A story about primary school-aged children in Rumonge, Burundi, concerning the (re)production of violence and strengthening of resilience.

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Master Thesis in International Development Studies
Imagining Pieces of Space as Spaces of Peace:

A story about primary school-aged children in Rumonge, Burundi, concerning the (re)production of violence and strengthening of resilience.

Master Thesis in International Development Studies

November 28, 2014

Graduation date: December 31, 2014 (24 ECTS)

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Word count: 29127

Cover photo and all other photos in this thesis: Tanja Hendriks.
Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis would have been impossible without all the people that I met in Rumonge: thank you so much for letting me into your lives. Thank you for taking the time to explain things that were often utterly normal to you yet totally unfamiliar to me and thank you for not getting bored of my naïve questions. All the pupils, teachers and school directors: thank you for allowing me to be part of the last weeks of the school year and the holiday activities. Girls, thank you for letting me play horo (a ball game) with you during breaks and boys, thank you for not laughing too hard when my football skills turned out to be even poorer than any of us had expected. I also want to thank my new group of friends at Chez David, especially Axelle, Benjamin, Zenon, David, Django and Fabrice. Thank you for accepting me, guiding me, showing me around Rumonge and taking care of me whenever I needed you to. Our late night dinners and discussions are engraved in my memory. A special thanks also to Nadia, my translator, interpreter and dear friend. Thank you, for being there for me and not getting as scared as I did whenever we were called into the police station or followed around by documentation (secret service).

A big thanks also to my two supervisors: Graciela Paillet and Lidewyde Berckmoes. Lidewyde, I thoroughly enjoyed your field visit and it really helped me coming to terms with what I had been experiencing up to then. Thank you for letting me be a part of your research project. Graciela, your continuous support and encouraging attitude helped me to write not only the research proposal but also this final thesis. You were always quick to respond to my questions and I have learned a lot from the ways in which you directed me during the strenuous writing process: thank you. My supervisors were not the only ones who read and commented on earlier versions of this thesis, so a big thanks also to Erwin van der Meer and Jordi Halfman. Of course, all mistakes that remain in this text are solely my own. I also want to thank both the UvA IDS-department and the Afrika Studiecentrum for allowing me to postpone my fieldwork thereby making it possible to combine the two MA-programs.

Last but definitely not least, I want to thank my family and friends in the Netherlands. Despite the fact that I regularly decide to leave you behind in cold Europe, you are always there to give me a warm welcome whenever I choose to return. A special thanks to my parents, Wiljan Hendriks and Wilma Vree Egberts, who are fully committed to supporting me wherever I choose to go – no matter how much this scares them sometimes. I am not often rendered speechless, but words fall short when it comes to expressing my love for you.
Abstract

Burundi has been experiencing cyclical violence ever since its independence in 1962 due to the infamous Hutu-Tutsi strife which culminated in genocide both in 1972 and 1994. The country then spiraled into a civil war which lasted until 2005. Nowadays, ethnic tensions are rising again not in the least because of the general elections scheduled for 2015. Unfortunately there is limited knowledge on how this intergenerational transmission of (ethnic) violence takes place, especially at the community level. Seeing that schools are an important site of intergenerational transmissions, I have focused on messages concerning violence that primary school-aged children pick up. Not all messages that children engage with are sent to them intentionally and what they pick up unintentionally can contradict, undermine or reinforce and exacerbate that which is intentionally taught. So how do they engage with un/intentional messages from their schools and their communities at large in the search for spaces of peace?

I chose to conduct my three months of fieldwork in Rumonge, a small town on Lake Tanganyika’s shore where the ethnic violence in 1972 began. Up until this day the region is plagued by violent incidents and many of these are linked to the continuous influx of returning Burundian refugees. By doing classroom observations, participant observation, focus groups and interviews with children, educators and other community members I have attempted to trace the messages that children engage with and also how they do so and subsequently negotiate their responses to them. I have found that despite the normalization of the use of (extreme) violence, primary school-aged children in Rumonge are managing to be resilient to violence in multiple and contradictory ways. The most extreme example of this would be the use of violence in order to protect one from it.

