensation and restitution confirm what scholars have previously observed, that despite the critical need to address land and property issues within the context of forced migration, these issues remain marginal within the realms of conflict termination and the transition towards peace (Bradley, 2013; Feller, 2009; Leckie & Huggins, 2011; Unruh & Williams, 2013). However, as shown in Table 7, a few examples defy this observation. For instance, in the case of the Darfur-Sudan peace process, data shows increased commitment to land and property issues from the 2004 Ceasefire Agreement to the 2011 Doha Document. As regional expert Jon Unruh (2012, p. 106) points out, land and property related grievances are central to the War in Darfur: “of the six recognized and agreed on ‘root causes’ of the war mentioned in the 2011 peace accord between the government and one set of the primary rebel factions, three deal explicitly with land rights issues.” While it is tempting to praise the Darfur-Sudan peace process for bridging the gap between the often-separated issues of forced displacement and land and property, empirical findings have cast doubt on the nature and

extent of commitments made towards forced migrants within this peace process (Praz, 2014). A similar observation has been made regarding land tenure security commitments as they appear in the 2000 Arusha Accord which ended the highly territorialised Burundian Civil War. While resulting land governance reforms have made an overall move forward in resolving land disputes, they have failed to do so when disputes involve internally displaced persons (Tchatchoua-Djomo, 2018; Tchatchoua-Djomo, van der Haar, van Dijk, & van Leeuwen, 2020). As such, commitments towards forced migrants within the realm of land and property is perhaps less about direct commitments to war-affected persons such as IDPs and refugees, and more about addressing governance issues and root causes of conflict.

While the above provides a preliminary discussion of results, it is certainly not exhaustive. In part, this is due to the overall aim of this article, which seeks to present preliminary results from the analysis of a PA-X dataset, rather than build theory. Greater examination of these results and thorough consideration for literature on peace agreements and forced displacement in sub-Saharan Africa could lead to evidence-based theory building. Additionally, in selecting and presenting the results from four of 10 code categories, this article has only provided a snapshot of the full dataset. With this in mind, several pathways for future research can be drawn out. First, as this article has largely treated code categories as independent units, future use of the dataset should explore how different categories – for example, ‘institutions’ and ‘programming’ – intersect in significant ways. More advanced statistical tools could be employed for this, but given how data was coded, dataset users will be limited to those tools suitable in treating predominantly binary variables. Second, rather than exploring agreement commitments towards refugees and displaced persons across sub-Saharan Africa, the dataset may be useful at the sub-regional level, where both researchers and practitioners working in specific countries may be interested in mining the dataset for their own

use. Third, future lines of inquiry may involve going beyond the dataset, exploring how trends, patterns, and relationships within and across its variables triangulate with other quantitative datasets. With great scholarly interest in the implementation of peace agreements, its challenges and implications (DeRouen et al., 2010; Hoddie & Hartzell, 2003; Jarstad & Nilsson, 2008; Spears, 2000; Stedman, 2002) the dataset could be used in conjunction with other metrics such as the Peace Accords Matrix' (PAM) 'implementation score' (Joshi, Quinn, & Regan, 2015). Fourth, as the dataset was developed exclusively from peace agreement sections responding to the PA-X database search queries 'Africa (excluding MENA)' (region) and 'Refugees/displaced persons' (category), there is research potential for comparative studies juxtaposing commitments to forced migrants across regions, and for intersectional studies exploring the convergence of multiple social and political identities such as race, gender, disability, and the like. In encouraging future research, then, the author has made the results of their content analysis available (Parent, 2020a).

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/IIMHR9>.

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PREAMBLE TO CHAPTER 3

The previous chapter has demonstrated that, by and large, commitments to displacement within peace agreements are limited. It should also be noted that in most cases, refugees have no ‘seat at the table’ when these agreements are being drafted. The same can be said within the context of peacebuilding, where efforts to stabilize a region are almost exclusively focused on the actors operating within it, as wholly embraced by the ‘local turn’ (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Paffenholz, 2015). However, refugees remain largely excluded from important discussions on how peace can be reached and maintained. This is certainly problematic when taking into account broader conversations on ‘refugee spoilers,’ where refugees risk impairing or destabilizing peace upon their return (Loescher, Milner, Newman, & Troeller, 2007; Milner, 2009; Perera, 2013; see also, Stedman, 1997).

There is therefore an important precedent to include refugees within peacebuilding processes. By doing so, peace may be defined and configured in a way that is more inclusive of the perspectives of persons who have effectively become victims (and/or survivors) of conflict. The following chapter explores this in greater detail, making the normative claim that refugee inclusion in peacebuilding is of great importance. How they imagine peace, and relatedly their return, is often rather concrete: absence of violence, presence of justice mechanisms to adjudicate compensation and restitution claims, availability of education, access to health care, opportunities for livelihoods, accessibility of housing, and so on. Yet, many questions remain: Will refugees be able to return to their pre-displacement context? Are they willing to repatriate to other regions within their country of origin? Have skills acquired during exile be able to contribute to

development? What does ‘justice’ mean for them and what institutions are needed to avoid renewed tensions?

To answer these questions, the next chapter proposes the use of ‘ethnographic mapping’ as a means to collect important information from refugees while they are still living in exile. Combining both mapping and traditional ethnographic methods, information collected through this approach is both spatial and sociocultural. It is framed as an approach that may be used by researchers and practitioners working towards peace in refugees’ homeland. In turn, this can inform peace programming *prior* to refugees initiating their return, serving the distinct function of aiding to fulfill the UN mandate of ‘sustainable return.’

CHAPTER 3

FROM EXILE TO HOMELAND RETURN: ETHNOGRAPHIC MAPPING TO INFORM PEACEBUILDING FROM AFAR

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ABSTRACT

When violent conflict flares up, forced migration often follows. Ethnographic data shows that forced migrants remain attached to their places of origin and often express a desire to return once conflict has abated, be it after weeks, months, or years. Conversely, peacebuilders in the homeland have not effectively integrated displaced persons within their strategic programming. This is cause for concern considering the literature connecting the collapse of fragile peace to ‘refugee spoilers.’ There is a critical gap in peacebuilders’ commitment to understanding refugees’ needs and claims, and the implications these pose on peace stability following repatriation. This article argues that ethnography of refugees still living in exile can generate rich datasets useful to the development of peacebuilding programming. More than this, it proposes a methodology — ethnographic mapping — that can collect both spatial (maps) and narrative (descriptions) information in tandem and across cultural groups living in refugee camps.

KEYWORDS

Mapping; ethnography; forced migration; peacebuilding; repatriation

INTRODUCTION

When refugees repatriate once conflict has abated, they frequently face new challenges that disappoint their long-awaited hope for stability and a return to normalcy. They often find that the landscape they left has undergone radical changes through the process of war and violence. Secondary occupants may be living in their childhood home or working their land. These ground-level realities routinely result in the emergence of new forms of grievance that potentially threaten peace that is already fragile and uncertain (Bradley, 2013; Unruh, Frank, & Pritchard, 2017). With sometimes tragic outcomes, the worst being a relapse in conflict and violence, refugees and other displaced persons bear the burden of being characterised as ‘spoilers’ to peace (Loescher et al., 2007; Milner, 2008; Perera, 2013). As many examples in recent history attest to the scale and frequency of this phenomenon, we must ask ourselves why peacebuilding programmes do not take forcefully displaced persons into greater account when working through conflict environments and towards landscapes of peace. Contrary to sedentarist assumptions that associate dislocation with absence of interest, capacity, or legitimacy in having a voice on important matters of the homeland, ethnographic evidence shows that refugees remain deeply connected to their country of origin (Betts & Jones, 2016; Chatty, 2010; Hammond, 1999). While in exile, they need opportunities to communicate memories, hopes, desires, claims, and perceptions on peace and conflict. Particularly in considering the prospect of large-scale return migration, this information can be instrumental and formative in developing comprehensive peacebuilding programmes that include the refugee perspective.

This article focuses on the importance of refugee voices in peacebuilding efforts. While an ideal circumstance would directly involve refugees in peacebuilding programming, the first step towards this is recognising and providing opportunities for those in exile to share their experiences

and perspectives on conflict, displacement, peace, and return with peacebuilders. A methodology to gather and organise this information, based on approaches in geography and anthropology, will be presented. As will be shown, ethnographic mapping in refugee contexts has the potential to generate rich spatio-narrative visualisations and descriptions. Data generated through this approach can, in turn, inform peacebuilding initiatives and help pre-empt potential conflicts resulting from voluntary repatriation.

The first section of this article connects the dots between the literatures on return migration, conflict, and peacebuilding. The second section outlines ethnographic evidence showing that refugees are politically capable and culturally invested in their homeland, therefore establishing their aptitude and importance in having a place at the ‘peacebuilding table.’ Next, a methodological outline for ethnographic mapping is provided, followed by a model for its use in refugee contexts. Before concluding, the article explores the risks and ethical considerations of ethnographic mapping.

THE PEACE AND RETURN MIGRATION NEXUS

Voluntary repatriation, or voluntary return migration, is one part of a trifecta of ‘durable solutions’ set out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); local integration and resettlement being the other two. Although UNHCR affirms that no hierarchy exists between the three, that they are all part of an integrated approach (UNHCR, 2012, p. 186), data on refugee flows and state policies clearly shows that “repatriation and return will likely continue to be the most favoured durable solution, not only for those hosting refugees but for many refugees themselves” (Hammond, 2014, p. 508). Acknowledging that the reasons for this are quite broad, much of the literature suggests that while some refugees may embody a desire to return home,

political processes that go far beyond their reach consistently undermine their agency — and sometimes choice — in whether or not they repatriate (Tegenbos & Vlassenroot, 2018; Bradley, 2013). Within this context, Long (2013, p. 2) problematises the identity-emplacement nexus, explaining that:

Too often, repatriation has been presented as a ‘natural’ best solution to refugees’ exile, when in fact the assumptions that underpin this claim — that people belong in a particular, fixed place — reflect the interests of the politically powerful in retaining the status quo international order, rather than the capacity of return to realize the rights of the displaced.

The now-widespread assumption that repatriation represents the ultimate route to restoring refugee livelihoods arguably developed as a result of two intertwined paradigms emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s. The first is the result of changing migration policies following Cold War-era politics, where states veered away from the humanitarian philosophy that underpinned sensibilities for refugee protection following World War II. Where states used to react based on obligation and expectation (Goodwin-Gill, 2001), they now “introduced a wide range of measures designed to keep asylum seekers from reaching national borders” (Hansen, 2014, p. 258). Moving from asylum to containment, Loescher (2014, p. 219) notes that “Western states have largely limited the asylum they offer to refugees and have focused on efforts to contain refugees in their region of origin.” Repatriation, then, proved to be most representative of this political environment, as other ‘durable solutions’ — resettlement or local integration — involved refugees remaining outside of their country of origin and under the care of a host country. This coincided with a second paradigm within the broader international community, where multilateral agencies consistently asserted that voluntary repatriation was the most logical, humane, and ‘natural’ way forward in addressing the

‘refugee issue.’ Following former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata’s designation of the 1990s as the ‘decade of repatriation,’ scholars warned that this attempt to universalise responses to displacement was predicated on false assumptions rather than a fully formed policy programme based on evidence and best practice (Harrell-Bond, 1989; Bascom, 1994; Black & Koser, 1999). However, with the political landscape now tilting towards containment, securitisation, and criminalisation of migrants and refugees, this paradigm quickly took ground within policy, development, diplomacy, and peacebuilding circles. Reactions within academia widely condemned the extent to which voluntary repatriation had been embraced by the international community. Scholars such as Mertus (1998, p. 345) went as far as considering voluntary repatriation as a direct externality of states’ irresponsibility towards displaced persons: “the primary cause of so-called “voluntary repatriation” is the host State’s unwillingness to provide for and protect refugees.”

From the late twentieth century until now, several examples have shown what many scholars had forewarned as this paradigm emerged. A striking example is that of repatriating Bosnians following the Dayton Agreement, where thousands were forcefully evicted while others found their homes inhabited by secondary occupants. For many, however, motivations to repatriate were overshadowed by a fear that their return would reignite ethnic tensions, and that those involved in the already haphazard, ad hoc, and unjust post-conflict repatriation strategy would fail to protect them under these circumstances. Despite this reality on the ground, the UN remained confident that its strategy was a success (Kleck, 2006). It is surprising, or perhaps not, that the UN had held itself to such a low standard of success, considering that previously mismanaged repatriation protocols as part of the UN-supervised Arusha Accords had demonstrably exacerbated local rifts, leading up to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide (Jones, 2001; United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum [USHMM], 2014). In 2002, return migration of Burundians was jointly facilitated by UNHCR and the governments of Burundi and Tanzania. This effort followed the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000, an agreement that established returnees' rights to property restitution or compensation (Government of Burundi, 2000). However, as with previous projects of large-scale return, the responsibility to deliver on the agreement's promises remained in the hands of state actors. Almost two decades later, the vast majority of returnees still remain landless and uncompensated, all the while experiencing food insecurity and contributing to local resource scarcity (Fransen, 2017). Evidence from recent years continues to show that the complexity of post-conflict return migration is still underestimated and unaccounted for. In the context of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, Knight (2008) argues that the 'R' is the most problematic component because it typically constitutes a long-term process; a timeline familiar to development actors, but out of the operational scope of peacebuilders. The complexity of the latter component of DDR is exemplified in the many iterations of 'R,' where reintegration is often substituted with rehabilitation, reinsertion, repatriation, and return. In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), for instance, return of demobilised soldiers (including children), internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees to their home villages is highly problematic and lacks foresight from peacebuilders in these areas. Through interviews with demobilised Congolese, Richards (2016) demonstrates that ex-combatants fear — and often face — capture by not-yet-demobilised groups following their return to native villages. In the case of child soldiers, where DDR programmes are focused on a return to the way it was before the war, Haer (2017) explains that this strategy often further entrenches historical and structural gender roles that harm girl ex-soldiers upon return. For IDPs and refugees, lands and homes left vacant following displacement are often occupied by

demobilised ex-combatants, leading to new grievances that can renew community rifts and conflict (Paddon & Lacaille, 2011). Where UN peace operations are the leading partner in the implementation of a dozen DDR initiatives globally (World Bank, United Nations Peacekeeping, & Social Science Research Council, 2018), there is evidence that the implications of return migration are not thoroughly considered within these programmes.

While problems with return migration persist, so does the desire of refugees to return home. That said, economic, political, and social conditions within the country of origin are strong determinants of whether or not a refugee will undertake a return movement. When these conditions are not clearly understood, or when refugees are incentivised — or sometimes coerced — into return, their arrival can threaten post-conflict environments. Bradley (2013) outlines three unique scenarios that commonly play out following repatriation. First, tensions may occur when returnees lay claims to lost housing, land, and properties that are now in the hands of occupants who may have participated in their dislocation and dispossession. Unruh, Frank, and Pritchard (2017, p. 1) share this observation, confirming that:

Among the most problematic aspects of any return process is the reclaiming, reoccupation and reconstruction of housing, land and property (HLP) for the hundreds of thousands to millions that will attempt this in today's dislocation scenarios. Equally difficult for those unable or unwilling to return to areas of origin, are the forms of redress for their HLP loss — due to destruction, secondary occupation, ethnic

cleansing, etc. — that could put to rest the acute grievances that unresolved HLP dispossession produces.¹⁸

Second, return migration may lead to a scarcity of natural and social resources that are already under pressure. Third, disorganised and large return movements can put pressure on fragile post-conflict institutions, potentially risking destabilising peace and triggering new displacement movements. As such, Bradley (2013, p. 6) suggests that “repatriation has not been a boon for peace processes.” From a peacebuilding perspective, Milner (2008) argues that refugee return can negatively impact peace prospects in two ways. First, referring to the existence of ‘refugee spoilers’ (or ‘refugee warriors’), some of which inhabit militarised refugee camps, these persons or groups plan their return with an opportunistic gaze to gain from or cause outright destabilisation of fragile peace (see also Loescher et al., 2007; Perera, 2013). Second, and reaffirming other themes explored above, is the push for early and unsustainable repatriation by host states with shifting donor interest. In these situations, there is usually an absence of ground-level preconditions for sustainable and peaceful return, and the voluntariness of ‘voluntary’ return is suspect, even when return is assisted by the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Bendixsen, 2019; Flegar, 2018; Gerver, 2018a). Milner (2008, 2011, 2015) confirms what other scholars have claimed, that refugees can play a positive role in building peace (Duthie, 2012; Grace & Mooney, 2009; Johansson, 2009; Pope, 2008; Sommers, 2001), but has also recognised that targeted and programmed opportunities for this to take place are few and far between.

With what we know from research work and past experience, why does assisted voluntary repatriation continue to be recklessly advocated for and facilitated? Why does peacebuilding not

¹⁸ For further literature on the importance of housing, land, and property restitution in post-conflict settings involving refugees, see Leckie (2007, 2009).

incorporate refugees — or, more generally, displaced persons — more effectively in their approach if we know that return may undo peace efforts? Looking at the UN organisational culture can help us answer these questions. In her widely acclaimed and prize-winning book *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (2010), Séverine Autesserre provides an erudite diagnosis explaining why a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to peacebuilding persists despite overwhelming evidence that it is inadequate and dysfunctional. Drawing on observations made when working in conflict and post-conflict environments in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and DR Congo, she attributes this failure to four dimensions of the dominant international peacebuilding culture: “The conception of the UN and diplomatic staff’s role as ‘naturally’ focused on the regional and national realms, the belief that specific strategies are appropriate for ‘postconflict’ environments, the veneration of elections, and the view of humanitarian and development aid as an ideal solution to local conflict” (Autesserre, 2010: 85). Peace and conflict scholars have often pointed to these same issues in the context of the Bosnian war (Merlinger & Ostraukaite, 2005; Richmond & Franks, 2009), Colombia (Berents, 2018; Naucke, 2017), and African conflicts more generally (Castañeda, 2009; Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016; Zambakari, 2017). One significant externality of a peacebuilding culture aligned to technocratic, managerial, and diplomacy-oriented approaches is that it does not sufficiently take into account local actors and stakeholders. This defies what the academic community has widely acknowledged: that it is most often local dynamics — not national or regional ones — that have the greatest impact on the achievement and sustainability of peace (Autesserre, 2014; Campbell, Chandler, & Sabaratnam, 2011; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Experience from UN peacekeeping missions, however, have repeatedly demonstrated that these operations are embedded in an organisational culture that equates peace to macro-level institution building, elections, and rule of

law (i.e., liberal peace), which are largely disjointed from local realities. Similarly, UNHRC has discursively considered repatriation as an emblem of returned peace in refugee-producing countries despite the complexity and uncertainty that these movements produce in post-conflict environments (Feller, 2009).

The above section has drawn specific links between return migration and ground-level efforts for conflict termination and durable peace. Most notably, it shed light on some structural flaws that suggest disjointedness between peacebuilding priorities and the need for ground preparations before large-scale return movements; a disjointedness that, if left unaddressed, can, in fact, threaten fragile peace in post-conflict environments. This analysis has been done largely within the purview of refugees having already returned to their country of origin. The next section moves backward in this chronology, prior to their return and while in exile. It builds a case for their engagement and agency in peacebuilding from afar.

RECOGNISING VOICE AND REFUGEE ATTACHMENT TO THE HOMELAND

In UNHCR's most recent *Global Trends* report, 15.9 million refugees, representing 78 per cent of the total global population, were in a state of 'protracted displacement,' defined as a situation "in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country" (UNHCR, 2019, p. 22). While this population is increasingly urbanised, many still remain in both formal and informal camps (Humanitarian Policy Group, 2015). In the latter case, and particularly in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, these camps have been likened to widespread 'warehousing of refugees' (Smith, 2004) in what Malkki (2002) calls 'vast zones of asylum.' Some have qualified these living conditions as 'liminal' (Mortland, 1987; Purdeková, 2011; Siganporia & Karioris, 2016), described in anthropology as the period of limbo

and transition between social positions in life (Turner, 1967) and where refugees and asylum seekers are perceived to experience a “conditional emplacement ... and the ambiguity characteristic of that position” (Svensson & Eastmond 2013, p. 163).

Ethnographic work revealing the political and productive lives of refugees, however, has challenged claims of liminality on the grounds that it dehumanises, decontextualises, and dissociates the biological from the biographical (Brun & Fábos, 2015; Brun, 2016; Hammond, 1999; Ramadan, 2012). Explorations in refugee conceptions of home, homemaking, and homeland have been instructive in articulating that while refugees are effectively ‘out of place’ from their point of origin, they continue to exhibit strong feelings of attachment to them. In Black’s (2002) study of Bosnian refugees’ conception of ‘home,’ he draws the conclusion that “the more distant ‘home’ is in time and space, or the more unlikely or impractical a return ‘home’ might be, the stronger the group’s identification with, and yearning for, such a return becomes” (p. 126). Similarly, Ghanem (2003, p. 27) states that “even if the association of ‘home’ with ‘home country’ is cast into doubt during pre-flight events, the irony of exile is that the geographical distance from one’s country of origin often brings the forced migrant emotionally closer to it, sometimes even closer than before his/her flight.” This is also an area where anthropology has been particularly apt in engaging with migration studies, where scholars such as Chatty (2014, p. 81) have characterised the ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ as “one of the most powerful unifying symbols for the dispossessed.” This perspective was instrumental to developing her methodology in *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (2010), using ethnographic research to call on refugees’ memories of “childhood and youth...of forced migration or those of their parents, their recollections of places where they sought refuge, the institutions and networks in their new places as well as their perceptions and aspiration regarding home and homeland” (Chatty, 2010, p. 3). In

Malkki's (1992) ethnographic study of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, she found that by "trying to understand the circumstances of particular groups of refugees illuminates the complexity of the ways in which people construct, remember, and lay claim to particular places as 'homelands' or 'nations'" (p. 25).

The refugee camp as a 'landscape of exclusion' (Sibley, 1992), however, reifies the invisibilisation of refugees. Too often, and this applies to the virtual absence of consideration for refugees in peacebuilding, forced migrants become 'excludable bodies' from key social, cultural, and political processes; what Agamben (1998) would perhaps consider as 'bare life.' The observations above, then, are important in dispelling sedentarist assumptions claiming life in exile as apolitical and without merit of inclusion in decision making (Allan, 2014; Betts & Jones, 2016; Chatty, 2014; Horst, 2013; Parent, 2019; Zetter, 1991). Refugees effectively continue to remember and feel a sense of attachment and rootedness to their homeland, therefore participating in the formulation of what Anderson (1983) calls an 'imagined community.' Voluntary repatriation stands as a case in point in establishing continued commitment to refugees' place of origin. When undertaken, return migration is typically representative of refugees' agency, choice, and empowerment.

Future outlooks on peacebuilding programmes, then, should explore the inclusion of exiled persons in the planning, managing, and brokering of homeland peace. As former Assistant High Commissioner for Protection at UNHRC Erika Feller (2009, p. 86) notes:

Peacebuilding will not be effective if it ignores the fact that refugees and displaced people often find themselves returning home alongside ex-combatants, demobilized

child soldiers, women associated with fighters, and others who have become disaffected from their communities.

In recent years, the international community has expressed a commitment to building greater refugee agency within intervention programmes. For instance, in its most recent landmark document related to forced displacement, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, UN member states convening at the 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants asserted the vital importance of refugee agency in both peacebuilding and development initiatives. Similarly, one core principle of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees in the Middle East is refugee participation in decisions linked to displacement responses and solutions (UNHCR, 2018a). These steps forward demarcate an important change of tide, where the international community has recognised what social scientists have long claimed: that those refugees and IDPs who stand to benefit from these efforts must play an integral role in how these projects and programmes are developed. A commitment to this is long overdue, and while it should be welcomed, the international community will need to do much more than sign declarations to put this into practice. In *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement and Building Peace* (2019), editors Bradley, Milner, and Peruniak describe just how deeply complex refugee agency and peacebuilding can be:

Displaced persons' roles in resolution processes, especially peacebuilding, are mediated by factors including histories and cultures of social mobilization; the strength of exile leadership and power structures; 'enabling conditions' for organization and advocacy in host communities, including access to resources, international networks, and ethnic, religious, and political affinities between displaced and host populations; socially constructed gender and generational roles; awareness of and ability to frame concerns in relation to international rhetoric on rights, development, peace, and

security; and the nature of relationship between displaced populations and national and international authorities. (pp. 13-14)

The question, then, is how to collect and consolidate this information. A further question is how to develop a transmittable output that can effectively communicate refugees' needs, claims, and perspectives prior to their return to post-conflict environments. The remainder of this paper will describe a distinct methodology that can be deployed to the field in order to gather these informational needs in situ (i.e., in communities of displaced persons) and prior to large-scale return migration. A general definition and outline of this approach — 'ethnographic mapping' — will be provided in the next section. This will be followed by a more targeted discussion and model on how to use ethnographic mapping in displacement settings.

DEFINING 'ETHNOGRAPHIC MAPPING'

Ethnographic mapping is formulated here as mapping practices that are decided upon and are performed through ethnography, and whereby its outputs — items, features, and contents oriented in space and meaning — are enriched by descriptive ethnographic writing. Here, the map goes beyond its primary function as a tool of representation, taking on a formulative role that enriches the process of ethnographic field research. This approach seeks to expand the typically assumed roles of the ethnographer, whom Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011, p. 1) describe as having two distinct activities:

First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually, the setting is not previously known in an intimate way [where] 'participant observation' is often used to characterise this basic research approach. But

second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others.

Efforts to socialise ethnographic knowledge making (Brown & Dobrin, 2004), however, have proposed that research participants be more involved in the drafting and formulating of descriptions made about them. In some ways, these new developments extend the poststructuralist preoccupation with representation, where scholars critical of mid-twentieth-century anthropology contended that the structural frames it had developed were laden with power (Foucault, 1976/1990, 1975/1995), historically inaccurate aesthetics (Said, 1978; Minh-ha, 1991), and prioritised some frames over others, leading to defects in reason and descriptions of reality (Derrida, 1967/1998). In addition to its interest in further engaging research participants in a participatory approach that generates information on meaning ‘from the ground up,’ ethnographic mapping seeks to add a spatial component that complements the interpretivist aims of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973).

Building from Kingslover et al.’s (2017) description of ‘cultural mapping’ as “a broad technique that may be used in two general ways by anthropologists: to keep track of the social scientist’s own findings...or as a method for understanding how those being interviewed are themselves mapping whatever is being studied” (p. 307), ethnographic mapping is interested in the latter function. In considering how these maps take form, there is an element of choice on the type of map selected for these mapping activities. With this comes a responsibility to present research participants with multiple mapping possibilities, some involving a certain level of training (Caquard et al., 2019), and all of which assume different degrees of involvement (or interference) from the ethnographer. These cartographic approaches can be classified under two categories: (1) professionalised/traditional cartography and (2) counter-mapping (Wood, 2010).

For the former, a participatory approach involves using general reference and thematic maps¹⁹ and adding cartographic elements based on participants' spatial descriptions (for an example, see Brennan-Horley et al., 2010). As described by Crampton (2010), widespread democratisation of spatial data and tools has facilitated this type of work, opening new methodological approaches in qualitative and public participation geographic information systems (QGIS and PPGIS, respectively) (Brown & Kyttä, 2014; Sieber, 2006). The development of these professionalised participatory maps has been successful in the areas of indigenous, rural, and community development, environmental and natural resource planning and management, urban and regional planning, and in developing mapping tools and technology (for a review, see Brown & Kyttä, 2018). While the outputs from this approach are likely to be appealing if relayed to technocratic and management-focused professional circles — areas of work that may have greatest familiarity and comfort in interpreting traditional grid-system maps — they do so at the expense of rich ethnographic information that may be collected through the mapmaking process. As recognised by Caquard et al. (2019, p. 1):

...the elusive geographies of memories don't easily overlap with rigid Euclidean structure of the conventional map...to map memories would inevitably require that memories be distorted in a way that fits a rigid cartographic structure, or to distort this structure in a way that would accommodate memories.

Similar to the internal tension vis-à-vis representation within anthropology, critical geographers have made laudable critiques of professional cartographers' claim to scientific, authentic, and 'true' representation of geographic space (Harley & Woodward, 1987; Wood, 2010; Wood & Fels,

¹⁹ Described by Eckert and Joerg (1908) as the two primary classes of professional maps.

2008; Woodward & Lewis, 1998). Through problematising these representational limitations, ‘counter-mapping’ has emerged as a new approach over the last twenty years or so. Counter-mapping is generally described as mapmaking practices that provide alternative representations of space with a distinct interest in formulating maps through a methodology that is inclusive of research participants (Hodgson & Schroeder, 2002; Peluso, 1995). In developing these counter-representations, maps produced within this scholarly area have also helped articulate counter-narratives about people’s relationships, histories, and cultural affinities to spatial elements. Where there is increased scholarly interest in decolonising methodologies (Cruz, 2008; Lincoln & González y González, 2008; Smith, 2012; Sundberg, 2013), challenging “imposed, exploitative research [that] denies respect for alternative ways of knowing [and] undermines trust and sabotages communication and collaborative exploration” (Howitt & Stevens, 2016, p. 51), counter-maps have been used to visualise counter-narratives of colonialism, dispossession, and occupation (Chapin & Threlkeld, 2001; Segalo, Manoff, & Fine, 2015). In confronting both academic and professional interpretations of native mapmaking as ‘primitive’ (Aberley, 1993), counter-mapping has been particularly productive in bridging the relationship between positivist methodologies of representation and indigenous territorial knowledge (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017; Wainwright & Bryan, 2009; Hirt, 2012). More recently, discussions on utopian mapping in projected and fictional spaces have emerged (Bonnett, 2018; Wakeman, 2016), where literature from feminist and queer studies on performativity (see Butler, 2009) has opened up new methodological horizons whereby “a performative approach sees mapping as not only taking place in time and space, but also capable of constituting both [where] new worlds are made every time a map is deployed” (Perkins, 2009, p. 127). In yet another development in counter-mapping, hand drawn and computer-assisted mental

maps (also termed ‘cognitive maps’) have been used to help decipher people’s attachment to and perspectives on places in the present or through the recollection of memories (Gieseeking, 2013).

While the diversity of possible mapping approaches can certainly be overwhelming, this equally demonstrates their ability to represent a diversity of social, cultural, and political settings. The use of topographic maps may be more appropriate when the key priority of a community, say dispossessed through land grabbing, wishes to spatialise ancestral land tenure. Counter-maps may be preferred in areas where local people have never had the opportunity to participate in formal mapping activities, perhaps as a result of historical colonialism that denied locals participation in mapmaking exercises. Research participants may choose to spatialise memories through mental maps or imagine their futures in a utopian iteration of such. Yet again, there need not be a divide between professionalised and counter-maps, as several scholars have devised sophisticated methods to merge technological/quantitative/‘representational’ spatial methodologies with more descriptive/qualitative/‘non-representational’ ones (Boschmann & Cubbon, 2014; Caquard et al., 2015, 2019; Kwan & Ding, 2008; Merschdorf & Blaschke, 2018). Ethnographic mapping, thus, is purposefully flexible in this regard, as the spatial representation component of its craft is tightly bound to the process of ethnography and the understanding and negotiation of community preferences that transpire through it. This constitutes an important core principle of ethnographic mapping: that the visual be informed by the community through open participation and narrative ethnographic analysis. Another guiding principle includes a specific consideration for the analytical interdependency between mapping and writing, which are both tools that assist the ethnographer to understand how meaning unfolds over space and is constitutive of relationships, symbols, institutions, and the like. As noted by Perkins (2009, p. 128), “by observing and participating in the performances around mapping we can explore its relations to identity, how

different spaces are co-constructed, and the ways in which people behave when carrying out mapping tasks.”

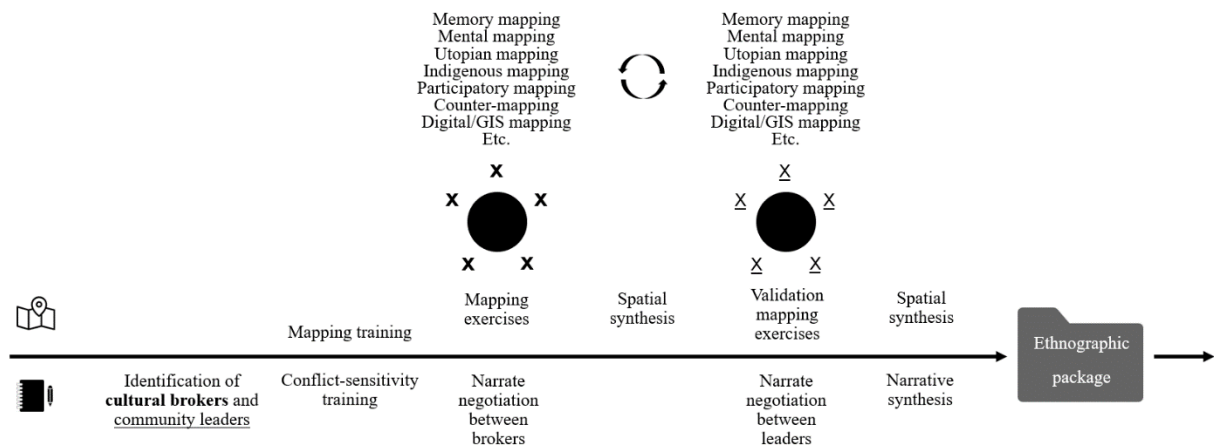
This ‘ethnographic package’ of visuals (maps) and narratives (descriptive writing) requires an earnest commitment by anthropologists to engage with mapping, geographers with ethnography, or practitioners and other scholars to appreciate basic principles of cultural geography. Here, users of ethnographic mapping should understand that while absolute representation is impossible, interdisciplinary tooling may lead to richer descriptions of people, places, and spaces. This is based on an appreciation of the vibrant synergies between geographical and anthropological theory that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, one that saw an increased appreciation for pluralistic views on place, multivocality, and the shifting nature of the relationship between geographic space and culture in research contexts increasingly impacted by dislocation, displacement, and deterritorialisation (Appadurai, 1988a; Feld & Basso, 1998; Gupta & Fergusson, 1992; Rodman, 1992). As contended by Low (2014), mapping and spatial techniques augment classic ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, making up the “toolbox for deciphering the role of culture in the production and construction of space and place” (p. xxii).

Ethnographic mapping stands as an interdisciplinary tool that can provide multiple routes to understand social realities. For participants, it offers multiple ways to communicate their perceptions. For ethnographers and other practitioners managing its implementation, the set of tools ethnographic mapping assembles leads to the output of rich multidimensional datasets. In the next section, we focus on this article’s interest in developing a method that can collect and synthesise peace and conflict-relevant information from refugees in exile. A general model for the use of ethnographic mapping in refugee contexts will be provided.

A GENERALISED MODEL OF USE IN REFUGEE CONTEXTS

We now turn to the elaboration of a proposed generalised model for implementing the use of ethnographic mapping in refugee contexts. As visualised in Figure 3, the process of ethnographic mapping can be seen as a two-pronged approach where spatial/mapping exercises are operating in tandem with narrative/descriptive composition (i.e., ethnographic writing).

Figure 3: A generalised model of use for ethnographic mapping in refugee settings.



As described in the previous section, mapping strategies should be based on a participatory model of decision making and community preferences, interests, and perspectives. It is thus advisable to undertake substantial participant observation prior to the use of mapping exercises. Participant observation is understood here as “a *long-term* intimate engagement with a *group of people* that were once strangers to us in order to know and experience the world through their perspectives and actions in as *holistic* a way as possible” [emphasis in original text] (Shah, 2017, p. 51). Within the context of forced migration research, this should also include “the collection of detailed oral histories and life stories; by telling their own stories to the researcher, refugees

themselves and the ethnographer her or himself are able to develop a narrative analysis” (Loescher, 2014, p. 322). As described by Chapin & Threlkeld (2001), participant observation is also a key groundwork procedure in assembling a community of research participants that is broadly representative. Here, it is proposed that participants be divided into two broad groups: ‘cultural brokers’ who stand as representatives of different cultural groups within the refugee setting (Smith, 2009), and ‘community leaders’ who crosscut these cultural boundaries.

Once these groups have been formulated, training may be necessary. In potentially volatile contexts, or in settings where internal tensions exist within the refugee community, conflict-sensitivity training of participants may be considered and desirable. Furthermore, as this may be participants’ first experience with mapmaking, exposure and training on a variety of spatial representation methods are important in order for participants to make an informed choice on which mapping method(s) they want to use (Caquard et al., 2019; Cochrane, Corbett, & Keller, 2014). During these training exercises, refugees should be encouraged to articulate what type of information they would like to map (for instance, memories about their place of origin, the journey of migration, prospects of return, etc.). These discussions and negotiations should be recorded through detailed ethnographic writing.

Once recruiting and training is completed, the first round of mapping exercises takes place. It is suggested that the cultural brokers group take the lead on this, where the visualisations they produce then undergo a form of validation through comments and observations by community leaders who act as intermediaries and negotiate between potential disagreements across cultural groups. These comments, shown to be greatly informative in past work involving mapping with exiled persons (Caquard et al., 2019), may be in the form of writing, drawings, or new maps. Between both activities, the facilitator (researcher, ethnographer, or practitioner) may need to

make small interventions in order to synthesise the maps produced and simplify them for ease of use. Comments from the community leader group are relayed to the cultural brokers group and subsequent rounds of mapping are performed until participants are satisfied with the results, changing hands between cultural brokers and community leaders. Throughout the entire process, detailed ethnographic notes are taken on both the procedural development of the maps and the comments and negotiations occurring about the maps. These notes are particularly instructive in identifying themes and topics that cause disagreement and/or collaboration between participants.

Following the data collection stage, the facilitator develops a synthesis document that must consider both spatial representations and narratives in tandem. This document, or ‘ethnographic package,’ can be the result of inductive analysis where categories, themes, and conclusions flow directly from the data. However, the analysis can also be done deductively if ethnographic mapping is deployed to the field with the aim of answering specific questions or to gather pre-determined variables of interest. Notably, the deductive approach may be useful in the application of ethnographic mapping to inform needs-based peacebuilding programming from afar. In this case, ground-level practitioners can benefit from the rich data collected on specific issues such as land tenure, property claims, natural resource, conflict perception, ethnicity and demography, contested territories, and the like.

RISKS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the two previous sections define ethnographic mapping and provide a guide for its implementation, best practice, and possible context-based adaptations, this method remains largely untested. As is common in good scholarship, ethnographic mapping – like any newly proposed methodology – should be explored through the lens of its risks and ethical considerations. This

section should serve as a guide for researchers and practitioners who wish to use ethnographic mapping in forced migration settings. Equally important, institutional review boards or ethics review boards can use the following discussion when evaluating projects proposing ethnographic mapping as a central data collection and/or theory-building method.

The risks and ethical considerations of ethnographic mapping meet at the intersection of research with forced migrants, participatory methodologies, and mapping. In the case of research involving asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons, Clark-Kazak (2017) includes equity, right to self-determination, competence, and partnership as key guiding principles for research with people in situations of forced displacement, further aligning these principles to the practices of voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, and minimising harm while maximising the benefits of research. This unique context of research with especially vulnerable persons, however, adds to the complexity of these considerations. While vulnerability is often of greatest concern while working in the field, Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway (2007) ask that forced migration researchers see beyond the lens of vulnerability in order to explore how their work risks entrenching existing hierarchies that threaten participants' autonomy. This includes hierarchies that go beyond the community, and those that create power dynamics between participants and researchers, undermining the principle of free, voluntary, and informed consent (Hyndman, 2000). Long-term ethnography where the researcher incrementally becomes closer to the community can certainly help shore up these concerns, but this is largely dependent on the ethnographer's field abilities and their commitment to consistently revise the ethical implications of their research. Participatory methods can also be instrumental in subverting power dynamics on the field, but no single method is the road to the El Dorado of total inclusion. Willingly or not, participatory methods such as those suggested for ethnographic mapping will

nevertheless give voice to some while denying or obscuring those of others, and thus how they are used should be critically re-evaluated and adapted throughout the duration of field work.

Similar to our best efforts to develop inclusive methodologies, claims that ethnographic mapping produces accurate — or true — sociocultural representations should be examined with scrutiny. As explored in earlier parts of this article through the example of professional cartography, absolute representation is not possible. It is important that the material and symbolic value of maps produced through ethnographic mapping be seen in these terms. In their critical review of disaster-response participatory crowd mapping, Bittner, Michel, & Turk (2016) articulate that despite widespread rhetoric on the inclusivity of crowd mapping, this practice is usually organised and mostly used by privileged persons least affected by crises and disasters. They ask critical geographers to ‘look at the crowd,’ its composition and power structures, and evaluate the extent to which participatory methods of this kind are intrinsically participatory or — perhaps — entrench certain access barriers to vocality and participation. At the convergence of mapping technologies and the ‘representational trap’ are the potential risks of producing ethnographic maps that may express new forms of territorialisation or reify power dynamics. As Fox et al. (2016) observe, maps are tools of technology and “technologies are complex systems promoting and institutionalizing relational patterns aimed at realizing particular ends” (206), and so “even if the community can control the maps, it is important to understand the multiple interests and actors found within communities; and the political and economic relationships between communities and other social actors” (p. 210). Thus, while ethnographic mapping embraces the notion that research participants be part of the data collection process, rather than simply act as sources of information, outputs generated through this process should not be assumed to be politically or culturally inert. This is where cycling between cultural brokers and community

leaders (and perhaps others), as described in the previous section, is of great importance to the process of ethnographic mapping and the documenting of power dynamics between participants.

Despite the participatory penchant of ethnographic mapping, the way it takes form on the field and how its outputs are interpreted undeniably involve the researcher, ethnographer, or practitioner. This is well understood by some fields of knowledge and practice, and hence why forced migration anthropologists commit to long-term fieldwork, as there is wide agreement that with extended contact comes familiarity and trust with the community (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Hermann (2001) warns that the researcher is not a *tabula rasa* devoid of biases or proclivities – that researchers in conflict settings are at the centre of the struggle between positivist/objective and hermeneutist/subjective epistemologies, travelling between the role of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider,’ the process of personal reflexivity and participants’ personal histories, and how these align to this scale of involvement/investment. In accounting for this, ethnographic mapping embraces the principle of poly/multivocality (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Rodman, 1992), but as Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011) point out, how these voices are translated into meanings and understandings is filtered through mediating effects (Mills, 1990) that align to one’s positionality. Where misrepresentation stands as a risk to any form of ethnographic and qualitative research, there must be conscious recognition of biases and subjectivities. Research design should thus include measures, protocols, and opportunities for the community of participants to dispel, enrich, or correct the researcher’s interpretations and perceptions they deem erroneous.

Reciprocity should also make up a key tenet of best practice to conducting ethical ethnographic mapping research. In the case of forced displacement research settings, recent literature has focused on the harmful, exploitative, and potentially retraumatising impact of ‘parachute researchers’ who swiftly enter research sites, extract data, and then speak/write

authoritatively despite having established few meaningful relationships with those being spoken/written of or about (Migration Leadership Team, 2019; Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman 2010; Talhouk et al., 2019). While Smyth (2001, p. 5) characterises research that treats people as objects as ‘ethically questionable,’ Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway (2007) suggest that mere ‘minimisation of harm’ as an ethical standard is insufficient; researchers should instead “recognize an obligation to design and conduct research projects that aim to bring about reciprocal benefits for refugee participants and/or communities” (p. 301). They continue, arguing that “if researchers are in a position to assist refugees to advocate on their own behalf or on behalf of others...then it is morally incumbent on them to do so [but that] such involvement must be at the request of, or willingly agreed by, the refugees concerned” (ibid). In this case, however, the researcher is faced with what Jacobsen and Landau (2003, p. 186) call the ‘dual imperative’: “to satisfy the demands of academic peers and to ensure that the knowledge and understanding work generates are used to protect refugees and influence institutions like governments and the UN.” This brings us closer to understanding the distinction between ‘ethical research’ and ‘research ethics,’ where the latter is typically of greatest concern and follows certain sets of universal criteria such as voluntary and informed consent and the principle of ‘do no harm,’ whereas the former is more so a judgment of the intrinsic value of a research project in advancing normative objectives.

While other risks and ethical considerations certainly remain, the above discussion provides some signposts to the prospective user of ethnographic mapping and ethics committees that review such research projects. Free, voluntary, and informed consent and issues of confidentiality and privacy were not addressed here, largely because they are well-entrenched ethical norms. Established guidelines should be strictly followed, as is common practice in all forms of research involving human participants.

CONCLUSION

Literature on peace and conflict has often characterised return migration as a cause of new grievances and an important factor in destabilising fragile peace in post-conflict environments. Other literature in the area of refugee studies has asserted that while in exile, refugees maintain a strong attachment to their homeland. In an attempt to draw out practical intersections between both of these observations, and recognising that return migration remains the preferred durable solution for states and refugees alike, this article contends that more comprehensive information-gathering strategies in exiled communities can help the peacebuilding community understand the needs and claims of refugees prior to their return. As has been argued, data generated through these sorts of consultative exercises could prove critical in devising comprehensive peacebuilding approaches that address the ‘return migration as conflict generating’ problem head on. Scholars recognising this need have advocated for greater integration between localised peacebuilding initiatives and refugees at the margins. Milner (2015) has proposed three areas of research and policy that could further bridge the relationship between refugees in exile and homeland peacebuilding: (1) integration of displaced persons in reconciliation programmes; (2) greater interaction with and investment in refugees from the peacebuilding community; and (3) more cross-pollination between peacebuilding literature and refugee studies to develop rigorous understanding of their intersection and develop more robust intervention models. While these normative proposals can be reached through a diversity of programmes for research and practice, this article has developed ethnographic mapping as an approach that can contribute to the fulfilment of these priorities.

Through the process of mapmaking and descriptive notetaking during these exercises, ethnographic mapping can generate rich spatio-narrative data at the nexus of peace and conflict. Its outputs can be instructive to peacebuilders on the ground, whereby formulations of space and

power based on memories, hopes, desires, and claims can help inform responses and pre-empt potential peace-crumbling conflicts in the event of voluntary repatriation. As an approach anchored in anthropology and geography, ethnographic mapping is founded on concepts of great interest to the peacebuilding community, such as: ‘space’ as geographic orientation within and between sites of social activity (Harvey, 2005; Jiménez, 2003; Massey, 1993); ‘place’ as meaning, emotion, experience, and attachment to space (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2004, 2006, 2009; Entrikin, 1991, 1997; Low, 2009, 2014, 2017; Packwood, 2001); ‘territory’ as the distribution and negotiation of space through power (Appadurai, 1996b; Duarte, 2017; Munn, 1996; Vaccaro, Dawson, & Zanotti 2014); and ‘landscape’ as the ever-changing character of interactions between people and their natural environment (Cosgrove, 1998; Hirsch, 1995; Howard, 2011; Sauer, 1925).²⁰ In the analysis of data generated through ethnographic mapping, these conceptual tools have a great interpretive capacity to describe refugees’ perceptions and experience of power dynamics, how geographic space is negotiated, and potential pathways towards the reconciliation of conflicting identities. It is not without limitations, however, as this approach requires its implementor to have a certain degree of expertise in the practice of ethnography. An equally important limitation of ethnographic mapping is the time it takes to fully implement: the time period from arrival to the research site to the output of useful data for peace practitioners can potentially span several weeks, if not months. As a result, ethnographic mapping as a ‘slow approach’ does not seek to compete with fast, rapid-response, tools that focus on short-term outcomes. This is not to say, however, that qualitative data resulting from ethnographic mapping could not foreseeably enrich quantitative information gathered by ‘fast approach’ tools such as IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix.

²⁰ Some of the authors listed discuss these concepts in relation to each other.

In this article, ethnographic mapping has been largely conceptualised as a data-gathering tool — a methodology to better understand displaced persons’ needs and claims, and how these relate to conflict landscapes in transitions towards peace. This is largely a functional response to the current state of peacebuilding where refugee perspectives are seldom considered in decision making. Ethnographic mapping can help bridge this gap. In the long term, however, ethnographic mapping could foreseeably facilitate refugees’ direct participation in peacebuilding programmes, stimulating their engagement, instilling feelings of agency, and giving them opportunities to have ownership over conflict termination and durable peace.

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PREAMBLE TO CHAPTER 4

The following chapter is the first of two chapters based on fieldwork conducted at Mahama camp, Eastern Province, Rwanda. Tracking the ‘ethnographic mapping’ method developed in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 puts this approach into practice.²¹ Theoretically, this chapter is aligned with an ‘epistemology of imagination,’ attempting to unearth justified true beliefs (i.e., knowledge) through the examination of imagination (Stuart, 2021). Through a combination of interviews, a focus group, and the production of mental maps, it asks research participants to discuss – and relatedly, imagine – the process of repatriation.

Chapter 4 reveals that there are a number of issues that inhibit the process of imagining return. One issue is that of lingering trauma, where there is general agreement that there hasn’t been substantial traumatic resolve vis-à-vis violence they have faced. This calls for the need of increased psychosocial resources within the camp setting. In their own terms, they also want killers, perpetrators, and ‘bandits’ to be brought to justice, pointing to the need for legal institution-building in the DRC. Another issue is that of their citizenship with the Congolese *polis*, where they believe their identity as Banyarwanda puts them in somewhat of a ‘citizenship limbo’ where they are not considered Congolese nor Rwandan. Speaking to the findings of Chapter 2, the issue of citizenship – and particularly for those who have lived in extended exile – is something that would need to be addressed within future peace agreements in the Congo. Importantly, a last issue is that of the ineffectiveness of a drawn out MONUSCO peacekeeping mission in the Congo. For refugees, this is a mission that has largely failed in its objectives to build and maintain peace,

²¹ It should be noted, however, that results generated here have not yet been relayed to peacebuilding actors in the DRC. However, this is planned within the coming months.

leaving them to feel rather hopeless about the capacity for the UN complete their mandate within the eastern reaches of the DRC. Overall, they remain uncertain about the likelihood for peace, leading them to hesitate to engage in a repatriation movement.

Despite these issues, changes in lines of support – first by transitioning from food aid to cash-based transfers (CBT) by the WFP, and then through the recent limiting of CBTs with the introduction of a vulnerability prioritisation scheme – are prompting refugees to reconsider the repatriation option. As they describe, camp conditions have become increasingly ‘unliveable.’ When imagining repatriation, then, they envision access to housing, health clinics, and education, amongst others. They also have specific claims in terms of lost land and property, where they ideally want these returned to them and few find financial compensation adequate or realistic. Overall, a return to an agrarian lifestyle is constitutive of how they imagine their repatriation.

In linking this to previous chapters of this dissertation, findings from Chapter 2 do not bode well for the above. As psychosocial support and education count as some of the lowest provision commitments within peace agreements, both areas are indeed valued and needed by those involved in this research. It is also clear that issues related to land and property compensation and restitution need to be foregrounded for sustainable return to occur, suggesting that future peace agreements in the DRC must not replicate the denial of these issues as found in other peace agreements within the region.

(RE)IMAGINING THE CONGO: MENTAL MAPS AND REPATRIATION TALK FROM MAHAMA CAMP, RWANDA

STATUS: UNSUBMITTED

ABSTRACT

The repatriation of Congolese refugees currently hosted by Rwanda has been increasingly foregrounded. With most of this population having lived in refugee camps for over twenty-five years, this temporal reality has added to the pressure of resolving this situation of protracted displacement. Since 2018, UNHCR has been encouraging dialogue between the governments of Rwanda and Congo to negotiate a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement. This is cause for concern when considering the persistent evasiveness of peace and stability in the Congo. There is also limited evidence that Congolese refugees have a desire to return, and what would be needed for their repatriation to be safe and sustainable. This research addresses this question, asking refugees who live at Mahama camp to share their perspectives on repatriation and the bounds of how they imagine it. Through twenty-three long-form interviews and a focus group, this research shows that several factors constrain refugees' imagining of repatriation, namely due to lingering trauma, persisting issues related to citizenship, and limited success of peacebuilding in Congo. In this, the question of repatriation is met with great weariness and suspicion. Despite this, refugees at Mahama camp see their conditions of asylum as worsening, prompting them to rethink the viability of repatriation. Using the mental mapping method, this research shows that refugees value good connectivity between housing, schools, and health facilities, and access to land for agricultural and pastoralist activities. Excluded from repatriation talks currently predominated by political elites, refugees herein stake a claim that they ought to be consulted within this arena.

KEYWORDS

Refugees; imagination; repatriation; citizenship; peacebuilding; mental maps; DR Congo

INTRODUCTION

Repatriation constitutes one of several movements that make up the global phenomena of human migration. Academics of migration studies began to seriously examine repatriation movements during the final decade of the 20th Century, following several failed post-conflict return migration scenarios in the Balkans and African Great Lakes. These scholars showed that despite the 1990s being coined ‘the decade of repatriation’ by the United Nations (Macdonald & Porter, 2020; Crisp & Long, 2016), political and ideologically-motivated convictions about return migration as the natural and most optimal ‘durable solution’ – as opposed to local integration or resettlement – had taken precedence over evidence-based policy and practice. Ground-breaking case studies from around the world were presented in Black and Koser’s (1999) *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, standing as a particularly strong response to Harrell-Bond’s (1989, p. 42) call for urgent research “to test the assumptions which have been the basis for the policy of promoting repatriation.” Today, repatriation still remains one of the least explored areas of research in the arena of human migration, and states and international actors have not strayed from the paradigm that claims repatriation as the ideal solution to mass displacement (Bradley, 2013; Hammond, 2014; Gerver, 2018b). Further, new research examining commitments towards forced migrants in peace agreements shows that – in Africa, at least – repatriation far exceeds other durable solutions within discussions on conflict termination and sustainable peace (Parent, 2022).

Within Rwanda’s refugee hosting context, the question of repatriation has been increasingly foregrounded. Since 2018, UNHCR has been actively encouraging dialogue between the governments of Rwanda and Congo to negotiate a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement. While no official talks on this have taken place, a technical meeting in April 2019 had all three parties

agreeing on facilitating ‘go-and-see’ missions where refugees could visit potential return areas in the Congo (UNHCR, 2021b).²² While UN informants confirmed that forced migrants have not been involved in these high-level discussions, refugees indicated during recent fieldwork that repatriation is often stated as an option for Congolese when claims related to camp conditions and the provision of food aid are made. For instance, following a reduction of cash-based food aid from World Food Programme in January 2018, refugees at Kiziba camp wrote a series of letters to the Head of the UNHCR field office in neighboring Karongi. After weeks of silence on the issue, refugees walked to Karongi to protest the issue, where just prior to the shooting of at least eight refugees by Rwanda National Police, they were told by authorities that if unhappy they could always repatriate (Kalamo & Alfred, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019). In the more recent case of a mass relocation exercise in the second half of 2021,²³ where thousands of Congolese refugees living (primarily) at Gihembe camp were relocated to the remote camp of Mahama, local informants indicated that three options were presented to them: (1) to relocate ‘voluntarily,’ (2) to locally integrate, or (3) to return to Congo. Local integration, however, does not present a stable option as there is high unemployment for youth and those newly entering the labor market (Ndagijimana, Nzasingizimana, & Heshmati, 2018; Niragire & Nshimyiryo, 2017), or when considering widespread land shortages that make it difficult for Congolese to work within their familiar sector of employment (Ansoms et al., 2018; Leegwater, 2016). And in terms of repatriation, a ‘Gordian knot’ of continued intra and inter-group conflicts across a range of state and non-state actors in the Congo make this an unlikely – and importantly, unsafe – route for Congolese refugees (Stearns, Verweijen, & Eriksson Baaz, 2013; Stearns, 2021; Yonekawa, 2014; Murara, 2018; Lake, 2017). To summarize, these examples demonstrate how refugee grievances

²² These were interrupted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

²³ I witnessed this event first-hand.

within Rwanda are met with a strong-arm approach where a ‘Hobson’s choice’ gives the illusion that refugees can make decisions based on multiple possibilities when only a single viable option truly exists. Specific to the repatriation option, the fact is that refugee management actors in Rwanda have gathered very little information related to refugees’ perceptions and aspirations for returning to the Congo, at the exception of rather simple data on intention to repatriate collected as part of a larger verification exercise aimed at documenting the physical presence of refugees in the country through the collection of biometric data (UNHCR, 2022b, 2018b).