Both the children’s exposure to violence and their potential ways of engaging with it appear to be heavily dependent on the space that they find themselves in, the people that are present and how they relate to each other. Children stressed that they react differently to violence in different spaces. This clearly shows that children actively strategize their responses within the complex and contradictory dynamics of what Glissant calls ‘the poetics of relation’. Tracing the ways in which children are able to relate to others in multiple ways demonstrates that different ways of relating can sometimes lead away from violence and towards a peaceful coexistence. This implies that by recognizing that people and their relations are always in a state of becoming, non-violent ways of relating can more easily be discovered and nourished. In some instances, primary school-aged children lead the way as they show us how to potentially convert mere pieces of space into spaces of peace.

Keywords: violence, resilience, un/intentional messages, human becoming, poetics of relation.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ........................................................................................................................................4  
**Abstract** ....................................................................................................................................................5  
**Table of Contents** ........................................................................................................................................6  
**List of Figures** ............................................................................................................................................8  

**Introduction: Starting a Story** ....................................................................................................................10  
Doing Research in Rumonge: Violence and the Search for Spaces of Peace ........................................12  
Structure of the Thesis .......................................................................................................................................15  

**Chapter 1: The Theory of Being in Relation: Relating Concepts** .............................................................18  
Relating with Children ......................................................................................................................................18  
Relating to/with Violence .................................................................................................................................19  
Relating to Resilience – Spaces of Peace .........................................................................................................20  
Relating to Un/Intentional Messages ................................................................................................................22  
Relating Relations: Embracing Contradictions and Our Imagination .........................................................24  

**Chapter 2: Methodology: Relating Experience and Data** .........................................................................28  
Relating to the World ........................................................................................................................................28  
Relating to Research Methods ..........................................................................................................................29  
Participant Observation ..................................................................................................................................29  
Classroom Observations ..................................................................................................................................30  
Interviews .........................................................................................................................................................31  
Focus Groups ...................................................................................................................................................34  
Relating to Analysis ........................................................................................................................................35  
Unit of Analysis ...............................................................................................................................................35  
Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................................................35  
Related Ethical Considerations .........................................................................................................................36  
Related Limitations ..........................................................................................................................................37  

**Chapter 3: Context: Relating to Rumonge** ...............................................................................................39  
Relating to the Past: a Divisive Tale ..................................................................................................................39  
Imagining an other other than Ethnicity ...........................................................................................................40  
Enactments of Mistrust ......................................................................................................................................42  
Being a Child in Rumonge ...............................................................................................................................44
List of Figures

Relating Images and Words

Figure 1: *Hoisting the flag so the school day can begin.* Page: 9.

Figure 2: *Rumonge.* Page: 17.

Figure 3: *Rumonge, Swahili neighborhood.* Page: 17.

Figure 4: *Nadia and me interviewing a pupil at her home.* Page: 34.

Figure 5: *Big age differences between pupils.* Page: 35.

Figure 6: *Public primary school.* Page: 51.

Figure 7: *Private lessons.* Page: 51.

Figure 8: *Mise à niveau.* Page: 51.

Figure 9 & 10: *Two teachers with their sticks.* Page: 55.

Figure 11: *Girls taking part in private lessons.* Page: 64.

Figure 12: *A boy has ‘pimped’ his school uniform.* Page: 86.
Figure 1: Hoisting the flag so the school day can begin.
Introduction

Starting a Story

“Whence the importance in tragedy of the art of unveiling.”

(Glissant 2010 [1990]: 52)

I am in a rush. I try to move as fast as I can without walking into passersby. I can feel their stares as I pass them. People sitting or standing on the side of the road look at me, with astonishment. Here they are, next to their shop or just patiently waiting for a minibus or bicycle taxi to come and take them elsewhere, and here I am, the *mzungu*¹ who passes them at high speed, ignoring them altogether. I am painfully aware of this and I can feel their eyes on me, burning, in much the same way as my tears are burning behind mine. Their surprised looks are not elicited by my mere presence; I have been taking this route every day for the past three weeks. Normally I stop by at every shop, sometimes I buy some ‘units’ (phone credit), sometimes I just greet the people there and then I calmly move on. But not today.