Based on qualitative research conducted at Mahama camp, the aim of this article is twofold. First, to present the views of refugees on the (im)possibility of repatriation, oriented in their subjective relationship to the homeland, their assessment of current peacebuilding practices in the Congo, and the difficulties of living in exile. Second, through the translation of their imagination into talk and mental maps, this article presents much needed ‘ground level’ insight on refugees’ own vision for the process of repatriation to the Congo. Research participants have been living away from their homeland for many years, and importantly, in encamped conditions where agency – both sensed and realised – is deeply affected by their neglect in decision-making. These facts, combined with the immaterial, not yet realised, and future-focused dimensions of this investigation, undergird the epistemology of imagination employed herein. The next section fleshes this out in more detail, tending to a conceptual framework that bridges imagination, encampment, and repatriation. I will then present the process and range of methodologies used for this research project. From here, research results will be discussed across three sub-sections. A short summarizing conclusion then follows.

IMAGINATION & REPATRIATION

Let us begin with a reflection on the vastness of imagination and how it interfaces with the phenomena of human (im)mobility:

Imagination ... accompanies the 'journey' in all its tempos, suspensions and directions, while supporting individuals and communities as they develop amid material, social and political constraints. Through imagination we can imagine ourselves being or becoming mobile, we can cross material borders and make mobility possible where it does not seem to be the case. (Cangià & Zittoun, 2020, p. 645)

Imagination as an ability, process, and practice, is complex and occurring within individuals whilst also being part of collective meaning-making. Old guard anthropologists of forced migration have often rooted refugees' imagination within their former homelands, focusing on how their memory and pre-displacement histories inform how they imagine their homeland in the present (Chatty, 2010; Malkki, 1995b). From the perspective of diaspora studies, Stuart Hall (1995) provides a more generous reading of migrants' imagination as it relates to home, where he contends that identity has multiple imagined homes where individuals are "capable of drawing on different maps of meaning and locating them in different geographies at one and the same time" (207). This approach has transcended to more recent work on transnationalism within the anthropology of mobilities, where terms such as 'simultaneity' (Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) and 'multiscalar social fields' (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2018) suggest a similar outlook, where it is contended that persons may indeed be engaged with, attached to, and imagine themselves within multiple geographic contexts. For those of us studying themes that implicate multiple geographies, such as repatriation, this is a welcomed theoretical development.

In thinking about how an ‘imagination of repatriation’ comes to life, we must tend to the forces that make up its filaments. Different imagery builds a generalised persona of the forced migrant, as completely apolitical or violently political, as victim of conflict or spoiler of peace, as economically productive or burdensome, as managed or overflowing, to name a few (Lems & Tošić, 2019; Milner, 2009; Sinclair, 2020). Independently or supported by each other, at different times (e.g. in ‘crisis-talk’ during crisis-making) and in different geographies (e.g. through spatial processes of racialization), these images lead to the construction of imaginaries around migration. And finally, these imaginaries are not isolated but overlapping, where people and groups who coalesce around relatively specific imaginaries about migration – the pragmatist, the social democrat, the no borders activist, and the white supremacist, for example – construe it as either good, bad, or somewhere in between. In considering repatriation, these are dimensions of the imagination that, depending on their nature, will limit, allow, or conceive refugees as being able to return and thrive.

This article does not to provide a holistic picture of migration-related imaginaries in Rwanda and the Congo, the two national geographies at hand, nor of the imaginative process of its peoples whose diversities play out with great richness in and across social fields. This is in and of itself the work of a lifetime. Instead, I tend to the ‘imagination of repatriation’ of a small group of Congolese refugees at Mahama refugee camp, and with a certain humbleness that what I write here is far from a ‘full picture.’ Researching imagination is not a simple and straightforward endeavour, as it is a process and practice that – in part – cannot be observed. Adding to this complexity is dizzying conceptual blurriness around imagination and its related lexicon (Salazar, 2020). With this, let me be as specific as possible on the conceptual framework used herein.

The different constellations of the ‘imag-’, in large part, point to a certain connectivity between subjectivity (i.e. an individualized form of imagining), collectivity (i.e. group formation through imaginative practices), and the symbolic (i.e. placeholder images and cultural artifacts that are imbued with meaning). As these individual parts do not passively come into being, and neither does their connection to each other, this article’s conceptual framework adopts Arjun Appadurai’s approach which qualifies imagination as a social practice:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. No longer mere fantasy ... no longer simple escape ... no longer elite pastime ... and no longer mere contemplation ... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practices), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. [emphasis in original] (Appadurai, 1996a, p. 31)

Describing the increased role of imagination in social life, he describes it as formulated by an ideational trifecta: “ideas of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the *imagined community* (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations” [emphasis in original] (Appadurai, 1996a, p. 31).

Allow me to clarify, beginning with ‘images.’ Here, it is the role of imagery and the visual in the construction of people, places, and ideas. Said (1978) and Minh-Ha (1991) have brought a postcolonial perspective to analysing the use of images in constructions of ‘the other,’ and Herman & Chomsky (1988) and bell hooks (1996) have done so through the prism of mass media and the

discursive reproduction of hegemonic power. Specific to refugee studies, scholars have pointed to the problematic use of water imagery to characterise refugees as flowing, invasive, and unruly (Baker & McEnery, 2005; Sinclair, 2020; Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017). In the case of ‘imaginaries’ (i.e., *imaginaires*), Appadurai’s nod to French scholarship signals a central focus on individual subjectivity. For Sartre (2004/1940), the imaginary consists of objects, places, and scenarios that are imagined through perceptual placeholders (‘analogons’); placeholders that have been developed through direct experience, descriptions by others, or are entirely fictional. Through subjectivity, affective bonds attach meaning to this imaginary. For Lacan, the imaginary is tightly bonded with the symbolic. Here, subjectivity attributes value to symbols, and the imaginary is representative of the subjective ego and its desires, alienation, and immediate position within the universe of symbols (Lacan, 1988). For Ricoeur, the imagination is to create images in the mind of things that are out of reach, and that may or may not exist elsewhere (Valdés, 1991). Whilst rather different from each other, these interpretations of the imaginary converge upon the features of subjectivity, dynamism, and its creative uses to engage with real, fictitious, and utopian spaces. And with particular attention to the symbolic, the imaginary gravitates around the use of imagery, as described above. The final constellation in Appadurai’s trifecta, the ‘imagined community’ as defined by the late Benedict Anderson (1983), refers to the coalescing of individuals around certain imaginaries, producing a sense of community (e.g. the nation, the clan, the cooperative, or in our case, the camp). This sense of community, in turn, manifests itself in the abstract forms of values, morals, and worldviews, or in material forms such as symbols, rituals, practices, et cetera.

Moving forward with an epistemology of imagination, that is, attempting to unearth justified true beliefs (i.e., knowledge) through the examination of imagination, Stuart (2021) describes imagination as “the ability to interact cognitively with objects not present to sensory

experience” (p. 1333). In his contribution to defining such an epistemology, he describes two processes of imagination. First, ‘imagination₁’ is the cognitive process defined as unconscious, automatic, low effort, and rapid, where one can effortlessly draw up a mental image of a purple elephant when one is mentioned. And second, ‘imagination₂’ is the cognitive process defined as conscious, controlled, and slow, where one must use effort to think about the beginning, end, and steps involved in a purple elephant juggling while riding a unicycle down Fifth Avenue. In returning to the processual dimension of Appadurai’s typology, where the imagined community is the result of collectively shared imaginaries which are built around imagery, the epistemology of imagination used herein tends to the latter imaginative process (i.e., ‘imagination₂’). Here, ‘repatriation talk’ and the production of maps (i.e., images) allow refugees to articulate some of the ‘steps’ that make up their imagination of repatriation. The next section addresses the methodological approach I use to undertake this task.

METHODOLOGY

In developing a methodology to examine different dimensions of imagination, I draw on Noel B. Salazar’s insight as a leading anthropologist studying the linkages between mobilities and imaginaries. As he rightfully points out:

We currently do not possess any precise scientific methods to know with certainty what people imagine ... in order to get access to what people imagine we still need to rely on how they translate their imaginings into observable expressions. These may take a variety of forms – oral, written, pictorial, symbolic or graphic – and include both linguistic and non-linguistic ways of producing meaning. (Salazar, 2020, pp. 769-770)

Here, he points to the task of bringing imagination into the physical world, materializing something that otherwise exists within the realm of cognition where experiences, thoughts, and the sensory intersect. Indeed, this involves a process of translation, and as with all forms of translation, loss is inherent. Thus, if A is to represent pure imagination as it lives within the mind of individuals, B corresponds to representations and observable expressions of A' (i.e., inexact and perhaps distorted iterations of A). In an epistemology of imagination, this is an empirical limitation that must be foregrounded.

Despite this, Salazar suggests that historical and ethnographic methods are well positioned within the study of imagination. Here, he writes that “although the precise workings of imaginaries are hidden from view, the operating logic can be inferred from its visible manifestations and from what people say and do” (Salazar, 2012, p. 866). Taking cues from this assertion that localized recounting of history (i.e., a ‘people’s history’) and field-based research examining sociocultural relationships and meaning constitute important pathways to studying imagination, I also suggest that geographic methods – namely, mapping – be included in this toolkit.²⁴ First, when considering images as an expression of imagination, as discussed in the previous section, and the postcolonial critique around the manufacturing of images of the ‘Other’ (Said, 1978; Minh-Ha, 1991), maps-as-images allow research participants to engage in defining their own visual culture. Relatedly, sociologist Nancy Lee Peluso has referred to this as the process of ‘counter-mapping,’ where groups who’ve been historically excluded from map-making processes are able to define their own spatial environments, real or imagined (Peluso, 1995; see also Segalo, Manoff, & Fine, 2015; Campos-Delgado & Campos-Delgado, 2018; Hunt & Stevenson, 2016). This leads to a second

²⁴ Through the concept of ‘spatializing culture,’ anthropologist Setha Low (2017, 2014) has also argued for the use of mapping as a way to augment classic ethnographic approaches.

point, where different forms of mapping²⁵ provide a unique ability to spatialize knowledge and features that are otherwise abstract, including those that reside within imagination. And third, the process of mapmaking adds a social dimension whereby “observing and participating in the performances around mapping we can explore its relations to identity, how different spaces are co-constructed, and the ways in which people behave when carrying out mapping tasks” (Perkins, 2009, p. 128). Relative to the study of imagination, these performances can signal nuances between subjective imaginaries within a community. Conversely, when imaginaries overlap and share features, this may point to knowledge and worldviews foundational to an imagined community.

Using a combination of ethnographic and cartographic methods, and through a methodological process I have described as ‘ethnographic mapping’ (Parent, 2020b), data for the research project at hand was collected at Mahama refugee camp over the course of four and a half months. Initially, my intention was to adopt a ‘participant-as-observer’ role, where I would become deeply enmeshed within the daily activities of the community through the life of my informants (Takyi, 2015). Soon after my arrival to Mahama, I realised this would not be possible for a range of reasons. Despite my best intentions, curiosity, and desire to engage in daily activities, my identity made this both difficult and problematic. As a white person, residents at Mahama associated me with a perceived ability to effect change to their material reality. Despite elaboration on my role as a student researcher, the majority of individuals I met could not forego their perception that I had a direct line of communication (and impact) with state and UN workers. When attempting to do various daily tasks, friends in the making were consistently disallowing

²⁵ Here I am referring to the ever-expanding number of mapping practices within the disciplines of geography, anthropology, and sociology. Amongst others, these include memory, concept, and mental mapping, the production of indigenous and utopian maps, specific practices of participatory and counter-mapping, or the leveraging of technology to produce digital maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

me to directly participate in a range of activities, largely on a premise of reciprocity. As exemplified by one of my informants, following an incident where I picked up a spoon to mix a brewing pot of *isombe*, “No, you cannot do this. Let me make the food and maybe later you help my family. You can call Geneva.” After several moments like this, I came to the conclusion that the participant-as-observer position would perhaps lead to the building of expectations. My identity as male-identifying also posed a problem. Since daily activities are highly gendered in this space, I realised that the participant-as-observer would limit my social contact to male-exclusive spaces, and importantly, that attempts to communicate and engage with women would be seen as a transgression. I therefore decided early on to adopt the observer-as-participant role, where observation take precedence over participation. Through this modality of community engagement, a certain distance between myself and the community allowed me to engage with camp residents in a freer flowing manner. It is true that a level of intimacy was sacrificed, but this seemed like a fair trade off when considering the management of expectations and respect for community values.

I eased into this role through daily walks around the camp, making pit stops along the way to visit friends in their homes, shop tenders, people lining up for water and gas, and women hanging around in the morning sun. Camp residents often joined me in my walks, where I would take notes based on their stories, recounting of history, daily gossip, and running commentary on the physical features of the camp environment. Through a contact made in the first few weeks in Rwanda, during a training on qualitative research methods I delivered to a group of practitioners in Kigali, I also hired D and E to help with interviewing. D, my field assistant, helped with recruitment and managed the interview schedule. E was my interpreter.²⁶ In total, we conducted 23 interviews, each

²⁶ The majority of interviews were conducted in French (n=15) and a few of the participants opted to speak English (n=2). The remaining interview participants (n=6) spoke in Kinyarwanda. E was present for fifteen of the interviews. Despite the majority of interviews being conducted in languages I speak (i.e., English and French),

lasting between forty-five minutes and two hours. Recruitment of women was difficult due to cultural conventions related to the perceived value of female perspectives in questions deemed ‘political.’ Whilst my field assistant and I devoted far greater time recruiting women participants, we found that many embodied this cultural norm, often refusing to participate on the grounds that they did not believe they would have anything to contribute to the topic of repatriation. The interview sample is therefore gendered, made up of sixteen men and seven women aged between nineteen and sixty years old. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with some core questions traversing all interviews but allowing for probing questions when appropriate. I began each interview by asking participants to recount their life story to me. I followed this by asking if they ever considered returning to the Congo, and what would need to happen for them to make such a decision. Interested in exploring their sense of agency within this process, I then asked how they believed they could participate in facilitating a durable form of repatriation, either whilst in living in exile or upon return to their country of origin. I ended each interview by asking participants to draw a sketch of an idyllic return to the Congo, prompting them by asking them to imagine themselves at the top of a hill looking down to their place of return. This led to the production of ‘mental maps,’ understood here as the translation of internal representations of spatial knowledge (i.e., cognitive maps) via sketching, labelling, and drawing exercises (Kitchin & Dodge, 2007; Gieseeking, 2013). Examples of these mental maps, discussed later, are provided in Figure 2 (panel A) below.

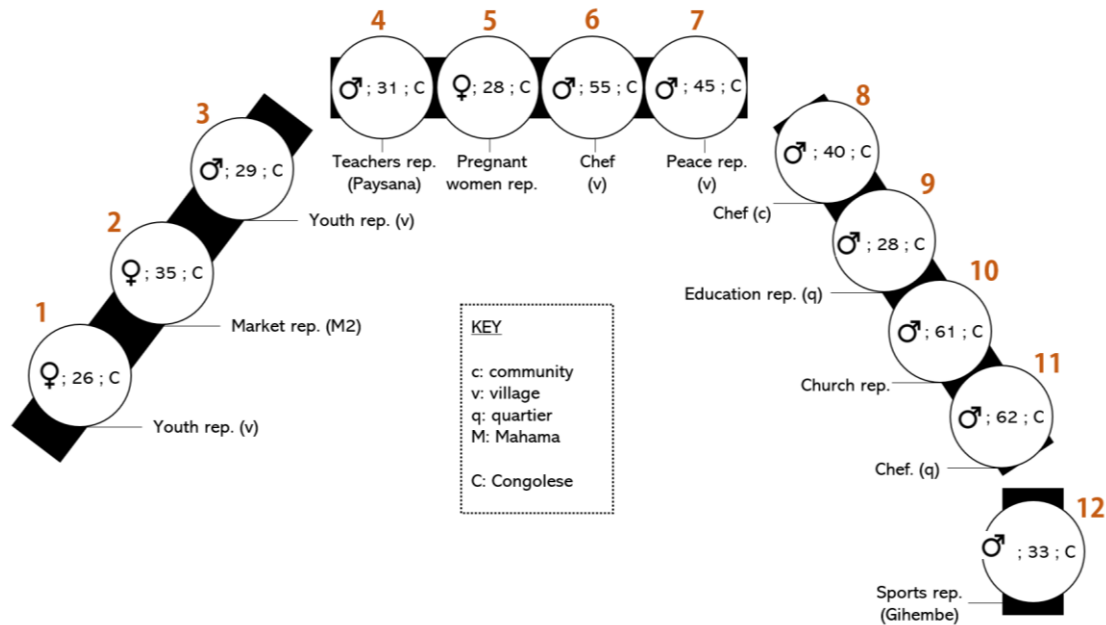
Following the interview phase, the resulting mental maps were analysed using an inductive coding method (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020), where common map elements were counted

participants often drew on E’s presence to explain certain ideas in their native language of Kinyarwanda. The focus group session had participants speaking all three languages.

to establish frequency. Once tabulated, a composite choropleth map was designed by myself (see Figure 5, panel B). Here, the frequency of each element is indicated by its colour. The logic of producing this composite map was threefold. First, to summarize the physical space of repatriation as imagined by interview participants. Second, to facilitate the orienting of ‘repatriation talk’ within a spatial dimension. And third, to develop a visual prompt that could be used in a focus group setting where new research participants can reflect and comment on spatialized interview data.

Interview data revealed a commonly shared desire to engage in decision-making processes around repatriation. Wanting to be included in broader political conversations currently occupied by UNHCR and the governments of Rwanda and Congo, refugees indicated that the formation of a camp-based advocacy group could help elevate their claims, needs, and desires towards these upper echelon discussions. In determining who should be included in the post-interview focus group, our small research team decided that it would be interesting to hear from persons who currently hold leadership roles at Mahama. Purposive sampling was then used to identify and recruit focus group participants.

Figure 4: Focus group participant identifiers and seating arrangement (n=12).



In total, twelve participants were involved in the focus group. Figure 4 provides descriptive information for each of the participants, along with the seating arrangement of the focus group session. All participants provided verbal consent for their roles to be included in outputs related to this research. Given the relatively high number of participants, a structured focus group format was used, asking a select number of questions around perceptions about repatriation. As the final exercise, the focus group was split into smaller groups of four persons, where each group was provided a copy of the above-described composite map. After a brief explanation of how this map was produced, each group was asked to comment through annotating, additional drawing, and ranking of geographic features.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Constraints to the imaginative process: Trauma, citizenship, and peacebuilding

Prior to my arrival at Mahama camp, I was inspired by Appadurai's (1996a) contention that the imagination is no longer a process of fantasy and escape, nor an 'elite pastime.' It seemed to me that he was pointing to somewhat of a democratization of the imagination, optimistically framing modernity as a moment of imaginative liberation. After some time on the field, however, it became clear that Appadurai's assessment was rather idealistic. Fieldwork at Mahama revealed that while refugees here were eventually able to use their imagination to formulate a future repatriation scenario, the starting point was usually qualified by generalized weariness, apathy, and hopelessness. While many of those I interviewed expressed interest in eventually returning to the Congo, as we shall see later on, *how* and *when* this process should happen, and *what* would be needed in terms of conditions of return was often prefaced with a range of factors that pointed to the impossibility of repatriation. In adopting an epistemology of imagination, my prompting of refugees' imaginative process revealed that several factors constrained it, namely lingering displacement-related trauma, uncertain conditions of return, persisting issues of citizenship, and limited success of peacebuilding in the DRC. The presentation and discussion of research results begins here, teasing out these factors that stood as important barriers to the imaginative process. I do this by drawing in philosophical readings on the limits of imagination.

The imaginative process is not merely a drafting of fictional imagery. Philosophers have compared the process of imagining to that of modeling, where different types and forces of constraints have an impact on one's ability to imagine (Salis, 2020; Kind, 2022). The result is that when constraints are high, imaginative models articulated in the mind, during future talk, or when engaging in thought experiments can be limited. Within this research, lingering trauma amongst

research participants proved to be an important constraint to imagine an eventual repatriation to the Congo. As explained by M, “You need to understand that everyone has a unique situation. ... many of us that stayed [those that never decided to repatriate] are the ones that had an experience that touched our heart. And that’s really hard to move on from.” B, whose parents and five siblings were burnt alive by *Interahamwe* when living at Mudende camp bordering the Congo, felt similarly: “there’s too much pain associated to Congo. No matter the change that happens there, I will never go back.” As a victim of torture and left with only one remaining hand, she explained that in addition to traumatic memories discouraging her thinking about repatriation, she had doubts that those coordinating this process would adequately consider her physical disability. When speaking with I2, one of the few Congolese I interviewed that arrived during the *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M23) rebellion,²⁷ he explained that he had already given Congo a second chance. His parents had been killed in 1996, and while he remained unsure who or what group was responsible for the murder of his father, he was sure that his mother was shot by members of the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), a predominantly Hutu armed group still active in the region. Following their death, he had been adopted and moved to Kitshanga until his displacement in 2012. Making a conclusive statement on repatriation, I2 affirmed “My parents were killed and I suffered so many struggles. There is no reason to return.”

In refugees’ hesitation – and for those above, overt refusal – to consider repatriation, difficulties in imagining a suitable model of repatriation spoke to ‘context-specific constraints’ such as those oriented in the ‘reality principle’ (Salis, 2020). The ‘reality principle,’ discussed in Kendall L. Walton’s *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1993), introduces the notion of closeness where

²⁷ The *Mouvement du 23 mars* was established in 2012 following the defection of soldiers from the Congolese Army. The armed offensive between M23 and the Congolese Army lasted from April 2012 to November 2013.

one's imagination is highly dependent on what they deem to be real. In the words of Kind (2022: 1), "imagers often constrain their imaginings to ensure they line up with certain facts about reality." For the imaginers in question, the most proximate memory of reality in the Congo was that of fear, loss, and the murder of kin. Understandably, this memorialized reality – supplemented by more recent (yet still violent) information from friends and relatives who remained in the Congo – was not conducive to imagining repatriation. The temporal disconnection between pre-displacement pasts and the present, where most of my interlocutors fled to Rwanda in 1996, added to refugees' problematizing of repatriation as realistic or even worth imagining: "Even if I wanted to return, it has been more than 25 years since I left. I don't remember what it looks like or what is there. I know almost nobody there. How do you start again in a place you don't know? It's strange to imagine returning" (KM).

Contrasting to the reality principle, which points to the limits of individual subjectivity and the formation of private imaginaries, Walton (1993) also introduces the 'mutual-belief principle.' This principle contends that imagination is also defined by mutually held beliefs within a group. Pointing to intersubjectivity, I would argue that this is one way to identify specific beliefs held by an 'imagined community.' One particularly salient mutual belief was related to questions of citizenship. Within the context of the focus group, the Teachers Representative provided some insight on this issue:

In Congo, we are not recognized as its people. They are not asking us to return because they don't think we are Congolese because of our history. They think we are Rwandese. This is an issue that needs to be discussed between the governments of Rwanda and Congo. What nation do we belong to? Maybe then we can move forward with our lives.

Virtually all research participants pointed to the shared issue of Banyarwanda citizenship in Congo.²⁸ The history of Banyarwanda in Congo is deeply connected to the production of what Mahmood Mamdani (2016) calls a ‘citizenship crisis’ in the Congo, where this population can be divided into three distinct groups based on when they migrated to the Congo: (1) nationals, rwandaphones who arrived in the Congo prior to Belgian colonisation; (2) migrants, Rwandans who came to Congo as labor migrants or were transplanted in order to work for the Belgian *Union Minère*, the mining conglomerate (1925-1931), the CNKI, the plantation oligopoly (1928-32), or for individual settlers; and (3) refugees following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2016). In 1971, the Banyarwanda were hopeful that their citizenship status would be resolved in Congo, when then-President Mobutu Sese Seko²⁹ introduced a citizenship law through the ideology of *authenticité*. Through this, Rwandans and Burundians arriving before 30 June 1960 would be considered Congolese citizens. Despite this, a series of citizenship-related parliamentary debates during the 1970s continued Banyarwanda uncertainty around this issue. In 1981, the Zairian Parliament revoked the 1971 law, establishing that only those being able to demonstrate Congolese ancestry back to 1885 would be considered citizens, effectively denationalising most Banyarwanda. Since then, the years of 1960 and 1885 as temporal determinants for Banyarwanda

²⁸ The prefix *banya-* in Kinyarwanda translates to “those who come from.” The literal translation of Banyarwanda is “those who come from Rwanda.” Depending on the literature, this group is also referred to as Rwandaphones (speakers of Kinyarwanda). Banyamulenge is also used in the literature, referring to Banyarwanda who live in Mulenge, province of South Kivu. Autesserre (2010) contends that this regional substitution of the *-rwanda* suffix to *-mulenge* began in the 1960s, when this group wanted to distance themselves from emerging descent-based and nativist narratives in the province of North Kivu. While not all Banyarwanda identify as Tutsi, as is the case for those of Rwandan-descent living in Rutshuru and Masisi who are predominantly Hutu (Mamdani, 2016), this term has endured an etymological transformation through its use in ethnic politics. As such, Banyarwanda are often considered as Tutsi. Through mindful consultation on self-identification with my interlocutors, I refer to them according to their preference, as ‘Congolese Tutsi’ and meaning Tutsi of Rwandan descent who – prior to displacement – lived in Congo.

²⁹ Mobutu Sese Seko was President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1965 to 1971. The country was renamed Zaire as a result of the *authenticité* ideology, and Mobutu Sese Seko continued as its President from 1971 to 1997 prior to fleeing to Morocco during the First Congo War.

citizenship have ping-ponged through Congolese Parliament with no clear resolve (Kamunga, 2022; Mandy, 2018).

This has been complexified through greater (and more violent) ethnicization of the Banyarwanda following the arrival of refugees during the 1994 genocide in neighboring Rwanda. Consisting of both Tutsi fleeing genocidal violence and Hutu extremists and *Interahamwe* escaping advances by the *Front patriotique rwandais* led by now-President Paul Kagame, camps in Congo included members of both groups. Following the of launching attacks against Tutsi living within their own camps of residence, *Interahamwe* Hutu extremists soon began to roam the countryside and targeting Congolese Tutsi (i.e., Tutsi Banyarwanda) through collaboration with the Congolese Army and indigenous self-defence forces known as Mai Mai or Simba; these were groups that already resented Tutsi presence in the region (Mamdani, 2016; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2003). As described by I, “We Tutsi were vulnerable. Many people in Congo did not consider us as from there. But when the *Interahamwe* came, the people who had hatred for the Tutsi, people in Congo did not respond to their violence. In a lot of cases, they were allies.” Recounting the months just prior to the armed offensive in the countryside, and when violence was still localized within close proximity to refugee camps, MM from the village of Bweza explained that “Hutus and Mai Mai in our area started saying ‘the Hutus from Rwanda will come help us’.” Violence against Congolese Tutsi contributed to a range of other factors prompting the First Congo War (1996-1997),³⁰ where Rwanda and Uganda were militarily implicated in the formation of the rebel fig leaf, the *Alliance des forces démocratique pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL) led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila who eventually replaced Mobutu as President of Congo. Reflecting on the

³⁰ At the exception of one person, all research participants included here were displaced either in the months leading up to or during the First Congo War.

range of armed groups that have come to life through Rwanda's involvement in Congo's eastern region, Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja (2003, pp. 229-230) notes that "what is most disturbing about Congolese Tutsi close to the RPF is that they and Kigali have taken it upon themselves to speak in the name of the entire Tutsi community in the Congo, by assimilating its interests with those of the RPF regime in Rwanda."

Congolese Tutsi refugees at Mahama therefore experience 'liminal citizenship,' understood as being "trapped between states of belonging and exclusion" (Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014, p. 195), and where recognition within a distinct citizenry cannot be identified. This mutual belief of their in-betweenness of Congolese and Rwandan identity makes the imagining of repatriation difficult and not so straightforward: "Rwanda says 'you are Congolese' but Congo says 'you are Rwandan.' We have no nation at this point ... We have never seen a representative from the Congo and the country never mentions anything about all of its exiles even though return is my right. Where do I go? Do I have a choice?" (M). Through the metaphor of citizenry-as-family, W expressed his sadness and sense of abandonment, "We are like children without a mother or father, never being asked to come home ... the DRC is not calling us ... How can I think about returning?"

Refugees' assessment on the limits of peacebuilding in the Congo constituted a final, clearly discernable barrier to their imagining of repatriation. When asking about the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and their collaboration with the Congolese Army, refugees were suspicious of their efforts:

I trust them [peacebuilders] too but we know it's not working. We get information from there. We have technology, you know? We get news from friends and our family who are still there. We heard that even this year there are people getting killed and

tortured and properties being taken. Organisations may be there physically but it doesn't mean the violence hasn't stopped.

– *Chef de village*

When I think about MONUSCO I feel unwell. You know, they are a business. They have been in Congo for all this time, and what have they accomplished? What are they doing?

– MM

They are weak. There are many groups of killers in the Congo, and although the UN is supposed to be strong, MONUSCO doesn't know what it's doing and fails to develop of sustainable strategy .. the army is weaker and even less organized than MONUSCO ... leaders in Masisi will support whoever has the guns and whoever can pay. It's a business and there is an economy related to the conflict.

– I2

The forces there, MONUSCO and the army, are not enough. The conflict just moves like water, flowing from one place to another

– D

A range of scholars share this skepticism of peacebuilding in Congo, pointing to the limits of its 'liberal peace' approach (Autesserre, 2010, 2016), the questionable reasoning and efficacy of its Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs (Stearns, Verweijen, & Eriksson Baaz, 2013; Stearns, 2021; Perazzone, 2017), the clandestine networks of client-patron

relations it has produced (Walker, 2014; Lake, 2017; Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, & Büscher, 2018), and the wide range of human rights violations that have been committed under its watch (Fuamba, Yonekawa, & Seegers, 2013), to name a few. This skepticism was indeed apparent in refugees' imagining of repatriation. Thinking again through a philosophical reading of imaginative constraints, an issue of mirroring seemed to be at play, described by Fiona Salis as the following:

Imagination displays mirroring when imaginings carry inferential commitments that are similar to those carried by isomorphic beliefs—that is, beliefs that have the same propositional content. If I believe that it is raining outside, I also believe that the pavement is wet. Similarly, if I imagine that it is raining outside, I also imagine that the pavement is wet. (Salis, 2020, p. 74) (see also Salis & Frigg, 2020)

Linking this to the qualitative record, refugee interlocutors with whom I spoke to did indeed believe that repatriation could be possible if peace returned to Congo (i.e., If I believe that there is peace in Congo, I also believe that I can return). When asked to imagine repatriation, however, this process of mirroring often collapsed because of disbelief that peace could ever be reached within eastern Congo. For example, after searching his words to describe an ideal return, KD shrugged his shoulders and pointed out, “Peace seems impossible to us. We don’t see this return happening.” In relation to another imaginative constraint of ‘vividness,’ the mind’s ability to imagine with detail, clarity, and intensity (Tooming & Miyazono, 2021), disbelief constrained refugees’ imaginative ability to produce a clear picture of safe and durable return to the Congo.

Prompting the imagining of return: Changes in aid and the pressure of unliveability

Examining refugees’ ability, scope, and desire to imagine an eventual return to Congo proved to be largely constrained, as described in the previous section. Here, I present and discuss results

which – albeit at a smaller scale – showed to prompt my interlocutors to think about return. To begin, let's examine a reflection by M2, who summarizes the main premise of this prompt:

We have been here for too long. We stay in camps and make little money. There is no job for us. We send our children to school, but for what reason? After many years we see this education doesn't mean a job. Some even go to university and still no job ... Now they implement a system of categorization for us to get a bit of money for food, and with these new categories most of us don't get anything. It's not just about having a small space and roof to sleep under. Life is more than that ... Maybe we make some friends or we have children. But for what? We can't make any plans. We have no vision. The camp doesn't give anything. Being a refugee is like being dead.

Fieldwork at Mahama did not confirm universalist assessments of refugee camps as 'non-places' (Augé, 1995) or as sites of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). Indeed, the architecture, site plan, and relative geographic position of the camp impose important limitations on the forms life that can inhabit this place, but my interlocutors insisted that Mahama is still a place imbued with community relations, social networks, forms of labor, and political bodies. After decades of asylum in these spaces, however, a sense of existential attrition called upon a range of questions related to the meaning of life and what is considered 'liveable.' These are the reflections that led refugees to think about repatriation as a potential option, as exemplified by the words of the Church Representative within the context of the focus group: "Being a refugee is not good. We are not valued here in Rwanda ... We sometimes wonder what's the point of teaching [our children] if we know there's no job for them? ... Right now we have almost nothing so we need something to convince us that our birth country can provide us with a life."

A great number of persons I spoke to were frustrated with recent developments regarding food aid, often suggesting that this was making them reconsider staying in Rwanda any longer. To summarize, in response to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme changed its approach to cash-based transfers (CBT) in May 2021, introducing a prioritisation scheme to identify and target only those deemed vulnerable (WFP, 2021, 2022).³¹ This led to the development of three categories of vulnerability: (1) Vulnerable, amounting to 7,000 RWF (~7 USD) per month, per person, and usually for those who have a physical or psychological disability, or for families who have two girls within their family unit; (2) Semi-vulnerable, amounting to 3,500 RWF (~3.50 USD) per month, per person, an unclear category where persons must demonstrate some sort of need; and (3) Not vulnerable, receiving no money through cash-based transfers, and usually young and able persons, or for families that include boys.³² A change that was still fresh in the minds (and bodies) of refugees at Mahama, this caused great uncertainty about their sense of future in Rwanda. “I am in the third category and receive nothing,” explained G2, “if you are going to give asylum, you need to feed us, it is your responsibility ... so, we have gone from a war of guns to a war of hunger. Both are based on the categorization of people.” In several interviews, participants drew a connection between WFP’s socioeconomic categorization and historical ethnic categorizing in the region, suggesting that this programme – for some, at least – revived traumatic experiences of social ordering. This was confirmed during the focus group session, where members drew parallels between both logics:

³¹ Prior to May 2021, all persons received 7,000 RWF per month.

³² From the hundred or so persons I spoke with during fieldwork, only a few were considered for the first category of vulnerability. World Food Programme has not been transparent in releasing official figures on recipients of cash-based transfers within this new framework. WFP did not respond to any of my attempts to discuss this issue with them, either through email, by phone, or in person at their offices in Kigali and Mahama.

I think categorization is a violation of our human rights. And for me I do think there is some links between ethnic and economic forms of categorization. Before, Hutu and Tutsi were economic classifications and then it ended up creating conflict between these two groups. I don't know, but I think in the long run this sort of economic classification can create conflict again.

– Education Representative, Quartier

Most relevant here, though, were the parallels drawn between this prioritisation scheme and the recent repatriation of Burundian refugees. As described by G, “Before we [Congolese] were relocated here, it was only Burundians at Mahama. Some were already leaving Rwanda. That is true. But when the new categorization came, more decided to leave.” In another interview, D explained that as the situation in Burundi is more stable than that in Congo, decision-making for Burundians was more straightforward: “It is more difficult for us because Congo is still in conflict. But now we consider returning, just like the Burundians did ... this new categorizing is making life too difficult here.” Exact reasons for the mass repatriation of Burundians are not well understood, not least because of UNHCR's lack of data collection on refugee decision making within return scenarios. That said, data shows that between January 2021, when the new prioritisation scheme was announced, and May 2021, when it was put into force, the population of Mahama camp dropped by approximately 17%,³³ and sources at UNHCR confirmed to me that nearly all of these were Burundians who decided to repatriate. After several months of living under the pressure of this new system, V suggested that hard decisions were ahead: “We are getting weaker. Our children are losing weight and we have no energy to work. We can't live here

³³ Data sources from UNHCR (2021c, 2021d).

anymore, we will die ... I think Rwanda wants us to leave and this new categorization will force us to return to Congo so we can have some food in our belly.” Listening to this deprivation, and to the hard choice between risking return to Congo’s continued conflictscape or enduring undernutrition while enjoying relative safety at Mahama, made me question the liveability of refugeehood in Rwanda. I wondered: Would such human movement resulting from deprivation constitute a form of ‘survival migration’ (Betts, 2013), something like ‘survival repatriation’? However sinister, the next section explores how this prompt of unliveability translated into the imagining of a space of repatriation in the Congo, a place that would be liveable under the right conditions.

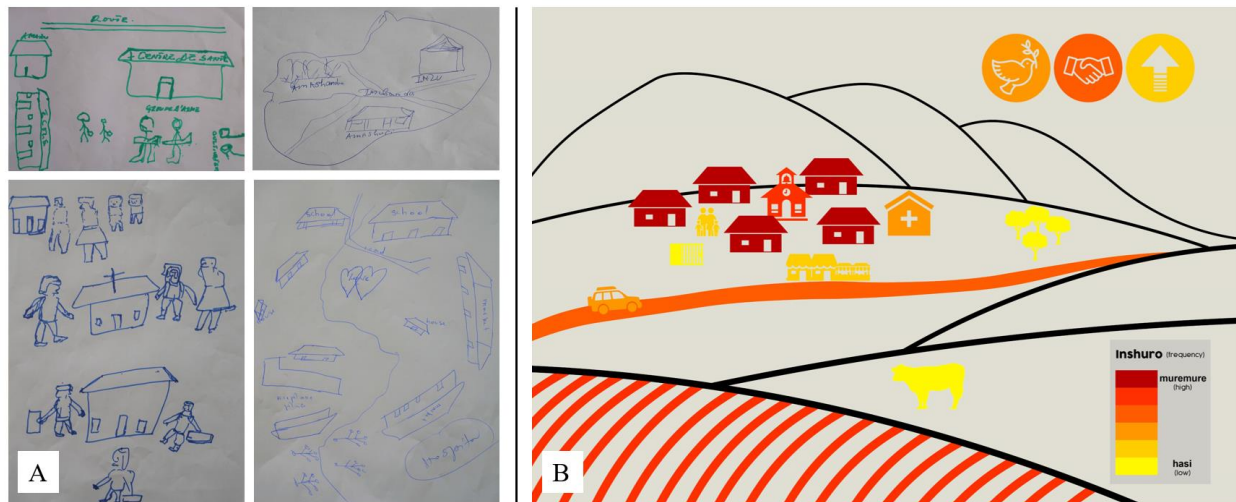
(Re)imagining the Congo

When moving to the mental mapping portion of the interviews, participants provided more detailed information on how they would imagine their repatriation and what their preferred landscape of return would look like. It was rather clear that drawing and producing a sketch was a more suitable mode of translating their imaginings into observable expressions. Visual imagery is considered to be the most common form of mental imagery, a cognitive faculty that is often referred as the ‘mind’s eye’ (Pearson, Rademaker, & Tong, 2011; Behrmann, Moscovitch, & Winocur, 1999; McAuliffe, 2015), and at least in this research, participants produced visual translations of their imagination that were more vivid, detailed, and concrete than in their verbal translations. These were also more hopeful and utopic than in their verbal descriptions of an imagined return to Congo.

As described in the methodology, individually produced sketch maps were combined to produce a composite choropleth map designed by the myself (see Figure 5). The most commonly sketched feature was housing, and when this map was reviewed in the focus group session, participants pointed to the small living quarters in Mahama. “I think it makes sense. After we were

relocated to Mahama, people now live in very small houses. We used to be more comfortable. We live too close now and parents can't share private moments," explained the Representative for Pregnant Women. Housing was often drawn alongside three other features: schools, health facilities, and mobility-enabling infrastructure. "One thing I will say is that people need to be independent. They need to be able to move from one place to another without fearing for their lives," G explained while narrating his sketch, adding that "in some villages, there is no school or clinic ... when there was tension in the area, children would not go to school because they could get stopped on the way ... that passage needs to be safe but if it's not possible we need more schools close to home." In another interview, W described Congo's roads as 'a nightmare': "It's impossible to quickly travel from one village and so it's difficult to access health facilities if something bad happens, or for our children to go to school if there's no school in the village. It also adds to insecurity because we can't flee quickly. The war has destroyed all the roads." Focus group participants were not surprised by this result, with some suggesting it should be higher on the scale of importance. As the *Chef de village* pointed out, "We've been stuck in camps for so long. I think we all have this feeling of wanting to be able to move." The 26-year old female village Youth Representative added to this reflection, "Absolutely. The young people, many would want to go back to their village. Maybe they would go back because that's where their parents bring them. But we also want to travel to bigger cities and enjoy busy places where there are many things for young people. We don't have that now."

Figure 5: Mental maps produced by interview participants (see Panel A for examples) were combined to produce a composite choropleth map showing the frequency of sketched features (Panel B) (N=22).



Turning to features related to land-based livelihoods, sketches pointed to the importance of agriculture. W situated this in the following way: “Our ancestors were ranchers and farmers. They had peace, connection to land. Before leaving, I had this too. I want this for my children, this peace you get when the land returns you gifts for your labor.” Focus group participants reiterated the importance of returning to a lifestyle centered on working the land, leading the majority to contest the low frequency of cattle raising. “This is surprising and I really don’t agree with cows being so low,” expressed the *Chef de quartier* in a rather frustrated tone. The Teachers Representative added to this: “Livestock needs to be the first and most important thing. This is the first thing the killers took from us and it needs to be the first thing that is returned ... many of us live from cows, for milk or meat. I would never return if this was not guaranteed.” Focus group participants unanimously agreed that having land and properties returned to them would be of great importance. I asked them whether financial compensation for these losses would be suitable, or if land outside of their villages of origin would be satisfactory. At the exception of the Sports Representative, financial compensation was not considered realistic or adequate by any of the focus group

members, underlining once again that returning to an agrarian lifestyle was of utmost important. Some agreed that being provided land elsewhere would make them consider repatriation more seriously, but others not. This division reflected findings gained through the interviewing phase, where some of my interlocutors were fixed on returning to their exact homes and land that had been cultivated by their ancestors, while others were more flexible on the location of return upon the condition that land was available.

The composite map generated other disagreements by focus group members, namely around the underrepresentation of certain features. Group participants were concerned with the low frequency of the sole security-related feature, identified as a prison. With some measure of worry, the *Chef de communauté* asked, “What will we do with all the criminals, killers, and bandits that are identified with this peacebuilding? Will we be expected to live with them?” The *Chef de village*, who gained positive reactions from the group, responded by suggesting that this would be determined during the reconciliation process, and that it would be the task of good governance to make these important decisions. The Church Representative piped in: “Yes, that’s why we added ‘*ubuyobozi bubi busenya itera mbere ryabaturage*’ [bad governance destroys community development] to our map.” The Teachers Representative, part of the same sub-group as the *Chef de village*, raised their map to the group, confirming the point made by the Church Representative and gesturing to their annotation “*ubuyobazi bwiza*” (good governance). The group also agreed that marketplaces should be more prominent on the map, and that churches should be included as well.

Specific concepts were sometimes included during the mapping exercise, as identified in the top right corner of the composite map where the dove is representative of peace, the handshake means reconciliation, and the upward arrow symbolises development. Focus group participants

agreed with the ordering of these three concepts, contending that reconciliation is the first step to achieving peace, and that overall development hinges upon the success of these two interconnected processes. A few members of the focus group, namely the peace, market, and educational representatives, believed that these should be higher on the scale of importance (i.e., higher frequency).

Focus group participants were excited about the composite map produced through the collation of individual mental maps. For the interview participants I had the chance to meet again, they too found the map engaging. As KA expressed a few weeks after she had drawn up her sketch: “This is very interesting. It gives an idea of what Congo could look like. It makes it feel real, like it’s a place we can return to or could exist.” M had a similar reflection: “This map means so much. We are never asked what we would want in Congo if we were to go back. This is something we can give UNHCR. We can even get more people to participate and make it a community project.” This locally produced and validated image provided a vision, it seemed. Beyond those who had explicitly participated in the production of this map, other refugees at Mahama and a good number of aid workers in the camp were animated by this visualization. This often led to broader conversations on mobilization, how this sort of image could be used as a tool for advocacy, or to get refugees organized around a common message for repatriation. In this, there was a feeling that these sorts of images can play a role in, first, understanding the vision of an imagined community of potential returnees, and second, facilitate its enactment where persons feel that they can demand political agency within otherwise high-level conversations on refugee repatriation. To varying extents, and with different positions of interest, most of the refugees I spoke with believed that their voice should be included in these decisions:

Repatriation is the most beautiful response to our situation, there just needs to be peace and more effective work by the government and agencies over there. The Congolese government should take the initiative and come visit us here and also work to improve Congo-Rwanda relations. If they come, they should sit down with the government of Rwanda, UNHCR, and refugee representatives should also be involved so we can all make decisions together.

– G

We are never given a chance to talk. The platform is small but we have big ideas. People up there [referring to UNHCR and the governments of Congo and Rwanda] just speak on our behalf like we don't know or aren't smart enough to see it. We should have a group that works with them.

– W

It is men who created this mess. Women are strong and are the solution. It would be good for women here to be connected to women in the Congo, to join the cause. We refugees are more powerful than MONUSCO. We are the children of Congo, not like MONUSCO who aren't even from there. Women are the solution and so we need to value women. MONUSCO needs to work with us, with the people who will bring development. They should stop working only with violent people.

– KA

Yes, we have skills and we have ideas, but our contribution will depend in governments letting us speak, firstly, and actually act on what we say, second. Let's at

least get to the first step, maybe through a group we create. The UN should ask Congo to come visit us so we can talk about your situation and our needs. There are many different opinions here but we need the opportunity to speak and not just see that the leaders stay there in Congo and not come see us. Instead, they give power to people with weapons instead of people with words.

– KD

Although somewhat disparate, these perspectives provide a small snapshot of the diversity of ideas, priorities, and scales of engagement refugees envision for themselves when considering repatriation. Importantly, a common thread is the desire to have voice in political discussions around return, suggesting that this enactment of an imagined community of returnees could take the form of a returnee association. The case of *Comisiones Permanentes de Representantes Refugiados Guatemaltecos* (CCPP) comes to mind as a potential building block for this type of mobilisation, a returnee association developed during the 1980s by Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. Despite some recognized failures in establishing a language of rights and duties between returnees and the state, and internal tensions within the group, this association is considered as largely successful due to its ability to gain legitimate representation in talks around Guatemalan repatriation, help establish institutions related to land and property restitution and compensation, and define the truth and reconciliation landscape in Guatemala (Stepputat, 1994; Krznar, 1997; Bradley, 2013; Long, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The aims of this article were twofold. First, to present the views of refugees on the (im)possibility of repatriation, oriented in their subjective relationship to the homeland, their assessment of current peacebuilding practices in the Congo, and the difficulties of living in exile. Through an epistemology of imagination, whereby explorations of the imagination are thought to provide unique forms of knowledge, some conclusions could be drawn. Most importantly, in examining refugees' imagining of an eventual repatriation to the Congo, an 'imagination of repatriation' if you will, this research shows that a range of factors impose constraints on their willingness, ability, or effectiveness in articulating such a possibility. Lingering trauma speaks to subjectivity within this matter, where refugees' own intimate experiences with loss and violence does not prompt the desire of return at an individual level. At a collective level, virtually all research participants pointed to the unresolved question of Congolese Tutsi citizenship as an important barrier to considering repatriation. Collectively shared observations on continued violence and skepticism on the success of peacebuilding in the Congo also factor as another constraint to the imagining of return. As such, through its exploration of emotion, identity, and the materiality of peace, this research shows that subjective imaginaries around repatriation are constrained, and that an 'imagined community' coalescing around repatriation views this movement with suspicion and may even resist it. That said, refugees at Mahama camp see their conditions of asylum as worsening, prompting them to rethink the viability of repatriation. Changes in the administering of cash-based transfers, a stand in for food aid provided by World Food Programme, are leading to difficult conditions in terms of nutrition. Refugees point to recent repatriation of Burundians following these changes, with some indicating that they feel this is part of a strategy to push them out of Rwanda. Not addressed here, but described in other research (see

Chapter 6), the recent relocation of Congolese refugees to Mahama camp also led to important losses of personal properties, businesses, and livelihoods-providing social networks, adding to their questioning of the liveability of exile.

The second aim consisted of translating refugees' imagination of repatriation through the modalities of talk and maps. This research showed that the later modality, the production of a map by exercising imagery, assisted in facilitating the former modality. Speaking through an image reference, either through interviewees narrating their mental sketches or focus groups discussing the composite map, revealed features of what would be considered a suitable area of return: good connectivity between housing, schools, and health facilities, and access to land for agricultural and pastoralist activities. The actual process of repatriation (i.e., people moving from the camp to Congo) was largely peripheral in refugees' imaging of return, perhaps as a result of the constraints above, but this research shows clear evidence that refugees want to be part repatriation-related decisions. As a political space what is currently occupied by UNHCR and the governments of Rwanda and Congo, refugees believe that they should be part of these discussions. In their reflections, there are signposts on how an imagined community of potential returnees could be enacted, potentially in the form of a returnee association.

This research provides much needed 'ground level' knowledge on refugees' perception towards repatriation, and relatedly, their imagining of it. Despite the proposition that refugees ought to be involved in conversations about repatriation that are currently predominated by political elites, this research provides evidence that refugees do not consider repatriation as a 'durable' solution. In fact, the question of repatriation is largely met with uncertainty and suspicion. With little proof that Congo is working on clarifying the citizenship of Congolese Tutsi, or lack of indicators pointing to greater stability in eastern Congo, repatriation is likely to be

dangerous for refugees and destabilizing for the region. UNHCR's current role in facilitating repatriation talks between Rwanda and Congo should center on addressing these issues. Moreover, if these talks prove unfruitful within these areas, UNHCR should publicly abandon repatriation as a durable solution and work with refugees to understand what other pathways are possible to addressing their protracted displacement.

This study is not without limitations. First, it is important to recognize the limits of focus groups. Within such settings, there tends to emerge forms of consensus-building that may not authentically represent the varied perspectives participants may have. In a cultural setting such as this one, where women are often believed to have less knowledge or interest in politics than men, there is the risk of reproducing gendered power dynamics within focus group settings. As the focus group played an important role in validating the mapping results, this should have been more carefully considered. Second, this research does not examine how the political context of Rwanda may be influencing how Congolese refugees imagine repatriation. This is an important line of inquiry that should be pursued in future research. And third, while this article uses a decidedly spatial approach – asking refugees to give a spatial character to their return through the production of maps – there remains a missing link in terms of spatiality: specifically, *where* would return take place exactly. This points to important links this research can be made within practitioner spaces that may be able to help identify potential return areas if peace were to return to eastern Congo.

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PREAMBLE TO CHAPTER 5

During fieldwork, it became clear that refugees at Mahama remain greatly connected to the land. As Congolese here enjoyed a pre-displacement past that was rooted in the soil, this is part of a shared heritage, and returning to an agrarian life is symbolic of peace. The previous chapter lays out the importance of land within the context of repatriation, but what if the ‘durable solutions’ framework is set aside? As much research on forced migration is centered on these solutions as somewhat of a baseline for ending situations of protracted displacement, it is pertinent to de-centre this framework and explore future solutions with no strings attached.

Chapter 5 strays away from the durable solutions framework to first investigate the linkages between land and peace. It does this by employing a method typically used by linguistic anthropologists, asking individuals to populate a domain of terms related to a central theme: in this case, either peace or land. Finding common terms such as community, Rwanda, future, and work, I then organized a focus group to better understand how these relate to land and peace. The subsequent discussion was rather incredible, where participants began to describe an imagined non-existent landscape that would shift their situation of encampment to one of agricultural livelihoods. I use utopian literature to differentiate between the architectural, archeological, and ontological dimensions of this space, drawing in critical agrarian studies to reveal its dimensions of political economy and their relation to current conditions of encampment. Like Chapter 4, this chapter exists within the future temporality, although close links between pre-displacement history and current living conditions are interwoven within.

As established in the scholarly literature and within African peace agreements (as seen in Chapter 2), repatriation remains an important priority to both ending situations of protracted displacement and in displacement-related dimensions of conflict termination. This chapter, however, suggests a return to agrarianism does not necessarily need to take place within refugees' country of origin. In fact, as developed by refugees, it may be an important way for local integration to take place, where they envision working with now-landless Rwandans within an intentional community setting. As such communities are typically understood as lying outside – or at the periphery of – the state (Sargisson, 2004, 2007a), this may instead be understood in UN-speak as an 'alternative (or 'complementary') pathway' (UNHCR, 2016). Where hesitance towards having refugees and host country citizens intermingle have often be articulated through the argument of 'resource competition' (Martin, 2005; Ali et al., 2017), findings in this chapter point to refugees' willingness and commitment to work with their hosts within an agro-community landscape.

CHAPTER 5

OF UTOPIA: CONGOLESE REFUGEES AND AN IMAGINED AGRARIAN FUTURE IN RWANDA

STATUS: UNDER REVIEW AT *JOURNAL OF RURAL STUDIES*

ABSTRACT

Congolese refugees in Rwanda constitute one of the most protracted displaced populations in the world. As durable solutions remain evasive, this article presents Congolese' own vision for life beyond the camp. Wanting to return to peasantry, their utopian agrarian landscape is articulated as an intentional community where subsistence and autonomy exist within a common property space shared peacefully with now-landless Rwandans. By exploring the archaeologies and ontologies that lay the architectural foundations of this utopia, key assumptions are subverted – notably, that refugees in protracted exile have no sense of futurity, and that their return to land within Rwanda would necessarily lead to conflict.

KEYWORDS

Congolese refugees; land and peace; futurity; utopia; critical agrarian studies; Rwanda

For my people who have an agrarian heritage, land is everything. It is sacred and the most precious gift from the heavens. With the blood of conflict, we have denigrated this gift ... We must transform our violation of land and those who work it, and prove through peaceful collaboration that we appreciate this gift that gives life.

– J.B., female, 36 years old

The so-call violence of my people, of Central Africans, is a violence that was made and sharpened by colonials. This is the violence that has torn our bodies and lands apart. If we are to rid ourselves of this sickness, we must show that we are united and peaceful.

– A.A., male, 23 years old

INTRODUCTION

In the far south-east corner of Rwanda, forty-five minutes' drive off the RN3 highway, and just an eye shot away from the Tanzanian border, a vast and organised settlement emerges over the hills. Navigating crater-like potholes, washed-out sections of road, and encountering broken-down white UN Land Cruiser's, a sense of remoteness fills my body; this is a rare feeling in Rwanda, a tiny country with relatively strong infrastructure, little 'free' land, and a rather high population density. Some minutes later, I arrive to a gate where members from the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, in their regular full-black attire, verify my paperwork and confirm that I may proceed. I am now within the limits of Mahama refugee camp, where over fifty thousand refugees live, spread across eighteen villages. I'm here to speak with Congolese forced migrants who've recently been relocated from Gihembe, a camp recently shut down by the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Gihembe had a convenient location, less than one hour's drive north of Kigali. However, it was old and faced the risk of landslides. Mahama, as an upper management UNHCR employee told

me, is a ‘flagship camp,’ “a state-of-the-art achievement in camp and community architecture.” Some residents here have shared gardens, and for an even smaller minority, a range of organisations issue permits to access and use small plots of land for food production. Everything is standardised, clean, and tidy.

In my encounters with over a hundred Congolese refugees over a four-month period, not a soul was happy about their relocation, or impressed by the amenities at Mahama. There is nothing spectacular about the physical characteristics of this place: “it is boiling, windy, and houses are much smaller than what we had at Gihembe ... services are the same [and] all this organisation looks good, but there is no life here.” Over a two-and-a-half-month period (August-October 2021), nearly ten thousand Congolese were hastily relocated to Mahama – in this rush, many lost businesses, cattle, personal properties, and labor connectivity to the neighboring town of Gicumbi and the ‘big city’ of Kigali. Alongside these immediate losses, the refugees I spoke to pointed to greater existential-temporal preoccupations, as captured by the following research participant:

We have been in camps so long. Now, we are in a new camp and here we wait, hoping that one day we will live, work, and be happy outside of a camp ... We are here and we live, but we live without hope or meaning ... We used to be farmers who ate well, now we are hungry bodies ... When will our time come and these so-called durable solutions happen?

– J.P., male, 38 years old

Congolese who fled to Rwanda around 1996 and during the First Congo War, escaping ethnic violence itself produced largely by the mass exodus of *génocidaires* from Rwanda in 1994 (Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2011), constitute one of the most protracted refugee populations in the

world. For over twenty-five years, this population has mostly remained within several camps spread across the Rwandan territory. Classic ‘durable solutions’ of voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement, as set out by the United Nations,³⁴ have been largely unfruitful. The resettlement option is hampered by the limited willingness of nations in the Global North to accept refugees living abroad. The repatriation option, although sometimes (albeit marginally) called upon in times of relative peace, is weakened by the material reality of continued mass violence within the eastern reaches of the Congo. And finally, the local integration option is challenged by rather simple reasons such as widespread unemployment and land shortages in Rwanda, and more complex ones around questions of citizenship and identity in Eastern and Central Africa (for a review, see Mamdani, 2016). As one can imagine, then, this relocation comes to refugees not as something fresh, new, or solution-oriented, but rather as symbolic of additional ‘time-in-waiting,’ and that which reflects others’ findings on its impact on senses of liminality and deteriorating well-being (Adhikari, 2021; Fee, 2021; Sagbakken, Bregård, & Varvin, 2020).

While the situation of Congolese refugees in Rwanda leaves much to critique, this article moves forward with a ‘care-based epistemology’ (Dalmiya, 2002) to unearth not just what is wrong, but *what can become*. In the language of care ethics, this involves moving “beyond critique and toward the construction of new forms of relationships, institutions, and action that enhance mutuality and well-being” (Lawson, 2007, p. 8). And in the language of Deleuzian theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), this means straying from structural preoccupations and identities produced therein (i.e., refugee as a fixed ‘block’), and using lines of flight to reveal imminent becoming and potentialities. In witnessing the material and existential difficulties felt by refugees in the

³⁴ See Chapter 7 ‘Solutions for refugees’ in *Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: The 10-Point Plan in action* (UNHCR 2011)

immediate aftermath of their relocation to Mahama, their expression of fatigue in discussing past traumas and the painful realities of encampment, and relative liveliness in discussing their futures, I turned my attention to lines of inquiry on futurity and ‘the good life’ in alternative time-space. What I found was a strong attachment to land, where refugees’ nostalgia towards their heritage as agrarian folk transcended into their imagined and idealised futures. Returning to the land, for them, would be symbolic of peace and resolve to over two decades of what some referred to – in geographical terms – as ‘placelessness.’ In teasing this out, a vision for a return to peasantry and an agrarian future in Rwanda took form. This possibilist utopian agrarian ‘landscape,’ the sum of territory and human agency (Balée, 2006), was articulated as an intentional community where subsistence and autonomy exist in a common property space shared peacefully with now-landless Rwandans.

In this article, I present the forms, ethics, and logics of an agrarian utopia as imagined by a select group of refugees, conferred to me through discursive engagements on land, peace, and futurity. I do this in full appreciation of growing calls to adopt an agency-centered approach to research with refugees and around questions of durable solutions, peacebuilding, and development (McGrath & Young, 2019; Grabska & Clark-Kazak, 2022). Moving forward, the next section presents the conceptual framework adopted to tease out and explore the qualitative record of this research endeavour. Here, I point to the relevance of critical agrarian studies (CAS), and particularly to its ‘future-forward’ dimension. In tracking futuristic dimensions in other critical fields, I supplement CAS’ analytic with a decidedly utopian penchant, proposing the use of Levitas’ (2013) ‘modes of utopia’ as a way to disaggregate the different dimensions of refugees’ envisioned agrarian landscapes. Next, I present the methodology used to explore issues of land, peace, and future with this refugee population. Using a sequential two-step approach (McKendrick,

2020), data generated through a free listing exercise is used to inform and structure a focus group conversation with community members who engage in local cultivation activities. Across two sections, I then draw on Levitas' (2013) 'modes of utopia' to present and discuss research results in tandem. The first section outlines the 'architecture' of this utopia, where I describe the form of this agrarian landscape, as imagined by refugee participants. The second section outlines the 'archaeological' and 'ontological' foundations of this utopia, where refugees' *mentalité* as it relates to agrarian futurity are explored through key discussion points within the focus group setting. This is followed by a short conclusion.

CRITICAL AGRARIAN STUDIES, FUTURE, AND UTOPIA

In the search for a suitable conceptual framework to help structure, discuss, and understand the qualitative data collected during fieldwork, a dilemma presented itself. On the one hand, Congolese' vision for an agrarian future in Rwanda – as something that is 'not yet there' – prompted a certain aloofness that is typical of idealism. On the other, the rich detail, texture, and reasoning provided by research respondents, how this community would be organised across social, political, and labor dimensions, made this utopian landscape feel real and realisable. However, approaches to the study of land, and those developed through subaltern, peasant, and agrarian studies are decidedly materialist. By this, I mean that scholarship within these allied fields is often anchored in the material world, where labor and relations of people is practiced and observable. Land is indeed something that exists in the real world, and it is therefore no surprise that Marxist approaches have been so influential in its study. That said, what analytic can best unpack immaterial, imagined, futuristic, and utopian visions of land? This is a deeply relevant question when examining the aspirations of encamped refugees who, despite being landless in the present, envision a future where social relations exist within an agrarian setting.

I turn to recent work on critical agrarian studies (CAS), a field that is “closely linked to the rise of critical frameworks that call into question dominant paradigms ... to identify, analyze and combat the biases and values and forms of representing and legitimizing knowledge that characterize conventional wisdom” (Edelman & Wolford, 2017, p. 962). In the case explored herein, this is the ‘wisdom’ that informs state policies that isolate refugees from the general population, fearing intermixing will lead to conflicts over land and resources (Fisk, 2019), or that of development and humanitarian actors who continue to associate refugees with the language of ‘beneficiaries’ rather than that of agency and self-sufficiency (Bradley, Milner, & Peruniak, 2019). CAS is a particularly flexible approach, where it examines agrarian spaces along several analytical axes centered on peoples (ethnicity, citizenship, status, classes, identity, etc.), scales (local/national/global), and processes (democratisation, development, and in this case, displacement and encampment). As an expanding field, CAS also continues to develop and take shape. In this, I see an opportunity to not only draw from its current workings, but also contribute to how it is defined, and particularly in terms of expanding its engagement with future temporalities.

Allow me to expand on this motivation by pointing to recent work by Dunlap and Jakobsen (2020), where their interest on extractivism, frontiers, and state control situates CAS as a framework to point out and theoretically assess questions of dispossession, territorialisation, and conflict, doing so through capitalism-inspired and Leviathanic metaphors of the ‘Devil,’ ‘Octopus,’ and ‘Worldeater’ (see also, Taussig, 1980; Perlman, 2010 [1983]). What is less explored in their work is how resistance and new collectivities are formed *as a response* to such capitalist, statist, or totalitarian processes, and importantly, how an alternate future could be shaped. Like other critical fields, CAS suffers from a ‘criticality bias,’ where its otherwise

important function as a hive for critique is insufficiently supplemented with equally rigorous propositions for alternative futures. Some feminist scholars have pointed to this often overlooked function of critical research within their own field (Mellor, 1982; Robinson, 2000; Hudson & Rönnblom, 2020), where MacLeavy, Fannin & Lerner (2021) claim the importance of positioning “feminist theory and politics not as a static or singular movement or project but as that which has the vitality to animate social change through open-ended invention and the desire to bring a different future into existence” (p. 1573). With a few exceptions (Zabus, 2015; Pordzik, 2001; Ashcroft, 2012, 2017), the same can be said of postcolonial studies, where Ashcroft (2021) raises the issue that:

... there has been a persistent failing in postcolonial criticism, namely, a tendency to reduce postcolonial engagements to a simple dynamic of opposition [and that] the function of postcolonial utopianism is to open up a space for political action that is buoyed up by the possibility—indeed, the probability—of social change. (p. 44)

Tracking these observations closely, this article seeks to contribute towards this otherwise underdeveloped dimension of CAS, shifting from musings of control and doom towards those of empowerment and possibility. This is not willful blindness or naïve optimism, but rather originates from a contention that the critique of critical research – this *yin*, and a particularly powerful one at that – must be paired with the *yang* of imagining architectures of hope and emancipation. This is particularly important in cases such as the one presented here, where informants manifest an express desire to explore the future temporality.

To do this, I propose the use of utopian thinking within the horizons of CAS. Just like critical agrarian studies “seeks to challenge dominant frameworks and ideas in order to reveal and

challenge power structures and thus open up the possibilities for change” (Akram-Lodhi et al., 2021, p. 1), the articulation of utopias preface “plans which remedy the perceived shortcomings of a particular present age” (Parker, 2002, p. 2). This is what is proposed by Benhabib in *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (1987), moving from pure critique to utopia (see also, Ingram, 2017), or what calls Moylan's (1986) ‘critical utopia,’ working “from the inside of the system, using estrangement as a vehicle for critique, anticipating a radically different tomorrow” (Sargisson, 2007b, p. 37). For long term camp-dwelling refugees who are indeed estranged from a range of socio-spatial processes, including those related to land-based labor, this is a particularly interesting conceptual position to move forward with. Drawing on utopian studies, Sociologist Ruth Levitas’ (2007, 2013) ‘modes of utopia’ are unique in their ability to, on the one hand, incorporate critique within foresight, and on the other, disaggregate utopian visions. On the latter, she describes the modes of architecture, archaeology, and ontology as part and parcel of ‘utopia as method,’ or what she refers to as ‘the imaginary reconstruction of society.’ In this method, the architectural mode includes the description and design of the good society, its relations and institutions (i.e. the utopia *per se*). The archaeological and ontological modes, for their part, stand as the bedrock to this architecture. The archaeological mode excavates ‘fragments’ and ‘shards’ – through history and experience – to locate the social and political origins of the architectural mode. Conversely, the ontological mode is concerned with the subjectivity of utopian agents, and specifically, how ‘the good life’ is constituted through “claims about who we are and who we might and should be” (Levitas, 2013, p. 196). Contending that “these modes or facets of the utopian method are analytically separable from one another but are also intertwined” (xvii), this article presents research results by weaving together ‘utopia as method’ within a future-oriented critical agrarian studies.

INVESTIGATING LAND AND PEACE AMONGST CONGOLESE REFUGEES AT MAHAMA CAMP

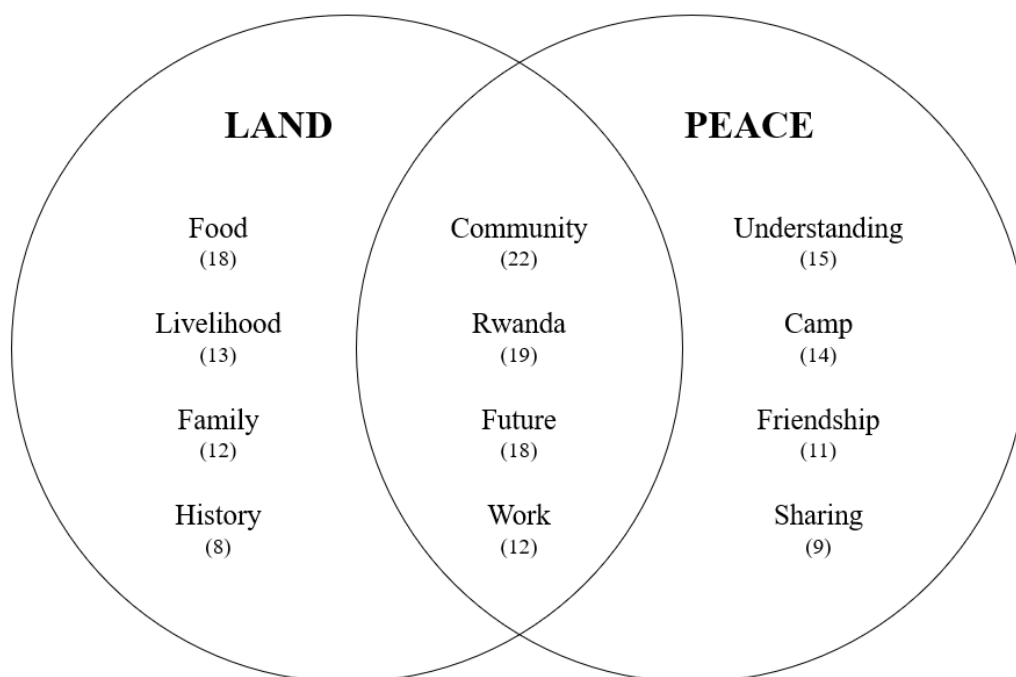
In this section, I describe the investigative approach adopted for this research. As the sequential research design (McKendrick, 2020) involved two data collection methods, with a focus groups informed by results gathered through free listing, this section does discuss some results. This research was conducted over the course of November and December 2021, spread across two visits (10 days total) to Mahama refugee camp located in the Eastern Province of Rwanda near the Tanzanian border. This research project is embedded in a larger ethnography with Congolese refugees, spanning from November 2021 to February 2022. As a first dimension of this ethnography, I wanted to understand the extent in which Congolese refugees perceive land as a potential substratum for peace. This interest is motivated by a critical reading of two assumptions: first, a paternalistic-colonial assumption that Congolese are inherently violent (Dunn, 2003), and second, the set of claims which consistently frame land as a conflict producer (or multiplier) (Froese & Schilling, 2019; Homer-Dixon, 2010; Le Billon, 2001).

I was first interested in understanding the linguistic dimension of land and peace as expressed by Congolese refugees; specifically, how do they think and talk about land and peace, and what are other connected words or expressions that formulate a linguistic domain around these two concepts? To address this question, I used the free listing method. The mechanics of this method are relatively straightforward: provide a prompt to a research participant and ask them to write a list of words or expressions that they relate to this prompt. The selection of this methods was based on the following aims: “to develop a preliminary inventory of the contents of [a] cultural (topical) domain of interest [and] to obtain measures of the ‘salience,’ ‘importance,’ and ‘commonness’ of the various items and/or clusters of items in a given domain” (Pelto, 2016, p.

169). As I was interested in two separate domains (i.e. land and peace) and did not want them to be immediately confounded or logically associated by research participants, I decided that each participant would be randomly assigned either land or peace for the free listing activity. In total, 40 individuals participated in producing free lists, 20 for the 'land' domain (11 women; 9 men) and 20 for the 'peace' domain (12 women; 8 men). Participants were selected randomly over a two-day period, during my daily walk around the camp. As I was not working with an interpreter, I would ask prospective participants if they spoke French or English, and with positive confirmation I would then invite them to contribute to the free listing exercise. Each participant was asked to write 10 words for their assigned domain.

Following the collection of all 40 free lists, I initiated the compilation process. This involved two steps: (1) computing the data and counting the number of times words were listed within a domain, and (2) identifying which words were commonly shared by both domains. A Venn diagram was then produced to display the most salient results (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Venn diagram showing the results of a free listing exercise of two domains, ‘land’ and ‘peace’ (N=40, divided equally across both domains). Numbers in brackets indicate the number of times mentioned.



Following the computation, analysis, and displaying of free listing results, I decided to lead a focus group to further explore the land and peace linguistic domains. This focus group was composed of individuals who did not participate in the free listing exercise and who currently engage in one of three agricultural settings accessible to them. A hybrid quota-convenience sampling approach was used for participant recruitment, done largely on a relational basis where I would ask random camp residents if they knew someone who was part of either of the three groups: (A) those that provide agricultural labour outside the camp through largely informal and often exploitative sharecropping agreements³⁵ (n=4; 1 woman, 3 men), (B) those that work the land within the camp-based crop areas, doing so by leasing the land from organisations (n=4; 1

³⁵ Informants reported positive relationships with other Rwandans engaged in agricultural labor (i.e. at the same level of labor). They noted, however, that when engaging in a sharecropping agreement with farm owners, these were often exploitative and informal. Due to their informality, Congolese refugees noted that working within these arrangements meant accepting exploitation and not having any legal recourse to address disagreements or conflicts with land owners.

woman, 3 men), and (C) those who take on the bulk of work within domestic plots (n=4; 3 women, 1 man) (see Figure 2). The rationale of forming a sample around this selection criteria was based on the research focus on land and an appreciation that refugees who work within cultivation activities at Mahama camp typically do so within one of these three settings. Four participants were recruited for each of the three settings, leading to the formation of a twelve-person focus group (N=12; 5 women, 7 men; ages 22-67). Men represented a larger portion of the focus group sample, resulting from cultural norms that made the recruitment of women challenging, along with the fact that – particularly in larger-scale agricultural operations – men within this setting tend to work the land more extensively than women. However, this is not the case within the context of domestic plots where female labour predominates; this is represented in the group C sample.

Figure 7: Focus group members (N=12) were recruited based on their participation within one of the three cultivation scenarios available to refugees at Mahama camp: (A) agricultural labor outside the camp, (B) cultivation within the camp-based crop areas provided by organizations, and (C) gardening within domestic plots.



I began the focus group by stating the aims of the research, ensuring that verbal consent was received following statements on confidentiality, privacy, voluntariness, and right of withdrawal. Next, I asked participants to briefly explain their perspectives on the intersection between land and peace. I then showed them the results of the free listing exercise, using Figure 6 as a prompt to stimulate conversation. Interestingly, focus group participants were greatly stimulated by the commonality and frequency of ‘Future.’ As one participant noted, “no one ever asks us about our future or how we would like it, and so this is an interesting topic for us” (R.M., female, 22 years old). Quite organically, this led participants to discuss (and imagine) what a future, peaceful, and land-based life would look like for them. Referring back to the other common terms of

‘Community,’ ‘Rwanda,’ and ‘Work,’ this future was constituted as an agrarian landscape in Rwanda and with Rwandans. In considering recently emerging work on refugee futurity (Barbosa, 2022; Poole & Riggan, 2020; Ramsay, 2018), along with the methodological and ethical challenges of initiating this sort of research,³⁶ I latched onto participants’ excitement in articulating their future. As focus group participants debated and agreed on the anatomical features of this agrarian landscape, I simultaneously probed these discussions to excavate the roots, rationales, and logics informing their utopian construction in its processual sense.³⁷ Recognising the limits of focus group settings, and particularly in terms of validating a commonly shared perspectives that may be imbued with underlying relations of power, the last half hour of the session was spent summarizing the conversation, providing a more structured opportunity for participants to voice disagreements, add details, et cetera. For situations where participants would want to communicate their thoughts privately, they were invited to stay beyond the focus group session, although no one took up this opportunity. The resulting data analysed through open coding, speaking to Levitas’ (2007, 2013) three modes of utopia and organised in terms of architecture and its foundations (i.e. archeology and ontology), are presented in the following two sections.

PLOTTING OUT AGRARIAN FUTURES IN RWANDA: THE ARCHITECTURAL MODE

Let us begin with a point on the meaning of peace and its relation to land:

³⁶ Anthropologist Diana Allan points to this in *Refugees of the Revolution* (Allan 2014: 139), explaining that “although much has been written on how refugees relate to the past ... there is comparatively little on how they orient themselves to the future,” and positing relatedly that “methodologically, it is difficult to research what is yet to be; ethically, it is difficult to ask refugees to probe their futures (which can seem like twisting a knife in the wound).”

³⁷ Much writing on utopia has focused almost exclusively on specific visions of an idyllic future, as seen in the work of Plato (1968), Rousseau (2004), and Moore (1516). As Ingram (2017) points out, this has led many scholars to disparage utopian thought, claiming that it escapes important political dimensions of the present. Scholars such as Sargent (1994) and Sargisson (1996), however, have insisted on examining utopia in its processual sense, as a political project that is both constituted from the past and present and always reconstructed through new ‘goal posts’ as new experiences and social realities emerge.

Land has everything to do with peace. Returning to land means returning to a time of peace and community before the conflict. Because of what land can give us, it also means peace for our bodies ... Peace is not just people getting along. It is also a feeling, like satisfaction or comfort ... there can be some guidelines to make land a place for peace, but this feeling that is equal to all of us brings people together around land ... that is more important.

– J.B., female, 36 years old

Herein, one can find the existential, ground-level, and relational dimensions that speak to new approaches to peacebuilding. Unlike the ‘liberal peace’ approach, where traditional peace architecture has centered largely around the issues of conflict assessment, intervention, institution-building, and rule of law (Reychler, 2002, 2006; Mac Ginty, 2012), proponents of this ‘new way’ have pointed to the importance of identifying and building onto locally-validated understandings of peace (Autesserre, 2014; Campbell, Chandler, & Sabaratnam, 2011). For J.B., peace comes in three interconnected forms: bodily satisfaction, land-based social relations, and a return to peasantry following protracted landless encampment. Across the refugees included in this research, these forms were a constant in their individual understandings of peace.

When examining questions of land and peace, Congolese focus group participants animatedly discussed what a future would look like for them. This took the form of extensive discussion on what a hypothetical plot of land would need to look like and how it could be organised, what types of crops and activities would take place, and the relations of people within this landscape. With this, classic questions of agrarian political economy were raised: Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? What do they do with it? (Bernstein, 2010, cited in Akram-

lodhi et al., 2021). While discussion did encounter some debate, and particularly in terms of ownership (as we will see in the next section) and crop choice, participants came to develop a shared vision for a future agrarian landscape in Rwanda. This is a vision where current refugees and currently landless Rwandans work the land together, organised in a cooperative structure around common property. In terms of infrastructure, living quarters are larger and cooler than those at Mahama, and health and educational resources and community spaces are readily available. There is also embeddedness between agricultural labor, social relations, and political life, where groupings of ten homes sharing cultivation spaces correspond to the political unit of *communauté*, headed by an elected chief who helps settle disputes and participates in community-wide decision making. All this translates to Levitas' (2013) conception of the 'architectural mode of utopia' as "its culturally most familiar mode: imagining a reconstructed world and describing its social institutions" (p. 197).

This next section draws heavily on the qualitative record, which is summarised in three forms. First, Table VIII condenses key points on political economy characteristics of this utopian space, supported by a selection of descriptions by focus group participants. Second, Table IX summarizes descriptions of the physical features of this imagined agrarian landscape, as expressed by interlocutors. Based on these descriptions, the third form (Figure 8) assembles a series of perspective captures from a 3D model commissioned by the author. The latter is based on an appreciation for the visual culture around other utopian work, for example, Congolese sculptor Bodys Isek Kingelez's intricate maquettes of *Kimbembele Ihunga* (1994) and *Ville Fantome* (undated) (see Cutler-Bittner, 2019; Pighin, 2022), the organic urban-rural *cités* of postcolonial Kinshasa (De Boeck, 2011), and the geographical-performative assertion that "new worlds are

made every time a map is deployed” (Perkins, 2009, p. 127). Returning to Ruth Levitas, she describes ‘utopia as architecture’ as both less and more than a model or blueprint:

Less, in being a provisional hypothesis about how society might be, offered as part of a dialogue, neither intending nor constituting a forecast, recognizing itself as in part a present future. More, in inviting both writer and reader to imagine themselves, as well as the world, otherwise. (Levitas, 2013, p. 198)

In the latter case, the architectural renderings provided offer this invitation. In the former case, where the future is an extension of the present, we turn to the archaeological and ontological modes of utopia; those that provide the foundations to this utopic architecture.

Table VIII: Key points on themes related to agrarian political economy, supported by qualitative descriptions by research participants

Theme	Key points	Descriptive examples
Ownership	Transformation of current public property into common property	“The government owns all land here. People lease it from the government for one-hundred-year periods, or something like that. For this future, I think the government should just give the land to this community and that we own it together as a group.” (J.B., female, 36 years old)
	Group ownership in the form of a cooperative	“There’s some agricultural projects going on right now. I think the UN is working with the government. I don’t know who owns the land but I think it should be people, not organisations, unless it’s a cooperative. It would be good if a big group of us could own it together.” (P.M., male, 48 years old) “A cooperative would be good. There’s a big cooperative movement in Rwanda, so it is already established. I think the system works well here. It’s a fair way of working and cooperatives usually work together.” (J.B., female, 36 years old)
	Contingent on cooperative membership and residency	“I don’t like the idea of excluding people but there aren’t infinite resources and those should be kept for people who live in the community” (J.P., male, 38 years old) “Members of this community, this cooperative maybe we call it, should have access. For others, it may depend on how much land and resources we have ... how satisfied we are” (L.L., female, 52 years old)
Access	Shared between current refugees and currently landless Rwandans (Class E socioeconomic class)	“One issue I think we need to think about is the question of Rwandans. You know <i>Ubudehe</i>, well that’s a system that exists because there are many Rwandans who don’t have land just like us. They should be with us.” (J.B., female, 36 years old) “We need to live together in peace, share everything, live as neighbors.” (J.P., male, 38 years old)
	A range of crops and livestock	“We need balance in our diet ... fresh greens, vegetables, beans [but] also meat and eggs.” (R.M., female, 22 years old) “Milk must be part of our production. It is very important culturally for us Congolese.” (L.L., female, 52 years old)
	Subsistence-focused, with equal distribution amongst community members	“Not being hungry should be the first priority. Nothing matters if we can’t have that as a first priority. Our association should be based on meeting this first need.” (M.A., male, 67 years old) “I think everything should be shared equally between everyone ... maybe not one hundred percent, like if someone is sick, but generally yes.” (M.M., female, 33 years old)
Use	Surplus may be brought to market upon community approval	“Some seasons may be very good for growing. We should be able to sell when we have surplus. Other seasons may not be so good because of weather, so then we may not be able to sell because we need to eat.” (G.B., female, 50 years old) “I agree that we have enough to eat, we should be able to sell the additional resources we have ... we can do that at markets in other villages nearby.” (M.A., male, 67 years old)
	Decentralized community-based justice	“Every group of ten houses elects a <i>chef de communauté</i> . If we have a problem between neighbors, this person will organize a meeting for us to talk about it. Most of our problems are dealt with at that level, but if it’s something bigger, it goes to the chef de village, and then to the chef de quartier.” (P.M., Male, 48 years old)
	Formation of councils	“I know in a cooperative everyone can vote. That would be good. I think we can also establish councils like a land council where people discuss issues about the crops, how to distribute the things we grow, and those kinds of decisions. We could use the current levels of chiefs to build these councils.” (R.K., male, 38 years old) “A social council would be really important too, so people can talk about education, community issues, health issues.” (D.K., male, 28 years old)

Table IX: Interlocutor descriptions informing the physical features of their described agrarian utopia.

Physical features	Descriptive examples	Comment (when applicable)
Embeddedness of dwellings and agricultural spaces	“At Mahama we have small plots next to housing groups ... It works well and it makes growing easy. Living spaces and places to grow our food should be close to each other.” (M.M., female, 33 years old) “Cultivating is not just about producing food. It’s also a social activity. It becomes part of your life and I think living space and cultivating space should be close to each other.” (M.A., male, 67 years old)	
Presence of livestock	“We Congolese value livestock. Many of us were pastoralists and so it’s important for us.” (P.M., male, 48 years old)	
Size of dwellings	“Talking about the other camp we lived in [referring to Gihembe], houses were bigger. Here, our living conditions are too tight. It goes against our culture for our boys and girls to sleep in the same room.” (J.P., male, 38 years old) “Houses are too small. We need to rotate for sleeping sometimes. It’s not liveable.” (M.M., female, 33 years old)	The dimension of housing units at Mahama is 6x6 meters, subdivided into quarters of 3x3 meters. Families of 10+ persons are allocated all four quarters (i.e. one unit), 9 persons three quarters, 3-8 persons two quarters, and 1-2 persons one quarter. This is significantly less space than was available when Congolese lived at Gihembe camp. Accordingly, units were expanded to 8x9 meters in size, intended to accommodate two families based on average family size of 3.7 individuals as reported by MINEMA (2022).
Thatched roofing and perforated mudbrick walls	“...it is boiling, windy...” (D.K., male, 28 years old) “We are Congolese from the mountains. Gihembe was good because the climate was like we knew before. Now we are living in the shade like snakes.” (M.A., male, 67 years old) “We used to live in the highlands here in Rwanda. We were then relocated here at Mahama. It is hot here.” (G.B., female, 50 years old)	Prior to relocation, Congolese at Mahama were located a Gihembe camp, located at 2,282 meters altitude in the cool hills of Byumba, Gicumbi District. And prior to displacement, Congolese lived in the Kivus, part of the Albertine Rift ecoregion of montane forests with a cooler climate. Now at Mahama, located in the hot and dry savannah, Congolese refugees have found it difficult to adjust to this new climate, and their dwellings are not designed for optimal airflow and retain cooler indoor temperatures.
10-unit housing communities	“Every group of ten houses elects a <i>chef de communauté</i>. If we have a problem between neighbors, this person will organise a meeting for us to talk about it.” (P.M., male, 48 years old) “I think it’s a good way for us to be organised in small units where our voice can be heard” (G.B., female, 50 years old)	While this system of political administration is implemented at Mahama, house groupings are comprised of eight units. This produces spatial-political awkwardness as some groupings are part of different communities. This is addressed in the drafted model, where groupings are effectively comprised of ten units.
Community center	“We need a specific place where we can have community meetings, or practice <i>gacaca</i>” (R.M., female, 22 years old)	
Circular design	“...all this organisation looks good, but there is no life here” (D.K., male, 28 years old) “Mahama is well-organised but we have to walk around big groups of houses to get to common areas” (R.M., female, 22 years old)	Through different language, respondents pointed to the sterility and inconveniences of Mahama’s grid planning. While colonial urban planning has brought grid-based design to many African metropolises, rural spaces typically develop around natural topography. This leads to more circular, sinuous, and organic spatial planning. In absence of a specific landscape where this community could be established, a wheel-and-spoke design was selected.



A



B



C



D

Figure 8: 3D model of future agrarian utopia in Rwanda, based on qualitative descriptions made by Congolese refugees at Mahama camp. Bird's-eye view (A) shows communal areas at its center and embeddedness of housing and cultivation areas. Zoomed in perspective of living quarters (B) shows two 10-unit communities corresponding to the *Communauté* political level, each with a shared community garden. For street-level view of community center and living quarters, see C and D. Model by Rija Youssuf, commissioned by the author.

UNDERSTANDING FOUNDATIONS ACROSS TEMPORALITIES: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL MODES

To unearth the rationales and logics for the landscape developed by those refugees involved in this research, my questioning naturally flowed towards the ‘why?’, seeking to tap into the foundations of their vision for an agrarian future in Rwanda. Drawing on a utopian methodology, this can be found by examining the archaeological and ontological modes of utopia, based on a social constructivist perspective where lived experience (archaeology) is deeply connected to how individuals and groups see and understand the world (ontology): “The archaeological mode of utopia as method properly includes the ontological, in excavating the assumptions about human nature and human flourishing that are embedded in political positions and institutional proposals” (Levitas, 2013, p. 177). I move forward with this in mind, where this section explores how archaeologies across different temporal registers give shape to refugee ontologies on questions of labor, governance, rights, and identity. Answers to these questions signal individual behaviours and modes of sociality that, when combined in a spatial setting, conjure up an alternative and more empowering political landscape for refugees. Through the archaeological and ontological traces of utopia, we can therefore understand the foundations for refugees’ desire to return to ‘the good life’ of peasantry, and importantly, how vision and action intersect.

When asking about the specific interest for an explicitly agrarian future, initial insight came as reflective of the difficult material reality of refugee life, with nutrition as cue for wellbeing and ambitions for a food secure future:

We have been hungry for too long ... it’s been almost twenty-five years. Look at my arms. There is no muscle. My children are bloated [referring to Kwashiorkor]. I want

to have eggs and meat at least once a week ... Not having to worry about feeding myself is what will make me happy

– L.L., female, 52 years old

Relatedly, others pointed to food issues in relation to their stewards, the UN agencies and Rwandan government:

Some years ago, we told World Food Programme that we want more diversity in our diet ... the food they gave was always same. So, they changed from food aid to cash transfers [known as Cash-Based Transfers]. They gave each person 7,000 francs per month [approximately 7 USD/month] ... A few months ago, they changed it into a system of categories. People who can work now get nothing. That's most people ... so now we have even less food, there's no jobs here, and we are far from any big town so people really get nothing. At least let us grow something for ourselves.

– D.K., male, 28 years old

The Rwanda government says we need to work and think about our future. How can we work or even think when we are weak and cannot stand without losing our step? How can we have a future if there are no jobs here and no system to help us? The first thing we need is food – nutritious food for a good diet ... That is the future. By cultivating we can have two things at once: we can work and we can eat.

–R.M., female, 22 years old

The experience of refugeehood and its impact on refugee bodies is a clear rationale for wanting to engage in labor that centres on food production. As pointed out by the last respondent, however, the interaction between undernutrition and shortages in labor opportunities produce existential pressures that not only inform, but perhaps even limit or frame future-thinking. This is well in line with other studies on refugee decision-making and how hope, desire, and ambition are effectively mediated by material-structural factors that are often beyond the control of refugees (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Omata, 2013; Zimmermann, 2011).

Indeed, conditions of everyday life in a refugee camp play a key role in how subjective and collective identities galvanize around certain truths, knowledge systems, and practices (Agier, 2002; Allan, 2014; Hyndman, 2000). This is particularly true of Congolese refugees in Rwanda, where they have been living in relatively isolated conditions since 1996. When excavating the archaeology of their envisioned forms of social and agricultural governance, research participants looked to their immediate political reality as a point of reference. In commenting on the group's description of a collaborative, democratic, and somewhat decentralised form of governance, R.K. indicated that "this is basically the way we do things in the camp ... right now there is issues of representation, but the structure I think is good." Another respondent, an elected *chef de communauté*, provided details:

Every group of ten houses elects a *chef de communauté*. If we have a problem between neighbors, this person will organise a meeting for us to talk about it. Most of our problems are dealt with at that level, but if it's something bigger, it goes to the *chef de village*, and then to the *chef de quartier*. Everyone in that system is elected, including the *Comité Exécutif* that's at the top. The problem is that above all these positions,

there's MINEMA, and then UNHCR and the National Police. At the big meetings they listen but they don't respect us ... and don't act on our issues.³⁸

– P.M., male, 48 years old

G.B. (female, 50 years old) chimed in:

Yes, that's the problem. Democracy is an illusion here. The ones that manage us don't listen or help us when we make a claim or want to change something. But I think it's a good way for us to be organised in small units where our voice can be heard. We should keep that when we think of forming our own farming system.

As many confirmed throughout my ethnographic fieldwork in Rwanda, the camp-based administrative structure is widely supported despite its limitations. Participants explained the central role played by the *chefs de communauté* in community-based mediation, protection, and peacebuilding.³⁹ As M.M., a female participant (33 years old), explained: “it has also been a good system to address gender-based violence ... there is gender balance in the *chef de communauté* elected here at Mahama ... sometimes a male *chef de communauté* has difficulty with addressing a GBV issue and then brings in a neighbouring female *chef de communauté* who has a better understanding of the issue.” Another respondent (L.L., female, 53 years old) made a similar point, adding that some chiefs are more experienced with matters of food production and garden-sharing,

³⁸ As the camp manager explained in a prior conversation, residents of Mahama are currently represented by 654 *chefs de communauté*, 18 *chef de village*, and nine *chef de quartier*, and by the *Comité Exécutif* made up of eight members. MINEMA and UNHCR sit at the top of this administrative structure.

³⁹ In a separate interview with the National Peace Advisor of The Legal Aid Forum, a key UNHCR partner in charge of community-based protection and local peacebuilding, it was confirmed that many refugees believe this governance structure is a key factor to peaceful camp cohabitation between Congolese and Burundians, where over ten thousand of the former had recently been relocated to this predominantly-Burundian camp.

and are therefore consulted in neighboring mediations or are brought on informal special councils. Relaying this forward to their imagined agrarian future, A.A. (male, 23 years old) added:

You see, the chiefs at different levels are elected for different reasons and because different groups of people value different skills and knowledge. But then when the system is put together, there's been a lot of positive collaboration. I think if we implemented this on our land it would work the same way. Some people would have ideas or claims about what to grow, how to rotate crops, what tools or strategies to use on the field, how money is managed. Others would want to be more involved on the social issues like GBV, education, health. We could still have something like an elected *Comité Exécutif* with members representing certain themes and to hold public meetings, but we don't need anything above that. We should be able to manage our own affairs.

A.A.'s remark was followed by unanimously positive body language, and for most in a very 'matter of fact' demeanour. Similar to the immediate issues of food security and nutrition informing a shared desire to engage in food production activities, the immediate forms of governance within the camp setting was seen as foundational to exploring the political structure of a future agrarian intentional community. As R.M. (female, 22 years old) asked quite innocently, "why invent a whole new system if only a few things aren't working?", signalling that perhaps the mode to achieving their utopic vision would be evolutionary or reformist, rather than revolutionary.

Beyond the immediate present, and acknowledging that many who I spoke to considered their 25 plus years of encampment as essentially liminal, where time feels 'absent' or 'suspended'

(Turner, 2011/1969; Brun & Fábos, 2015), the link between their pre-displacement past and future agrarian utopia could also be traced throughout our discussion. This was particularly salient in our conversation on what rights they would like recognised within this setting:

When I was in Congo, we could grow whatever we wanted. We could start agriculture almost everywhere since Congo is so big, not like here. We could make our own decisions. If we did not have enough food to sell, we didn't sell. If we did, then we go to the market to sell or trade them. We would never go hungry that way, even when some seasons were not good. I would want the right to eat and to not sell if I can't feed my family.

– G.B., female, 50 years old

Before [in Congo] community was so important. Its true what G.B. said, we never had the pressure to sell what we produced. The most important was that we have enough food for ourselves ... If some areas needed food we would send it, even if we didn't know the people. This was before all the ethnic issues started ... We were just people and we knew that if we had a problem at some point, then others would help us. We built things and worked land even if we didn't know who owned the land, if it belonged to the state or the Native Authority. That didn't matter and those were issues of politics.

– M.A., male, 67 years old

To get to this issue of rights, I think what we are saying is that we want to decide what we want for our community. People say Congo is a crazy place, but it's just less bureaucratic. What is so crazy about wanting a plot of land where we can build, grow,

and manage our own things? We could do that in Congo, but I don't know we can do that here.

– R.K., male, 38 years old

Exactly. In Congo it was never clear who owns this or that piece of land. It didn't matter because the country is so big and no government could enforce it. That's why most of us don't have any papers to make a claim about property. Now it's a problem, but before the ethnic stuff, we all just worked and shared without thinking too much or calculating everything ... That's what my parents told me.

– L.L., female, 52 years old

Here, several rights are invoked through a temporal register of emplaced memories. As the discussion progressed, these rights were also discussed in relation to each other, and claimed as flexible and changing depending on sociopolitical circumstances, calling into play the concept of 'bundle of rights' (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2019). As seen above, the right of access is implied through references to a 'vast' and 'chaotic' Congo; one qualified by abundance and cooperation, but also formal ownership ambiguity and weak institutions unable to reach remote rural areas (Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2021). Further references are made to somewhat of an elastic band metaphor of expansion and contraction vis-à-vis market contact, where a right to derive income from production is fundamentally dependent on agricultural yields and food stocks, firmly placing it as secondary to the right to subsistence – and perhaps to an extent, the right to life.⁴⁰ And combined

⁴⁰ This is in line with Hyden's (2008) assessment of the peasant 'economy of affection' in sub-Saharan Africa, where "peasants in Africa, by being subsistence-oriented and at best having only one foot in the market, [are] uncaptured [where] neither force nor monetary incentive [is] enough to draw peasants out of their relatively autonomous position within the national economy" (16).

with the previously proposed governance structure, the desire ‘to make their own decisions’ on a range of issues – including in agricultural terms (i.e. management and use rights) – points to wanting the right to autonomy and self-determination.

I wondered how this ontologically aligned or defied classic, Western-oriented preoccupations of political economy, and particularly on the question of ownership. In terms of property theory, would this agrarian landscape be open access, common property, public property, or individual private property? And in thinking through the question of territoriality (i.e., power over space), who would hold the ‘right to exclude’? In their recalling of the past, I sensed that the two eldest respondents above were nostalgic of a time and place where these questions mattered little, at least not materially. Given their age, they would have lived during a period where ethnic-based territorialisation processes were less prominent than now, experiencing during their youth and early adulthood a marked transition where their civic rights as Banyarwanda – including their right to access, own, and use land – became increasingly put into question through nativist politics (Stearns, 2011; Diebert, 2013; Mamdani, 2016).

When asked, participants were keen to share their thoughts on the ownership question:

There are some agricultural projects going on right now [in Rwanda]. I think the UN is working with the government. I don’t know who owns the land but I think it should be people, not organisations, unless it’s a cooperative. It would be good if a big group of us could own it together. We haven’t had property [referring to individual private property] so it makes more sense to do this as a group ... Actually, there’s already land shortage problems here. It would be better to own it with Rwandans.

– P.M., male, 48 years old

I agree. I think we need to work with Rwandans. They know the land better than we do and we can't start a project that excludes them. They've been generous. I've worked with them for some years and they are good people. What happened here in Rwanda, it was horrible. But they found reconciliation and now everyone works together. We were here in the 90s too, so we learnt from that. I think it would be a problem if we excluded them.

– D.U., male, 27 years old

We should own the land together. Or maybe they own the land but we can work it and are equal in how we manage it and live there together ... I know a lot of refugees who are waiting to be selected to go to U.S.A., or Canada, or Europe. They won't want to have their name on the land because it might make it impossible to leave.

– L.L., female, 52 years old

This last respondent was referring to the resettlement 'durable solution,' where refugees are brought to a safe third country. It was a point that led to animated conversation, where participants confirmed that individual private ownership could cause issues related to their status as refugees. There was a fear that owning land officially could threaten their right to resettlement as guaranteed by international refugee law. After some discussion, there was general agreement that refugees participating in this land arrangement could somehow be given the option to commit (or not) to formalised common ownership, but ultimately, that this should not limit their use and access rights. Several of the participants suggested establishing a cooperative where ownership could take place as a group, creating distance between individuals and a formal land deed. As R.K. pointed out, "I wouldn't sign anything because I'm on the [resettlement] list, but some people who want to

integrate here probably would.” This, like the other considerations outlined above, indicated a rather pragmatic view on ownership, and perhaps one that strays from capitalist and Western logics: it should be cognisant of land shortage issues, conflict-averse and embracing of partnership between refugees and the host community, and flexible for those who wish to maintain a ‘light touch’ on land. All told, on a scale of enclosure from open access to individual private property (Eggertsson, 2003), focus group participants were clearly in favor of formulating an agrarian landscape around a system of common property, “in essence, private group property, places and resources regulated by exclusionary and inclusionary criteria” (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2019, p. 332). While participants acknowledged that the relation between land constraints and membership would lead to some level of ‘excludability,’ a fundamental aspect of all property systems (Klick & Parchomovsky, 2017), many were vocal about negotiating this question of membership carefully, as one participant exemplifies:

We have seen the violence around land. We can’t allow it to happen again ...
Rwandans need to be included ... [they have] been generous and we need to recognise
that ... That way, everyone can benefit and it doesn’t cause problems.

– P.M., male, 48 years old

J.B. (female, 36 years old) added to this:

You know *Ubudehe*,⁴¹ well that’s a system that exists because there are many
Rwandans who don’t have land just like us. They should be with us, the poorest ones.

⁴¹ *Ubudehe* is a national programme whereby poverty alleviation projects are selected by the community, and a system of economic classification to identify the dispersion of socioeconomic groups across the country through groups identified by the letters A (the richest group) through E (the poorest and landless). (Niringiye and Ayebale 2012)

I work with some of them, on the field outside the camp. They really need a future like we are talking about.

Like those two quotes included at the opening of this article, refugee participants – at different junctions within the focus group conversation – expressed vivid concern for preventing conflict over land and resources. This goes against conventional (and Malthusian) wisdom categorizing land as a conflict-producing variable in intergroup relations (Maphosa, 2012; UNEP, 2009), and particularly those between refugees and host communities (Martin, 2005; Ali et al., 2017). In my light probing of the issue, participants explained that Congolese are often seen as violent people, an issue that Dunn (2003) has identified as a legitimating factor for interventionist paternalism within the region. Like many others with whom I spoke to during my ethnographic fieldwork at Mahama, focus group participants expressed a desire to repair this reputation, both for themselves and to the eyes of outsiders. In this, they believed that the range of institutions resulting from Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation process could be helpful in achieving this. This was a point made by R.M. (female, 22 years old), supporting the importance of including Rwandans within their thinking about the future:

These Rwandans, they are really smart and have a lot of systems in place that can be implemented in this community we are thinking about. I'm referring to the village meetings,⁴² *Gacaca*,⁴³ or the *Imidugudu* system.⁴⁴ They are really smart when it comes

⁴² This is a reference to *Inteko y'abaturage*, a people's assembly where community members can voice concerns, feuds, or claims. In Mahama, they have something similar called 'village meeting.'

⁴³ Meaning 'soft grass' and a reference to a place of meeting, *gacaca* is a forum-based community court able to administer community-level justice, a pre-colonial practice recalled into Rwandan society during post-genocide Rwanda to deal with the widespread reporting of human rights violations and crimes of genocide (Begley, 2016; Geraghty, 2020).

⁴⁴ A system of community protection, where groupings of ten households elect an *Umudugudu* to ensure safety in their neighborhood.

to managing community issues and so we can learn from them but also, if there's problems between refugees and Rwandans, we will have systems to deal with them.

Returning to the modes of utopia, Levitas (2013) considers ontology as a set of normative judgements based fundamentally on how different people conceptualise human flourishing, aligned principally in terms of how needs are met (i.e. 'the good life') (see also, Sayer, 2011). Human flourishing, then, is not exclusively about its constitution but also *how* we achieve it in political terms. In the case explored here, refugees envision a collaborative and non-rivalrous relationship with their Rwandan allies, based in part on political practices that they know have been relatively successful in Rwanda's post-genocide context and can therefore make up a grander utopia. This is also informed by traumatic archeological traces; those land and identity-based conflicts which produced both mass violence in Rwanda and Congolese' own displacement. And leading towards their architectural conception of a utopian agrarian future in Rwanda, their vision of human flourishing, it is one where land indeed provides the substratum for social and existential peace.

CONCLUSION: FROM ENCAMPMENT TO A PEASANT MORAL ECONOMY

As research participants developed a 'subsistence-first' peasant utopia that answers a specific set of agrarian political economy questions – Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? What do they do with it? (see Bernstein, 2010) – their accompanying discussion drawing on life stories, the experience of exile, and identity are oriented in the complementary approach of critical agrarian studies, wherein undergirding social and cultural forces that make up agrarian political economy are examined (Akram-Lodhi et al., 2021). While utopia has garnered criticism for its construction of idyllic spaces divorced from present day politics, this paper utilises a processual definition of

utopia (Sargent, 1994; Sargisson, 1996) as a *some-place* that is imbued with politics that are as much idyllic as an extension of past and present experiences of (dis)empowerment. Congolese' agrarian heritage as small-holder and subsistence-based farmers informs their desire to participate in this form of agriculture. Their experience of camp life, its administrative features, challenges for personal and communal development, and food access difficulties inform their formulation of socialized governance centred around the production of food and provision of basic needs. Their combined absence of formal land tenure (in Congo), extended lack of access to private property (in exile), and continued interest in resettlement informs their gingerly attitudes towards individual private property, preferring instead shared ownership within a common property system. And relatedly, their combined experience as displaced persons resulting from identity and land-based based conflict, and their exilic life in a Rwandan landscape that has largely succeed in its identarian reconciliation, informs their preference for a socially inclusive land system. These social and cultural forces (archaeologies, if you will), are fundamentally constitutive to both how refugees imagine 'the good life' (their ontological leanings) and the architecture of an agrarian future in Rwanda.

Like Thompson's (Thompson, 1991, 1971) 'moral economy of the poor,' where he explains eighteenth century riots in England as the result of a sense of injustice within the feudal system, a paternalistic system where "the local lord or landowner or village squire had formal responsibility to care for the peasants and serfs in his villages" (Lind, 2010, p. 32), Congolese refugees at Mahama – under the formal responsibility of UN and state agencies – feel a similar sense of injustice; an injustice where meaningful futures haven't materialised and the satisfaction of basic needs has been minimal. Instead of entrusting this to paternalistic forces, these individuals have made clear in their 'future talk' that they wish to take responsibility within their own hands, to

establish a moral economy where food production – above all – stands as the vector for subsistence, sense of community, and the good life (Sayer, 2000).⁴⁵

While this article has largely sought to contribute to the ‘future-forward’ dimension of critical agrarian studies, perspectives presented here also engage directly with the ‘critical’ dimension of this field. First, findings herein speak to CAS’ critique of the modernisation paradigm which has sought to transform ‘traditional,’ small-scale, and subsistence-oriented agriculture into ‘modern,’ industrial, and market-oriented agriculture (Akram-Lodhi, 2018; Akram-Lodhi et al., 2021). As has been presented, this is not how refugees envision an agrarian future in Rwanda, preferring instead to combine labor and community life, and to access the market when subsistence and basic needs are met. Second, in reflecting on how literature demonstrating the link between land and conflict far outweighs that which links land with peace, this article has made a case for the latter. For Congolese refugees who have a displacement story that is deeply connected to land-based conflict, their imagined future seeks to liberate itself from territorial rivalry and violence. In their discussion on ownership, property, and community membership, they integrate within it a deep appreciation for the national context in which they live; one where important lessons, institutions, and behaviours have emerged through a positive process of post-genocide reconciliation. In this, they wish to cooperate with Rwandans and build a socially just land-based community that serves both refugee and host communities, resonating with an increasingly important body of literature on environmental peacebuilding (Dresse et al., 2019; Ide, 2017). And third, in contrast to the widely held assumption that refugees are hopeless beneficiaries with little

⁴⁵ Here, I use the concept of moral economy to speak to wider literatures from political ecology, agrarian studies, and anthropology. From my own assessment, the socio-institutional configurations within refugees’ imagined agrarian landscape – along with their motivations, although less rebellious – is well in line with those found in James C. Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976). This could potentially be contrasted with the more geographically relevant ‘economy of affection,’ as developed by Africanist and Political Scientist Göran Hydén (2008).

motivation to move beyond encampment, as revealed through many of my conversations with key refugee-centered organisations in Rwanda, this research has shown that even a sliver of qualitative data can disarm such rudimentary and essentialist readings.

This research article was only possible through a serious engagement with an often-neglected temporality: the future. In most cases, scholars of forced migration have tended to a myriad of damage-centred questions around trauma, violence, destitution, and hopelessness. While these critical perspectives have been useful, answers to the ‘what now?’ question have not been as robust. To echo sociologist and social futures scholar John Urry (2016, pp. 188-189), we must “‘mainstream’ the future into social science since it is too important to be left to states, corporations or technologists.” Thinking through utopia stands as an important direction towards this, where it “possesses the capacity to de-naturalize the dominant reality by imaginatively transcending what are seen as current material limitations” (Reedy, 2002, p. 170). For refugees whose everyday life is defined by such limitations, transcending them through talk of futurity can be liberating. This is a particularly important exercise when considering the stagnation and failure of classic durable solutions that largely rely on state support in refugees’ local integration, resettlement, or repatriation. ‘Future talk’ can add important insight to ongoing talks around ‘complementary pathways’ that seek to compensate for the shortcomings of durable solutions, as committed to through the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees. While “the exact meaning of the term ... remains subject to ongoing discussion” (Wood, 2020), these pathways often place refugees under the care of non-state agents, for instance, through community and private sponsorship. Notwithstanding the value of encouraging such solidarities, this paper provides policy-relevant grounding for the inclusion of intentional agrarian communities within these pathways, leading to spaces where refugees can exercise autonomy through self-reliance.

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PREAMBLE TO CHAPTER 6

Introducing Chapter 6 requires an admission. When this project was first conceived some time in 2018, I attached to it a set of assumptions about ‘rootedness.’ In Peru and Turkey, I sensed a deep impulse for eventual return from the refugees I had worked. And as I thought through a body of literature that put great emphasis on the repatriation solution, I assumed this would likely be the case for Congolese refugees in Rwanda. The next chapter is as much a piece of theory-building as it is a testament to the maturation of my thoughts as a researcher. Under normal circumstances, it would perhaps be placed immediately after the literature review, prefacing the remainder of the dissertation. I have intently placed it where it is, signaling the finality of this dissertation, and writing from the position of someone who has learnt a great deal about the question of place-based identities and how these are oriented within and (re)defined through time.

Chapter 6 builds on the insight of influential scholars such as Clifford (1988), Munn (1996), Rodman (1992), and Rosaldo (1988) challenging long-held assumptions that people and cultures are necessarily rooted in originary and self-contained locales, effectively ‘freezing’ them in time and place. This chapter addresses these sedentarist assumptions directly, effectively positioning ‘anti-sedentarism’ as a more useful, localised, and historically-relevant lens in which to approach the question of people and place. It does not propose the ‘death of place,’ meaning that place no longer holds meaning in a globalized world, but rather that people’s identification with and construction of places is continually changing. While it may be tempting, or even politically practical, to envision voluntary repatriation as the most ‘natural’ solution to ending situations of protracted displacement, believing that – in some sense – individuals being displaced inherently

want to return ‘home,’ anti-sedentarism takes a more cautious approach that believes new homes and place identifications can be created whilst in exile, or beyond within new contexts that are other than places of ‘origin.’

In the case of Chapter 4, we see that despite enduring exile spanning over two decades, refugees do remain attached to their homeland. Along with Chapter 5, refugees draw on memories of their past life as agrarian folk to speak of ‘the good life’ when milk was abundant and communities across the landscape helped each other in difficult times. While both chapters point to the importance of land-based livelihoods for refugees at Mahama, they are distinct in terms of *where* these livelihoods can take place. This is indeed a lesson in anti-sedentarism, where both researchers and practitioners should not assume where refugees belong, but rather, consult them to examine the dimensions and boundaries of ideal spaces where they believe life can thrive.

CHAPTER 6

ANTI-SEDENTARISM AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FORCED MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Anthropologists of forced migration have advanced unique perspectives exploring identity and community as they relate to space. With its critique of naturalized conceptions of rootedness, boundedness, and territorialization, anti-sedentarism stands as an important conceptual development emanating from this work. And while expressions such as ‘sedentary bias’ and ‘sedentary thinking’ are found throughout this body of literature, anti-sedentarism per se has not received a proper treatment of its disciplinary underpinnings and relevance to the anthropology of mobilities. This review article identifies some of the genealogical traces of anti-sedentarism, discussing it through anthropological contributions in both the cultural and mobility turns. Informed by the work of anthropologists of forced migration, the shape of anti-sedentarism takes form, followed by a critical discussion on key debates related to this concept. A selection and review of migrant and refugee ethnographies produced during the mobility turn (1990s onward) is then used to explore the extent which anti-sedentarism has translated to the empirical work of anthropologists and ethnographers engaging with displacement, dispossession, and deterritorialization.

KEYWORDS

Sedentarism; forced migration; refugees; space; place; mobility; ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a rapid uptick in studies exploring mobility (for a review, see Cresswell, 2010, 2012, 2014). ‘Mobility’ is all encompassing of research on movement, transit, transport, migration, displacement, and so on. In its ambivalence and diversity, this research area is interested in all that is in motion. This direction is supplemented by claims that we now live in a new age of ‘hypermobility’ or ‘supermodernity’ (Augé, 1995; Sivaramakrishnan & Vaccaro, 2006) – qualified by rapid flows and processes of goods, people, and ideas – notions of ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1989), and the foundations and aspirations of earlier scholarship on globalization (Massey, 1994). Central to the ‘mobility turn’ is its contestation to notions of sedentarism – both in its relation to time and space – where it is taken to represent boundedness, immobility, and ‘being stuck’ in a world that is otherwise moving. As an intellectual paradigm based on movement, the mobility turn has naturally gravitated towards fluid, unsettled, and ‘nomadic’ conceptions about the world and its peoples.

The study of migration has been instrumental in defining the mobility turn. As Lems (2016, p. 317-318) observes:

Over the last two decades, there has been a radical shift from stable, rooted and mappable identities to fluid, transitory and migratory phenomena. Rather than being bounded by a timeless and unmovable place, people are now thought of as moving continuously through flexible, open-ended and contested *space*. Refugees and migrants have come to be the symbolic figures of this shift. [emphasis in original]

Migration scholars have effectively been well-positioned to contribute to the intellectual currents of the mobility turn. Amongst them, anthropologists have shown great aptitude, largely because of

their discipline's imprint across the social sciences during the 'cultural turn', where many of its key ideas now formulate scholarship on mobility. An influential figure here is Liisa H. Malkki and her advances in 'Refugees and exile: From "refugee studies" to the national order of things' (1995a). Based on her ethnography of camp-based and city-dwelling Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki (1995b) warns against the sedentarist bias of scholarship and the naturalized representations of territoriality, nationality, and rootedness that underlie the category of 'refugee' and conceptualizations of 'people on the move'. Extending Malkki's work, anthropologists have challenged the notion that primordial attachments to particular places remain the primary determinants of identification and belonging among displaced populations, emphasizing instead the importance of forward-looking practices of attachment (and detachment) from place. These anti-sedentarist contributions focused on deterritorialization and transnationalism have been instrumental in deconstructing essentialized readings of refugees, their experience, and more broadly, global migration phenomena. Importantly, it has 'opened up' new ways of thinking about refugees' role and agency in reterritorialization, place-making, and inscriptions of the cultural self in *new places*.

The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive review of literature to draw out some of the genealogies of anti-sedentarism and how its critique of naturalized conceptions of rootedness, boundedness, and territorialization is situated within contemporary ethnographic work by anthropologists of forced migration. While many scholars have discussed the emergence, origins, and broad conceptual underpinnings of the 'mobility turn' (Cresswell, 2010; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006), and others exploring how this relates to the study of forced migration (Schewel, 2020; Glick Schiller, and Salazar, 2013), I am unaware of any work that specifically looks at these developments through the lens of anti-sedentarism. Bringing together

an eclectic collection of anthropological literatures that connect different forms of human migration, (im)mobility, and movement to geographic space, this paper defies the often monolithic and isolationist norms of traditional review articles. Through this approach, anti-sedentarism *as a concept* takes shape, showcasing its relevance within assessments on the interconnection between people ‘on the move’ and places of meaning and identification. Importantly, while this article works towards recognizing and locating anti-sedentarism within anthropological work focused on forced migration, it also hopes to speak to other anthropologies (and geographies) centering on human movement.

The next sections will move towards this, first by exploring anti-sedentarism’s roots in the intellectual developments of both the ‘cultural turn’ (1970s-early 2000s) and ‘mobility turn’ (1990s-present), supplemented by relevant work by anthropologists of forced migration. Drawing out key traits of the anti-sedentarist position, I will then attempt to draw out the shape of so-called anti-sedentarism. Critiques of anti-sedentarism will then be explored. Next, a selection of geographically-diverse ethnographies – largely by forced migration anthropologists – will be used to explore the extent in which the anti-sedentarist approach has been relayed to the field. The final section of this essay will explore how these ethnographies conducted and published throughout the mobility turn have at once grown from the engagement and critique of naturalized representations of territoriality, nationality, and rootedness, all the while remaining faithful to the importance of ‘groundedness’. This last section shows how the empirical work of forced migration anthropologists ‘talks back’ to the anti-/sedentarist binary, showcasing their important contributions to broader anthropological inquiries into transnational (im)mobility (Glick Schiller, 2010, 2015; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Salazar, 2013).

GENEALOGICAL TRACES OF ANTI-SEDENTARISM

Anthropology has long been interested in the relationship between place and people. In classical works, place (often synonymized with the term ‘space’) was merely an inert container where social and cultural life occurred. From a functionalist perspective, place and space facilitated and gave life. From a structuralist perspective, place and space constituted an affinal fixity – much like kinship – that provided the bedrock of community and society. As with many other concepts and theories of the social sciences, essentialist and taken-for-granted ideas of spatiality and culture were disrupted during the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1970s. This period, spanning from the 1970s until the early 2000s (Rosati, 2017), was marked by a heightened interest in culture as a central node of sociality and personhood. Most importantly, it was a period where the old guard of structuralism and its deep commitment to understanding the organization of people and places through systems, hierarchies, and models was replaced with postcolonial (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978; Minh-Ha, 1991), poststructural and postmodern (Derrida, 1967/1998; Foucault, 1976/1990, 1975/1995), and feminist (Butler 1990; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981) approaches. Grappling with its foundational ties to the colonial project, anthropology paid great attention to how it had constructed and reified notions of ‘the native’, ‘the savage’, and ‘the Other’.

In these confrontations, the intersection of place, culture, and identity underwent great scrutiny. Clifford’s (1988) work was instrumental in this new disciplinary reflexivity, making the erudite observation that “the idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of a stable, territorialized existence ... common notions of culture persistently bias the answer toward rooting rather than travel” (338). Confrontation to this long-standing ‘expectation’ was greatly influenced by the increasing popularity of critical scholarly work exploring nationalism and identity, and importantly, the historical observation that while mobility was characteristic of much of human

history it had become increasingly restricted as a result of post-Westphalian nation-building and colonization (Dowty, 1987; Wolf, 1982). As Akhil Gupta (1992) notes in the introductory paragraph to their influential article ‘The song of the nonaligned world’:

“The nation is so deeply implicated in the texture of everyday life and so thoroughly presupposed in academic discourses on ‘culture’ and ‘society’ that it becomes difficult to remember that it is only one, relatively recent, historically contingent form of organizing space in the world.” (63)

Equally important was the increasing recognition that we were moving into an increasingly globalized future:

“‘Globalization’ is currently one of the most frequently-used and most powerful terms in our geographical and social imaginations. At its extreme (and though ‘extreme’, this version is none the less highly popular) what it calls up is a vision of total unfettered mobility; of free unbounded space.” (Massey, 1999, p. 33)

In these reflections existed a deep sense of anti-sedentarism – both as a vision for an unbounded and ‘free’ future and in its confrontation of past (and present) anthropologies that uncritically naturalized the link between people and place.

Here, I echo Kokot’s (2007) analysis that anthropology’s new theoretical directions grew out of both a postmodernist perspective that critiqued foundational terminology – the ‘field’, ‘place’, ‘culture’, ‘identity’ – and the emerging global studies perspective that explored delocalization and deterritorialization. Important debates emanated from the postmodern perspective, where questions about representation led to observations on anthropology’s implicit

albeit perhaps unintentional forms of othering through the constructions of its ‘subjects’ as somehow – ‘primitive’, ‘native’, ‘savage’, ‘exotic’ – and some-*where* – in place, bounded, immobile, and sedentary (Appadurai, 1988b, 1988c; Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Representational issues of voice and time became discussed in close tandem with the issue of place. Fabian’s (1983) concept of ‘denial of coevalness’ was relevant here, recognising that anthropological accounts of the ‘Third World’ were often anachronistic and central to primitivizing people and communities under study. Complimentary to this, Munn (1996) showed the idiosyncrasy in assumptions about time and place, where the former was considered dynamic while space remained static, where “boundaries are always fixed, relatively enduring forms marked off the ground” (p. 464-465). Where spatiality in these foreign places experienced an assumed inertia, so too did its people, leading to representations of these cultures as somewhat frozen in time (Appadurai 1988b, p. 36). Rodman’s (1992) contributions were also influential, where observations from her fieldwork in Melanesia and Vanuatu led her to articulate a conception of place as socially constructed, relative, and dynamic; one where ideas and people are temporary, overlapping, and contested. Like Rodman (1992), Appadurai (1988c) drew attention to the ethnographers’ positionality at the intersection of place and vocality: “The problem of voice (‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking to’) intersects with the problem of place (speaking ‘from’ and speaking ‘of’)” (p. 17).

From the globalist perspective, the ‘nation’ and its constellations – nationality, nationhood, nationalism, nation-state – became the object of much deconstruction, largely as a result of new globalization-induced contestations to its integrity, its changing role in geopolitics, and new theoretical directions from the postmodern critique. This deconstruction inevitably undermined the legitimacy of nations as both homogenous and the ‘natural’ interlocutor between the global and

local (Basch et al., 1994/2000). New observations about mobility and exchange also played an important role in shaking up these national markers of cultural and social difference:

The view of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither 'we' nor 'they' are as self-contained and homogenous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late 20th-century world, which is at once marked by borrowing and lending across porous cultural boundaries, and saturated with inequality, power, and domination. (Rosaldo, 1988, p. 87)

In what was seen as an increasingly mobile and deterritorialized world, new ideas at the intersection of place, culture, and identity were flourishing; to name a few influential directions, scholars became interested in cultural exchange through hybridity (Bhabha, 1989), assimilation of 'outside ideas' through indigenization and vernacularization (Appadurai, 1996a), and the exploration of culture through 'routes not roots' (Clifford, 1997). Peoples and cultures were increasingly conceptualized as connected, heterogenized, and flowing through each other via intricate global networks (Massey, 1993) and 'translocalities' (Appadurai, 1996b). Where the 'clustering of cultural practices' became increasingly understood as deterritorialized (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992), and national communities as constructed through 'imagination as a social practice' (Appadurai, 1996a; see also Anderson, 1983), there was a thorough rattling of pseudo-puritanical ideals about the significance of emplaced and territorially bounded nations, and particularly how these relate to questions of identity.

Considering their scope, it is not surprising that anthropologists of forced migration found kin within these new horizons. Fieldwork 'at the margins' (Das & Poole, 2004) exposed these

scholars to the brutal reality of political violence and to the dark side of state technologies that cemented notions of identity, community, and nationhood – identity cards, passports, borders, refugee camps, and immigrant detention centres. And as these same notions became increasingly understood as artificial and socially constructed, so too did the assumed foundational building blocks formulating the refugee identity. Liisa H. Malkki was arguably a trailblazer in bridging the postmodern and globalist developments of the ‘cultural turn’, the then-emerging paradigm concerned with mobility (i.e. the ‘mobility turn’), and anthropological work centered on displacement, dispossession, and deterritorialization. As observed by Chatty (2014), Malkki’s contributions were revolutionary in shifting anthropologists from an interest in exploring refugees’ past and continued attachment to their homeland to explorations on homemaking, belonging, and future aspirations.

To explore the emplacement-displacement binary, Malkki drew heavily on explorations of hybridity, postcoloniality, creolization, and transnational cultural forms, pointing out that “these discussions do not assume the purity or naturalness, wholeness or wholesomeness of origins, identities, communities, cultural traditions, or nationalities ... displacement and emplacement are seen as historical products, ever-unfinished projects” (Malkki, 1995a, p. 516). It is through this view that Malkki challenged the essentialized form of the ‘refugee identity’ – a depoliticized and liminal identity that was ‘naturally’ out of place, estranged in its country of asylum, and undoubtedly yearning for an eventual return home (Malkki, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). Malkki’s research with Burundian refugees in Tanzania provided an anti-sedentarist countercurrent to much of the refugee research of the 1990s which, as Preston (1999) notes, was largely focused on the repatriation of refugees to their respective places of origin. This ‘decade of repatriation’, as it was designated by former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, was largely reliant on

‘sedentarist thinking’ (Kibreab, 1999) that saw re-rooting displaced persons as the optimal and natural solution to the refugee problem, an approach that – alongside Malkki’s contributions – became increasingly problematized as the ‘decade of repatriation’ was coming to a close (Black & Koser, 1999).

THE SHAPE OF ANTI-SEDENTARISM

The above provides signposts of the anti-sedentarist position and its relation to mobility, migration, and displacement. It begins with a fundamental critique of a sedentarist mythico-history⁴⁶ that normatively considers the tight coupling of people and place as optimal and preferred. Following the discourses of human nature and evolution, sedentarism is seen as a historical imperative; conversely, nomadism is a backwards practice symbolic of an absence of civilization. While anti-sedentarism *should not* to be synonymized with nomadism, but rather be conceptualized as a critical approach to claims that ‘naturalize’ the link between people and specific geographic locales, it is no doubt influenced by a strong historical record showing exchange, movement, and interaction between people, and across large expanses of geographic terrain (Barnard & Wendrich, 2008), and relatedly, by the call to study human evolution and social change through historical explorations of changes in (im)mobility (Kelly, 1992).

In its effort to debunk the ‘sedentarist myth’ that assembles people in isolated cultural units neatly associated to distinct places in geographic space, anti-sedentarism seeks to disrupt the ‘sedentarist *doxa*’⁴⁷ that has led to the political, ideological, and religious construction of

⁴⁶ Here I borrow from Liisa H. Malkki’s lexicon in *Purity and exile* (1995b). Mythico-history is understood here as ordered, scripted, and formulaic stories that make up a world that can neither be called history nor myth.

⁴⁷ This is a reference to Bourdieu’s (1990) conceptualization of *doxa* as “undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve, and native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field” (p. 68). By ‘sedentarist *doxa*’, I am referring to the unquestioned and taken-for-granted logics and ‘facts’ that naturalize the link between human civilization and permanent settlement.

territorially-based identities. As expressed by Hammond (2004), “what is the issue ... is the *assumption* that place plays a particular, generalizable, and predictable kind of role in community construction and identity formation across cultures” [emphasis in original] (p. 79). Jansen & Löfving (2007) provide a similar assessment: “The problem of the sedentarist bias, we argue, is not only that people are presumed to be naturally rooted, and that movement is therefore somehow inherently violent, but also that they are seen as *forever* rooted” [emphasis in original] (p. 9). And so, whilst the anti-sedentarist position sees both place and identity as the result of social construction, its analytical focus is most concerned with the internal and external construction of catchall, stereotypical, prescriptive, and essentialist *place-based identities*. Codified by markers of ‘nationality’, ‘refugee status’, etc. – as we have seen – these highly sedentarized identities risk emboldening geographic divisiveness and the ‘Other’, all the while locking peoples to places without choice, autonomy, or agency.

Located within critical assessments on global immobility (Maple et al., 2021; Turner, 2007), anti-sedentarism therefore underpins the many confrontations to global power asymmetries and forms of violence that stifle, control, and prevent human movement. To anti-sedentarists, sedentarism as a script for social organization is an imprisoning form of control, an extension of carceral logics if you will (Moran et al., 2018), and one based on territoriality, place of birth, heritage, history, and the like. Rather than look to the past for markers of identity – for instance, by exploring attachments to the homeland or nationalist discourse – anti-sedentarism and its engagement with movement, transnationalism, and deterritorialization is instead interested in forward-looking practices of identity formation and intersubjectivity. In its extreme deterritorialized form, the anti-sedentarist position has produced migration scholarship that goes beyond the material world, as is evident in work exploring the imaginary (Findlay et al., 2013;

Ramji, 2006; Salazar, 2011), existential immobility (Hage, 2005; Lems & Tošić, 2019), and temporal dispossession (Ramsay, 2019), to name a few. In its radical form, the anti-sedentarist position and its proclivity for individual and unbounded freedom leads to a direct confrontation with state, authoritarian, and hegemonic technologies of control, perhaps one grounded in anarchist theory and praxis.⁴⁸

LOSING AND HAVING GROUND BENEATH OUR FEET

The critique of the anti-sedentarist dimension of the mobility turn – and it is, effectively, only one dimension of this paradigm – lies between a sense of *losing* and *having* ground beneath our feet, both materially and metaphorically. With sophistication, the postmodern critique has successfully penetrated and abstracted much of the social sciences, producing highly theoretical forms of scholarship that can seem distant from reality, or rather, difficult to translate to the empirical context. Hage (2005) exemplifies this feeling in his defense for field-based migration research, providing an interesting observation on the wide-use of Anderson's (1983) 'imagined communities':

When a person presenting a paper on a diasporic community is asked what evidence there is to show that the diasporic group they are studying is a community, they give you a superior look and inform you that 'it doesn't work this way' because the community they are studying is an 'imagined community'. Here 'imagined

⁴⁸ Through its long-standing philosophical contributions, anarchist thought has emphasized freedom, liberty, and autonomy. Relevant to anti-sedentarism, Emma Goldman's (1917/1969) essays 'Prisons: A social crime and failure' and 'Patriotism: A menace to liberty' share a common discussion on the spatiality of control. Both Élisée Reclus (1905/2013) and Peter Kropotkin (1902/1989) are also relevant to this discussion, where they question notions of progress across geographies and refute the naturalization of humans as inherently competitive. Anti-sedentarism can also be found in anthropologist David Graeber's (2004) discussion on non-state political entities and the need to dissolve borders, a point that has been raised by the author in his own discussion on environmental displacement (Parent, 2021).

community' seems to have very little community in it and a lot of imagination instead, usually the imagination of the researcher. (Hage, 2005, p. 468)

While this bold critique perhaps overlooks the value of Anderson's contributions, it is demonstrative of wider concerns on the absence of firm groundedness in postmodern theory and its wider project to 'de-naturalize' key concepts across disciplines (Easthope & McGowan, 2004). Relevant to the study of migration, spatial terminology has undergone a similar upheaval, where Cresswell (2009) identifies a bifurcation between those scholars "who see mobility and process as antagonistic to place and those who think of place as created by both internal and external mobilities and processes" (p. 9). While Malkki's contributions were certainly influential in confronting sedentarist notions of migration as pathological (Chatty, 2014), other migration scholars have suggested that relying too much on this logic may instead lead to a pathologized conception of place-making, belonging, and connections to locality. Gaim Kibreab was arguably one of the first scholars to challenge Malkki's thesis, with Jansen & Löfving (2007) providing a summary of his view on anti-sedentarism: "ignoring existing patterns of territorialization, identification with place, and a desire to return to locality of origin, anti-sedentarists engage in politically dangerous forms of wishful thinking, mistakenly concluding that identities are nowadays more and more detached from territory in a global move toward a-national, deterritorialized citizenship" (p. 4). Relatedly, there is a concern that undermining important place-based questions related to exilic belonging and homemaking may embolden a problematic discourse that frames displaced persons as essentially liminal (Brun & Fábos, 2015; Parent & Sarazin, 2020; Ramsay, 2019).

As a response to this, Lems (2016) asks forced migration scholars to "confront the absence of place in current readings of displacement ... where dominant anthropological discourses tend

to become tangled up in a fascination with the boundlessness refugees and migrants embody” (p. 317). This is a preoccupation that has endured throughout the mobility turn, where Brun’s (2001) early treatment of the ‘imaginary’ contends that “the focus on imagination and the fear of becoming essentialist seem to have resulted in a neglect of the location where displaced people and migrants are present” (p. 20). In its deepest form – fully uprooted, deterritorialized, and unbounded – one must wonder if the mobility turn somewhat fetishizes movement, not realising that this is perhaps an elitist worldview (Friedman, 2002) that isn’t thoughtfully engaging with neither the facts of widespread immobility, nor its violent form of forced displacement.

This last observation is no less important in the assessment of anti-sedentarism as an intellectual norm that – if not employed in close tandem with critical analysis – risks depoliticizing the migration process and overlooking important material manifestations of power that constitute the ‘refugee reality’; important considerations of widespread immobility (Massey, 1994; Kibreab, 1999; Faist, 2013; Bélanger & Silvey, 2020), protracted encampment (Malkki, 1996; Hailey, 2009), short-sighted humanitarian interventions (Hyndman & Giles, 2016), the strengthening (Richardson, 2013) and externalization (Rodier, 2013) of borders, and so on. In its assault on terminology, there is a fear that some conceptual directions of the postmodern-friendly anti-sedentarist position have subtle – yet extremely important – political implications. As Stepputat (1999) puts it:

When researchers use . . . de-naturalizing analytics on categories that are introduced in order to help or protect people, such as ‘refugee’, ‘repatriate’ or ‘internally displaced people’, they are entering a loaded political field where they have to be very much aware of the effects their arguments may have. (Stepputat, 1999, p. 416; quoted in Turton, 2005).

Allow me to draw a parallel to demonstrate this. In Blu's (1996) essay relating sense of place to her ethnography of the Lumbee Native Americans, she notes that 'Indians, for their part, need to make their claims convincing to federal or state legislators, lawyers, and policy implementers and are often forced to argue for their priority in time and stability in space in order to fit other Americans' ideas about Indianness, property, and rights' (Blu, 1996, p. 224-225). These conditions point to a kind of sedentarism, one based on a "stereotyped view of 'an' Indian people with 'its' own culture and social organization located in 'a' designated territory" (Blu, 1996, p. 224). In order to gain land rights, the Lumbee need to 'speak to' a state typology on indigeneity. This is evidently linked to the notion of 'legibility' and the demand to acquiesce with a rights-granting logic that has been put in place by what Scott (1998) would likely call 'authoritarian high modernism'. Refugees face a similar predicament, where their very protection (and the rights granted to them) depends on the outcome of a highly opaque asylum determination process. They must 'prove' their persecution with finesse, using records, documentation, witnesses, and marks of bodily harm to build a case for themselves. Dubiously enough, the standard of proof and the protocols for status determination vary widely between nations. And as Malkki (1996) rightly affirms "the international refugee regime ... is inseparable from this wider national order of things, this wider grammar" (p. 516). There can be emancipatory brilliance, then, in an anti-sedentarist anthropology of forced migration that constitutes culture and identity as largely deterritorialized, interconnected, and hybridized; one where subjectivities take precedence over essentialized notions of belonging. However, in this resistance to essentializing refugees to a simplistic transactional model that associates identity and culture to bounded 'places' and national territorial entities, we also run the risk of undermining important identity markers that make them legible in

a panoptic system of control (Foucault 1975/1995). The disturbing plight of stateless persons and *sans-papiers* exemplifies the possible outcome of such risks.

This discussion, as it is intended, should leave us unsure about the beauty and the beast of anti-sedentarism as it relates to the mobility turn and the anthropology of forced migration. Stepping away from theoretical and disciplinary debates for a moment, the next section will ‘look to the field’ to explore how the above has translated to the practice and writing of ethnographies within migrant contexts.

WHAT A SELECTION OF ETHNOGRAPHIES TELLS US

The purpose of this section is to explore how anti-sedentarist thinking and approaches – and conversely, those from the sedentarist position – have been employed in contemporary ethnographies throughout the ‘mobility turn’. To do this, I will explore a small but eclectic mix of ethnographies (Agier, 2018; Allan, 2014; Chatty, 2010; Clark-Kazak, 2010; Hammond, 2004; Hasselberg, 2016; Hyndman, 2000; Jackson, 2016; Malkki, 1995b). The selection of these ethnographies was based on three factors: (1) their influence to the field of refugee and migration studies, (2) their thematic and geographic difference, and (3) my personal interest and claim that these have something to say about the above discussion on anti-sedentarism. The analysis of this small collection of ethnographies was done by reading each carefully, first identifying key themes, methods, and conclusions on the link between people, place, and migration. This was followed by a process of literature grouping (Galvan & Galvan, 2017), working deductively from categories related to key tensions between the sedentarist and anti-sedentarist positions. All ethnographies were conducted by anthropologists, at the exception of Clark-Kazak (2010) and Hyndman (2000) who, respectively, explore their cases through their expertise in international development and

human geography. Diving into these ethnographies, readers should not consider this section as a complete review of these works; the selected ethnographies have much more to say than what I will draw out here. Rather, its specific intention is to situate sedentarism and anti-sedentarism within field-based studies.

One notable convergence is the persistence of territorial identities despite displacement, dispossession, and deterritorialization. In Hasselberg (2016), she follows the cases of eighteen migrants who have been given a deportation order as a result of criminal conviction. The bulk of those involved in her study are first- or second-generation immigrants, most of which feel British and disconnected from their place of origin. Her ethnography is focused on the period between their ‘deportability’ (i.e. when they are given the deportation order) and actual ‘deportation’, a period typically spent in a migrant detention centre. Here, liminality is experienced in different forms – between two national identities, and between freedom in one place and deportation to another. While Hasselberg (2016) clearly states that her work is not intended to be political, her ethnography draws attention to some of the idiosyncrasies of ‘crimmigration’ and its foundations in nationalist discourses of exclusion. Despite identifying more with the place and identity of the United Kingdom, this study shows how immigrants’ nationality – as a legal category – predominates over these attachments, determining life courses and limiting individual choices.

While vastly different, Allan’s (2014) study on the experiences of Palestinian exile in Shatila also explores the ‘in between-ness’ of identities as they relate to territorialization and deterritorialization. Her work shows that for many Palestinian youth, there is a disillusionment with the ‘Right to Return’ movement and a strong desire to move beyond nationalist orthodoxies. As Allan (2014) shows, this is the result of several mutually-reinforcing and interdependent factors: to name a few, that most youth were born in Shatila and have no physical relationship to

Palestine, that a generational divide somewhat bifurcates the elders who hold onto the past and the youth who wish to look beyond it, and that there is a sense of abandonment from important organizations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The difficult camp conditions, Allan (2014) contends, make it difficult for young Palestinians of Shatila to address the tension between historical/territorial and forward-looking/deterritorialized identities: “the provisionality of daily life has produced a particular temporality in which the burdens of the present eclipse past and future” (p. 162).

Clark-Kazak’s (2011) study of Congolese refugees in Uganda also finds a temporal tension between identities. While explaining that research participants recognize the artificiality of borders and notions of ethnicity, her ethnography describes a camp experience that is heavily influenced by these markers of identity. Territorialized attachments to ‘lineality’, Clark-Kazak (2011) shows, are important in defining the refugee experience – both in how people associate to each other and in terms of their legitimacy when making political claims at the family, house-hold, community, and policy level.

In her ethnographic work on Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki’s (1995b) findings suggest a rift between town-based and camp-based refugee identities. At Mishamo camp, Tanzanian authorities are ‘Tutsinized’, becoming the symbolic dominant Other who controls and makes life difficult for Hutu refugees. Town refugees living in Kigoma, who conversely have more extensive and egalitarian contact with Tanzanians, are more inclined towards incorporation within Tanzanian society. Malkki’s (1995b) work, then, suggests that those living in the camp have a stronger attachment to Hutu a mythico-history and national cosmology, explaining why this group is more resistant to the possibility of naturalization; the status of refugee is considered symbolic

of Hutu identity, and if stripped away, would prevent them from laying claim to their homeland upon return.

Despite bodies being physically dissociated to place through deterritorialization and displacement, these works show the tenacity of territory and place in the construction of identities, senses of self-perception, and community relations. Specific to Allan (2014), Clark-Kazak (2011), and Malkki (1995b), these historical and territorial ties are related to the locus of agency and futurity, demonstrating an effective exchange between both sedentarist and anti-sedentarist approaches to analysing fieldwork data. Their engagement, on the one hand, resists ‘naturalizing’ the link between people and place, and on the other, doesn’t take an ontological route that forcibly de-historicizes research participants from their spatial roots.

In their exploration of refugee geographies – the physical places where refugees inhabit and experience the world – these ethnographies leverage both sedentarist and anti-sedentarist analytical perspectives. In camp-based ethnographies, some scholars show both an acceptance and resistance to the deeply sedentarizing feature of refugee encampment. On the one hand, these scholars (Agier, 2010; Allan, 2014; Clark-Kazak, 2011; Hyndman, 2000) recognize that the extreme lack of resources in refugee camps, limited opportunities for employment, non-existent privacy, and dearth of meaningful places to congregate make up a substratum for dire living conditions. To that end, readers of these ethnographies can get a sense that in order for refugees to live dignified and fulfilling futures, these ‘warehouse conditions’ (Smith, 2004) will need to be dismantled. Yet, these ethnographies do not make such normative – perhaps anti-sedentarist – claims that directly contest the fabric of refugee camps. Instead, they explore what goes on inside the camps to subvert the logics that formulate the ‘refugee identity’, control refugeehood, and justify their segregation from citizen spaces. By showing how complex, creative, and innovative

refugees are in their effort to build informal economies (Allan, 2014) and embody and enact politics (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Malkki, 1995b), these scholars deracinate essentialized notions about refugees; those that qualify them as liminal, apolitical, unproductive, and effectively out-of-place until returned to their ‘homeland’.

While Hammond’s (2004) ethnography is not within a refugee camp, but rather explores the building of the isolated returnee settlement of Aba Bai, her ethnography unsettles common ideas about refugees by showing their impressive ability to form community attachment and a sense of home all the while coping and adapting to extreme living conditions. In this context, Hammond (2004) shows the paramount importance of place. Taking a stronger stance within the sedentarist and anti-sedentarist debate, Agier (2018) is firmly anchored in the former while Hyndman (2000) the latter. From a markedly spatial approach, Hyndman (2000) provides a critical study that places the refugee camp as a site of power. Travelling between ground-level qualitative data with refugees and a macrolevel analysis of humanitarian aid and development actors, she demonstrates how powerful actors qualify and govern refugee camps along the Kenya-Somalia border as ‘communities’ despite their lack of autonomy, agency, and social functionality. Agier (2018), on the other hand, provides a near-romantic account of the informal camp at Calais, characterising the ‘Jungle’ as a vibrant social and urban laboratory ripe for experimentation. Whereas Hyndman (2000) firmly holds that power asymmetry is characteristic of the relationship between camp residents and humanitarian actors, Agier (2018) defines this relationship as essentially productive and egalitarian. Until its destruction by French authorities, the Jungle was a deeply meaningful place that encouraged self-organization and autonomy and embodied a solidarity of cosmopolitanism. Similar to Agier (2018), Chatty’s (2010) ethnography points to the central importance of place in building local cosmopolitanism across the Middle East. Looking to

important communities having suffered a great deal of dispossession and displacement, notably Armenians, Christians, Kurds, and Palestinians, she argues that these minorities have maintained their cultural identity while enjoying strong attachment to their host community. Defying the anti-sedentarist position, Chatty (2010) argues that this is the result of a Middle East metaculture that does not prefer assimilation, but rather encourages cosmopolitan ideals where minorities are encouraged to remain attached to their cultural identification and heritage.

Across these ethnographies, an important observation can be made on the ‘de-sedentarizing’ of methodologies. As with other important concepts that were re-examined during the cultural turn, as described in the previous section, the ‘field’ underwent a similar treatment. As described by Kokot (2007), “‘the field’ is no longer a spatially defined site anthropologists naïvely enter, leave or return to, as the notion of spatially bounded ‘cultures’ rooted in a distinct territory has been thoroughly deconstructed’ (12), adding that ‘in a vague metaphorical way, “de-territorialization” refers to the dissolution of borders, boundaries and the anthropological “field” ’ (15). As such, scholars have recognized a notable push for multi-sited ethnography, including in migration-related research (Boccagni, 2014; Falzon, 2015; Hage, 2005; Paul & Yeoh, 2020; Salazar, 2017).

The ethnographies of Chatty (2010), Clark-Kazak (2010), Hyndman (2000), and Jackson (2016) embrace this methodological approach, where their findings are less attached to specific locations and places. This allows the authors to engage with metanarratives that go beyond specific places and speak to broader, systemic, or general themes such as humanitarianism (Hyndman, 2000), ethics (Jackson, 2016), youth (Clark-Kazak, 2010), and cosmopolitanism (Chatty 2010). This approach can also make way for comparative research that explores differences between sites, as is the case with Clark-Kazak’s (2010) and Malkki’s (1995b) work. From a conceptual and

epistemological standpoint, ethnographies engaging with the imaginary (Allan, 2014) and existentialism (Hasselberg, 2016; Jackson, 2016) also show a commitment to deterritorialized and anti-sedentarist pathways to study migrant and refugee identities, memory and futurity, and attachment and belonging.

CONCLUSION: TALKING BACK

The ethnographies discussed in the previous section all took place during the mobility turn, and importantly, following the publication of Liisa H. Malkki's seminal ethnography in 1995. While only a snapshot has been provided, these scholars have certainly engaged with and 'talked back' to issues brought forth by the debate between sedentarism and anti-sedentarism and how these relate to anthropological research. While some have been more critical – or rather, explicit – than others, I would argue that the bulk of these ethnographies have re-examined taken for granted markers of identity – 'nation', 'refugee', 'foreignness'. In a sense, this is representative of the postmodernist foundations of the anti-sedentarist position, characterized by a deep desire to uproot, and 'deterritorialize concepts'. Interestingly, nuance has emerged from this exercise. On the one hand, these ethnographies have shown the deep persistence of territorially-based identities in the everyday lives and remembered histories of forced migrants. On the other, the innovation and creativity of refugees, and their impressive efforts to build homes and a sense of community, have challenged the notion that primordial attachments to particular places remain the primary determinants of identification and belonging among displaced populations. These observations attest to the complexity of displacement and the lives that exist within these situations, and neither the sedentarist nor the anti-sedentarist positions in their strictest and singular form seem to be able to disentangle all that happens therein. As these ethnographies reveal, life, identity, place, and

culture are – unsurprisingly – too complex to explore exclusively through a mutually-exclusive binary.

Perhaps the most thoughtful, inspiring, and humanizing of these ethnographies are those that analyze their cases through somewhat of a Bhabhian ‘third space’ where identities are conceptualized as hybridized, negotiated, translocal, and ever-changing. While memory, history, and things of the past are important in identity-formation, so are present day lived experience and aspirations for the future. While a person is physically in one place, they can still attribute meaning or attachment to ‘other places’, whether they be in other geographic locations, in the past or future, or even the imagination. And lastly, while testimonials sometimes suggest life is at a standstill and betwixt and between, it certainly is not inert. These nuances are particularly salient in ethnographies that make generous use of direct quotations from research participants (Allan, 2014; Hammond, 2004; Jackson, 2016).

The ethnographies presented above have also showcased the important ways forced migration anthropologists have engaged with and advanced broader anthropological inquiries into transnational (im)mobility. Born out of the mobility turn, this ‘anthropology of mobilities’ (Lelièvre & Marshall, 2015; Salazar, 2014) has produced a vast ‘conceptual repertoire’ (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2017) around a recognition that “many people maintain ties to their countries of origin at the same time as they become integrated into the countries that receive them [where] immigrant incorporation and enduring transnational practices are not antithetical but simultaneous processes that mutually inform each other” (Levitt, 2009, p. 1225). In the 1990s, Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc’s *Nations Unbound* (1994/2000) described, amongst others, the concept of ‘transnationalism’, “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement [building] social fields that cross

geographic, cultural, and political borders” (p. 7). This has produced other related concepts such as ‘simultaneity’, the idea that people who move can be simultaneously embedded in more than one locale (Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), and more recently ‘multiscalar social fields’, where migrants “form multiple new social relations and maintain others as they settle in specific places and the networks in which they live contribute to the remaking of the institutional nexus of city-level, regional, national, supranational, and globe-spanning actors” (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018, p. 9). A critique of ‘methodological nationalism’ has also been called into play (Glick Schiller, 2010; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003), asking that scholarship go beyond the nation-state as the ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ container of people, societies, and cultures. From the ethnographies of forced migration presented above, their alignment to these developments in the anthropology of mobilities is clear.

Yet in ‘talking back’, some from the anthropology of mobilities may critique the continued use of the language and analytic of (anti-)sedentarism within academic literature, claiming that this binarily-oriented debate has been supplanted by the above (and more recent) concepts of transnationalism, multiscalar social fields, and simultaneity. And while I can appreciate certain anthropologists’ desire to ‘move on’, the forces of sedentarist logic have not ceased to exist. The phenomena of mass displacement and mass incarceration continue to be deeply intertwined, sustaining and producing new carceral geographies across the globe. Repatriation, as opposed to resettlement and local integration, continues to be the most likely ‘durable solution’ to protracted forced migration (Bradley, 2013; Hammond, 2014; Gerver, 2018a). Securitization and criminalization of migration is still gaining ground, orienting territorial containment strategies at the American, Australasian, and European periphery. And as for implications related to scholars’ own research work, the so-called resurgence of nationalism, and particularly in its populist, ethnic,

and digital forms (Elias et al., 2021; López-Alves & Johnson, 2018; Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2020), has in some ways emboldened the pervasiveness of methodological nationalism, where the nation-state increasingly exerts a centrifugal/pulling effect on social science research. To summarize, the link between people and place continues to be ‘naturalized’ along a spectrum of discourse, at one end, and violence, at the other. While many idealists will appreciate Levitt & Glick Schiller’s (2004) call for transnational migration studies to reformulate the concept of society, those whose studies are centered on the latter pole of this spectrum know too well that theoretical reformulations won’t change material circumstances.

As such, despite sedentarist bias and its dull and outdated essentialist-collectivist readings on the links between people and place, it is perhaps too soon to abandon the (anti-)sedentarism analytic. As the literature review herein has shown – and further situated within landmark ethnographies – both sedentarist and anti-sedentarist positions continue to pull at each other in meaningful and stimulating ways. In its unique ability to articulate and critically assess the different discursive registers around the link between people and geographic space, this article has shown the importance of (anti-)sedentarism language within the anthropology of forced migration, and more broadly, within interdisciplinary transnational migration studies.

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CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to examine how refugees project themselves in spatio-temporal contexts outside of the camp, answering the following question:

How do past experiences of emplacement and displacement, and current experiences of encampment, participate in the imagining of future post-camp geographies where life can thrive?

The empirical chapters of this dissertation confirm that extended encampment has not led to the materialization of thriving lives. Refugees here are isolated, unable to find work, undernourished, find it difficult to make plans, and have little faith that they will be able to exit the camp for better prospects. Within the context of recent changes, be it through the mass relocation of Congolese from other camps to Mahama or with changes in humanitarian aid by further limiting cash-based transfers, lives have become more difficult. In imagining post-camp landscapes, refugees at Mahama formulate futures through their own experiences of emplacement, displacement, and encampment. Cross-temporal linkages are clear within the body of this dissertation, leading to important implications for state, humanitarian, and development actors who invariably hold the greatest capacity to effect change for this community. An important take away of this dissertation is that these actors must not envision or plan refugees' future without consideration for their unique experiences across time. These experiences make up fundamental archaeologies that provide

signposts on what an ideal future could look like. Notably, Congolese refugees remain attached to the land, and a return to an agrarian setting is emblematic of peace. Autonomy and mobility also feature as important dimensions of these spaces, along with the restitution and compensation for losses endured through violence and war. Thus, in recognising two intersecting responses to situations of displacement – first, UN durable solutions that largely seek to urbanize refugees through state care, and second, through the drafting of peace agreements that vastly overlook the needs, claims, and grievances of displaced persons (as seen in Chapter 2) – this dissertation clearly identifies that both are inadequate in the realizing of futures that take into account refugees’ own conception of ‘the good life.’ This is perhaps specific to this context, however, and the generalizability of this result should not be assumed.

To initiate a broader discussion of the work herein, I will take a thematic approach aligned with the four major themes this dissertation addresses: (1) peace, (2) temporality, (3) refugee camps, and (4) durable solutions. Doing so will facilitate in accomplishing the aims of the discussion, first by cross-examining chapters to reveal broader contributions and implications of this dissertation, and second, plot out certain limitations of this work and how this can lead to possible lines of future research.

Peace – There is no doubt that peace makes up an important theme of this dissertation, albeit perhaps differently than how it is conceived in its classic definition of ‘absence of conflict.’ This is mostly clear in Chapter 5, where peace is considered as a bundle of amenities, opportunities, relations, and rights. Here, peace is not one ‘thing,’ but a collage of different material and existential conditions that facilitate meaning-making, sense of community, and livelihoods. Land becomes the substratum of peace, providing life-essential nourishment that simultaneously returns to Congolese refugees a familiar landscape where abundance once existed. Conceptualized as

somewhat of an intentional community in Chapter 5, mirroring others that lie at the periphery of the state and usually rely on the principles of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and inclusive governance (Sargisson, 2004, 2007a), the question of citizenship brought forth in Chapter 4 may prompt readers to wonder whether such a setting constitutes a project of citizenry-claiming. While Congolese included in this research were proud of their heritage, this is less about national origin and more about rural ways of life where subsistence is of greatest importance for subjective meaning and sense of community. The utopia described in Chapter 5 establishes a place where peace in these terms can exist. Yet, in recognising that land shortages and extensive political involvement are important dimensions of Rwanda's agriculture (Huggins, 2017), limiting both the access to territory and desire for autonomy within refugees' utopic setting, I recognize that the architecture of this space could be construed as pure idealism or wishful thinking. Therefore, it is perhaps wise to deterritorialize this vision for an agrarian intentional community, allowing us to examine its value in locations that are further afield and in landscapes that are more amenable and suitable for putting a project of this sort in place.

A possible direction to begin this process is by initiating a thorough examination of the practicalities of creating this sort of space for refugees. This would involve working with agronomists and planners to identify potential sites where this sort of community can be established, and to evaluate the extent in which subsistence can be achieved. Economic geographers could play an important role in modeling how rural-urban linkages may play out if this sort of community was established, and economists – collaborating with humanitarian actors, architects, and builders – could evaluate the cost of maintaining refugee camps against those involved in establishing a new agricultural community. Despite Chapters 4 and 5 pointing to Congolese aversion to land-based conflict, these observations would need to more thoroughly

addressed by engaging state actors and broader civil society to ensure that the question of Congolese-Host community relations undergo careful inspection, especially when considering the pervasiveness of Malthusian assessments on land where communities are perpetually construed as vying against each other for resources. This is an area where the emerging field of environmental peacebuilding could greatly contribute (Dresse et al., 2019; Ide et al., 2021). Still within the domain of politics, and in the spirit of ‘responsibility sharing,’ it would be important to engage other states that may have more capacity to establish this sort of project. This could first begin within the regions of Central and Eastern Africa, although as discussed in Chapter 6, it would be wise not to adopt a sedentarist approach that legitimizes Western practices of containment. As such, it would be important for refugees (and similarly, host country citizens) to be involved in this process.

While the establishing of intentional communities present an important avenue for peace-making, this is admittedly through a non-classical reading of what peace constitutes. Chapter 5’s interest in examining how refugees consider the process of voluntary repatriation aligns more directly with the ‘absence of conflict’ definition of peace. What this chapter shows is that Congolese at Mahama do not consider the Congo as a peaceful place, and that the Congolese Army and MONUSCO have largely failed at securing spaces where they would potentially return. While others have attempted it (Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2021), the question of how to resolve Congo’s conflict is not something this dissertation claims to answer. What research results do show is that while positive memories of peasantry remain them connected to their homeland, unresolved trauma, lingering issues of citizenship, and interminable conflict within the Kivus makes voluntary repatriation an unlikely option for them. Normatively, this dissertation puts forward to claim that this solution – currently informing policy discussions, operational mandates, and intergovernmental talks – ought to be abandoned. This is not to say that Congolese refugees should

waive their right of return, but rather, that humanitarian and state actors within this context adopt a more realistic approach that reflects the reality of eastern Congo. The recent language of ‘complimentary’ (or ‘alternative’) pathways is interesting, and within this context of protracted displacement and unending conflict (both some of the longest lasting in contemporary history), this is an ideal site where experimentation, innovation, and creativity can take place. At the very least, Chapter 6 has shown the extent in which refugees are animated by alternative solutions to their predicament, and with decades of talk around the ‘local turn’ – in peacebuilding and development, for instance – engaging forced migrants to imagine, design, and plot out their own futures is a long time coming.

Temporality – This dissertation has shown the importance of framing time as something that is a continuum. The past, present, and future are not divorced from each other, but rather, inform one another. The future is certainly the most immaterial of this trifecta, and perhaps this part of why it remains largely underexamined within scholarly debates. Unearthing the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I suspect Marxian materialism – and the wide-ranging critical approaches that later developed through it – are part of the answer. While some of this is examined within the context of critical agrarian studies (as seen in Chapter 5), this doctoral work has brought forth a range of questions that prompt me to explore this in more detail. Why, for example, does the imagining of alternative space become denigrated as wishful thinking, naïve idealism, and nothing more than a dream? What is the point of critical research if it barely engages with the future beyond meager policy recommendations? Has our imagination surrendered to Hobbesian ‘nature’ and to the hegemonic rule of global state capitalism as the epitome of social order? Perhaps more effectively than any other body of literature, afrofuturist writings do not abandon hope for the future; in fact, this hope breaths through it freely. It is true that many texts

of afrofuturism are works of fiction, but fiction has greatly helped define our intellectual endeavours – Achebe’s (1958/2009) *Things fall apart* (on coloniality), Atwood’s (1985/2011) *The handmaid’s tale* (on patriarchy), Huxley’s (1932/2007) *Brave new world* (on psychological manipulation), and Orwell’s (1949/2008) *Nineteen eighty-four* (on state control) to name a few. A shortcoming of this dissertation is that while it engages directly with the future temporality, it falls short of aligning its conclusions within the geographic and temporal relevance of afrofuturism and its engagement with Black liberation, decolonisation, and panafricanism. Working with refugees who have suffered from colonial legacies (see Chapters 1 and 4) and remain largely hindered in their imagining of the future, I was fully aware of the links between my research and these themes throughout my doctoral research, but hesitance to include a literary dimension within this work ultimately prevailed. This constitutes an important direction for future research.

What the dissertation does show are the important linkages between temporal registers. Congolese refugees understand their history as Banyarwanda that – at multiple points – migrated to the Congo to engage in agricultural labor. While they lived well for some time, producing enough to feed their families and build sense of place, they realise that their geographic origins were often a source of resentment amongst those claiming indigeneity within the Kivus. As shown in Chapter 4, this underlying resentment led to issues of citizenship within the DRC. Within their pre-displacement history lay archaeologies for the future. On the one hand, memories of abundance and bodily satisfaction informs a desired agrarian future. On the other, memories of instability, non-recognition, and tense relations limits their belief that they will ever be recognized as Congolese citizens and that Congo can be a welcoming environment for incoming migrants (including returnees). Importantly, this is also foundational to their desire to have positive relations in and around the land. Present-day encampment also informs the future, where chronic nutritional

deficit makes stronger the imagining of a return to agrarianism. Land takes labor, and for a community that is endlessly searching for opportunities to work, agricultural production leads not only to the production of life-providing food, but also to the cessation of everyday hustling. These are important motivators to establishing a future agrarian community, despite recognising that relatively poverty may continue to be part of their lives.

In imagining future return, refugees here make it clear that the trauma of violence and displacement continues to haunt them, limiting their willingness to consider repatriation. If the repatriation option does continue to be pursued by UNHCR, they will need to recognize that sustainable return can only occur if mechanisms of transitional – and perhaps, restorative – justice are put in place. Despite long-term encampment, grievances remain strong amongst Congolese refugees. They have not forgotten the family members, land, properties, and time they have lost through displacement, and return is unlikely if these grievances are not addressed. With land and property compensation and restitution remaining largely absent within the context of African peace agreements, as Chapter 2 has shown, this will have to take a stronger dimension in forthcoming Congolese peace talks if repatriation is to take part of the overall Congolese strategy towards conflict termination. Approaches such as ‘ethnographic mapping,’ described in Chapter 3, can be used to understand the nature and extent of refugee grievances, claims, and needs *prior to* return and *within* peace processes. Chapter 4 demonstrates the value of such an approach, where research participants identify key markers of stability that would perhaps encourage them to return: availability of land, adequate housing, access to education and health clinics, infrastructure to facilitate mobility, and the need for reconciliation-facilitating institutions, to name a few.

Refugee camps – Returning to the question of camps as ‘spaces of exception’ and ‘bare life’ discussed within Chapter 1, it is undeniable that existence within Mahama is indeed bare.

While it is difficult to identify the threshold of camp life as being bearable, perhaps in the first few months or year after displacement when mere safety is ‘good enough,’ to it becoming unbearable when life begins to feel at a standstill and well-being crashes, the qualitative record here shows that many of those who participated in this research crossed this threshold once they were relocated to this ‘state-of-the-art’ camp. Most refugees I spoke with had been relocated from Gihembe camp, a space that was just 45 minutes away from Kigali – facilitating economic activities – and where camp authorities allowed residents to undertake small renovation projects to improve their living conditions (see Chapter 5). This is not the case at Mahama. This is a largely sterile environment where rules and regulations are strictly enforced, and where the breaching of these lead to heavy fines. An area unaddressed in this dissertation pertains to humanitarian infrastructure, and how buildings, site planning, and everyday management of camp spaces have a direct impact on connectivity, sense of community, and morale. In recalling their previous living conditions, describing these as more humane and organic, this dissertation affirms what other scholars have contended: that camp architecture has deep consequences on the people who inhabit these spaces (Fosas et al., 2018; Maani, 2017; Thomson, 2014).

I am hesitant, however, to qualify Mahama as a site of ‘bare life.’ Upon walking the streets and neighborhoods, a life does exist here. Children play, marriages are joyous, and food is enjoyed. Happiness is calibrated to what the space provides and the restraints it imposes. While quicker access to water and fuel could make life easier, not to mention additional aid for food, residents are regularly reminded of the limits of their happiness within this space of enclosure. The humanitarian baseline of protection, education, health care, and ‘adequate’ food security is represented in a baseline of happiness. Much like the examination of development has shifted from purely quantitative metrics such as gross domestic products, infant mortality, and levels of

education, bringing into its assessment new (more qualitative) metrics such as life satisfaction, happiness, and trust, the contemporary condition of global apartheid and increased time-in-waiting for durable solutions to pan out demands that the humanitarian sector broaden their view of what constitutes adequate service provision for refugees. As it stands, Congolese having lived in camps for over two decades are little different than incarcerated persons. While the moral philosophy underpinning incarceration is already subject to critique (Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007), there is little argumentative purchase that can legitimize how refugees – victims and survivors of conflict and persecution – should be destined to such extensive forms of enclosure. Future directions in carceral geography can address this by articulating how prison abolitionism translates to camp settings, drawing out normative steps towards global de-camping of refugees.

Durable solutions – Given the extent of global displacement and limited results in addressing situations of protracted displacement, the ‘solution’ in durable solutions is questionable. In thinking through some of the feedback I received through this doctoral research, and particularly in relation to Chapter 5 where I was – at one point – accused by a UNHCR representative as being a “naïve wishful thinker,” I could say the same about durable solutions.⁴⁹ While I won’t deny that there may be some truth to this, the greatest anatomical difference between the naivety of exploring a utopic agrarian landscape and that of durable solutions is that the latter has persistently failed to address the global crisis of displacement whereas the former hasn’t. This reminds me of something Peter Kropotkin wrote in *The Conquest of Bread* ([1892] 2015: 36):

Open any book on sociology or jurisprudence, and you will find there the government,
its organization, its acts, filling so large a place that we come to believe that there is

⁴⁹ In a similar manner, Moyn (2010) assesses the close linkages between the concept of utopia and that of human rights.

nothing outside the government and the world of statesmen ... And when you read the newspapers, you hardly think of the incalculable number of beings – all humanity, so to say – who grow up and die, who know sorrow, who work and consume, think and create outside the few encumbering personages who have been so magnified that humanity is hidden by their shadows, enlarged by our ignorance.

The central problem with durable solutions is that they have essentially transformed into becoming the normative ‘rules of the game,’ consistently reproduced by state and humanitarian actors as the only way situations of displacement can be resolved. Meanwhile, as Chapter 5 reveals, the humanity of refugees is far less rigid, and the imagining of their future bursts with possibility and ambition. As Chapter 1 has shown, durable solutions have been ineffective and largely represent the sedentarist and protectionist interests of the Global North (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on sedentarist logics). However, new visions and opportunities have emerged from the recent 2018 Global Compact on Refugees. These including broadening the solutions toolkit by exploring new and innovative pathways to resolve displacement, termed ‘complementary pathways.’ At present, those pathways explored within this new direction should be welcomed, such as family reunification schemes, private sponsorship, collaboration between humanitarian actors and higher education institutions, humanitarian visas, et cetera. What remains unaddressed, however, is how refugees fit into the architecture of these solutions. The empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 4 and 5) suggest that refugees have much to say about how they imagine post-camp futures. Through direct engagement with the repatriation solution, Chapter 4 suggests that – in the present, at least – Congolese in Rwanda have very little interest in voluntary repatriation. Despite this, UNHCR continues to court the governments of Rwanda and the DRC, encouraging them to discuss a tripartite repatriation agreement. “We need this,” one UNHCR representative told me,

revealing to me the distance that lies between the agency and the population they claim to serve. And while the discussion around complementary pathways is indeed exciting, it is worth nothing that in the many conversations I had with members of staff at UNHCR, I cannot recall a single utterance pointing to them. My experience in Rwanda largely confirmed what I had concluded from my experiences engaging with UNHCR in Turkey: that the organisation is deeply averse to change, and that this invariably caused extended human suffering.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the aim of this dissertation, first established in the introduction, this dissertation examines how refugees project themselves in spatio-temporal contexts outside of the camp. As presented, this dissertation confirms that refugees do indeed wish to leave the life of encampment. This wish is informed by a range of factors that can largely be attributed to the limits of camp space and its implications for existential-communal fulfillment and sense of futurity. Perhaps if camp life was constituted more inclusively, and with a future forward-dimension, Congolese at Mahama would claim the ‘right to remain.’ And while they still do remain, it is more so due to lack of prospects in alternate geographies. Land shortage issues and unemployment make Rwanda a difficult setting for them to imagine a fruitful life. Returning to Congo remains hazardous, and particularly so in the Kivus. And in geographies beyond Rwanda and Congo, they remain on resettlement lists with little success. At the moment, the camp is the only setting in which they know – at the very least – that some food, basic shelter, and rudimentary services will be available.

Projecting themselves into the future is not an easy task, nor an exercise that has been encouraged by the Rwandan state and UNHCR (their stewards). It dredges up painful memories that they still live with today, transcending to what would constitute ‘the good life’ in the future. This dissertation shows, however, that Congolese refugees have perspectives that can contest the orthodoxy of durable solutions. The implications these bring forth can be seen as dangerous, undermining the humanitarian logics that currently form the durable solutions framework that defines responses to situations of forced displacement. They may also be seen as the seeds of an

exciting future; one where refugees have more autonomy and agency in what their futures hold. In this dissertation's examination of repatriation, it is clear that refugees do not see this solution as the natural or most likely path forward. In terms of local integration, an urban future where few jobs exist does not meet these refugees' understanding of peace, resolve, or emplacement. Returning to an agrarian livelihood is of greatest importance, at least for those interlocutors who participated in this research. UNHCR mustn't ignore this in the name of orthodoxy, precedence, or routine. Finding a solution is part of their mandate after all, and if current paths do not hold the solution to resolving a situation of twenty-five years of encampment, it is their humanitarian (and perhaps legal) responsibility to explore new options. Complementary pathways are an important direction forward as they break free from the trifecta rigidity of durable solutions, but many of those currently proposed aren't new, or innovative for that matter. This is particularly the case for private sponsorship and humanitarian visas. The energy that must be injected within these conversations must come from the refugee community itself, and when given the opportunity (as this dissertation has, in some modest ways), it is impressive how creativity can burst from the experience of refugeehood and the desire to move into the future.

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