I try very hard not to run, but at times I can’t help myself and I start running. This happens twice, but after only several seconds – and even more burning stares – I resume my brisk pace: the futility of it all frustrates the living hell out of me. After what seems like forever, I finally reach the turn-off and I find myself on the big side road that leads past the main hospital all the way up into Rumonge’s *collines*². As I stand there, contemplating whether I’ll dare to enter the hospital alone, my phone rings. It’s my friend Amina³, telling me that she is waiting for me at the main gate. I can see her from where I am standing and suddenly I feel calm again. At a normal pace I walk past the main entrance gate where a dozen patients are waiting to be registered; a man with what seems to be a broken wrist and a few mama’s with crying babies, lovingly strapped to their backs. Some of them stand up from the rickety wooden benches that they were sitting on just to see me greet Amina before we enter the hospital through the visitors entrance.

The hospital is a seemingly old square of buildings with a green courtyard in the middle. Despite the fact that it is only eight in the morning the grass is already filled with families and friends

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¹ *Mzungu* is a Kiswahili word which means ‘white person’ (although it is also commonly used to designate rich people or people with a light(er) skin tone). The term is commonly used throughout East and Southern Africa (cf. Hinnebusch & Mirza 1998)
² French for ‘hills’.
³ This is a fictitious name.
busy preparing breakfasts for the patients they’ve come to visit. Amina skillfully leads me past them, towards a small brown door at the center of the back of the building. Without saying a word, she enters the room and I follow in her wake. There are two beds, one on the left side, one on the right. They are made out of metal and I immediately register that the mattresses on them are very thin. I also remember noticing the broken mosquito nets that were slantwise placed above them, before seeing him. Claude⁴, my dear friend who had been showing me around Rumonge since the first day I got there. After we had met at the hotel where I spent my first few weeks (and where his niece, who later became my translator, turned out to be the manager) he’d been introducing me to many people in the community. Also, on my explicit request, he took me on a tour around Rumonge. While standing next to his hospital bed, afraid to look at him, the thought flashes through my mind that he also showed me the location of this hospital. Something that had seemed utterly unimportant to me only a week and a half ago.

I take a deep breath and look at him. The first thing I see is his half-shaved head with the big bandage on it; dazzling white but with a clear stripe of bright red blood right in the middle. Then his eyes meet mine. I gasp in horror: his right eye is swollen and bloodshot, you can barely see his eye pupil. He turns his head, probably in order not to see my facial expression. This makes matters worse because I get a full view of the left side of his head and I see that his left ear has nearly been chopped off. Judging by the clearly visible suture that pervades it they’ve been trying to stitch it back, but it is still bleeding heavily. Several flies are feasting on it. He grabs my hand, which was still hovering in mid-air after my already forgotten attempt to greet him. He shakes it and I can feel him tremble. Looking at all the cuts, scrapes and wounds that he sustained that night, this is not at all surprising. The strong, agile and self-confident basketball player that he had been the day before, had now become a heap of broken misery. Completely beaten to a pulp. My eyes start to tear up when I see his swollen jaw, twice as big as it was, and the traces of a knife next to his mouth and on his throat. And then it hits me: while I was peacefully asleep in my hotel bed, Claude had been outside, fighting for his life. By the looks of it, he had nearly lost that battle.

Amina makes me sit down on his hospital bed – I probably looked like I was going to faint any minute – and Claude tries to smile at me reassuringly, which doesn’t really work because of his cracked lip and painful grimace. When he readjusts the covers of his bed, I see that his arms are full of stab wounds as well. There is sand in his hair and his green T-shirt is covered in dust, sand and blood. “Stop looking at me like that”, he says, half jokingly. I swallow my tears and ask him what happened, despite the fact that Amina already explained most of it to me when she called me this morning while I was on my way to school. He explains that he met with bandits, robbers, just before

⁴ This is a fictitious name.
he reached home last night. After he had dropped me of at my hotel, he had started walking to his house which is situated right next to the market. Just in front of the gate, when he had been looking for his keys, four men came out of nowhere and started attacking him with a knife. They ended up fighting for quite some time, but Claude lost. The men took his shoes, wallet and phone and then left him for dead. While narrating the last lines of this story, Claude silently lifts his arms and crosses himself.

Luckily his mother and the neighbors had heard everything. When I meet them in the same hospital room the next day, they tell me all about the excruciating pain, frustration and powerlessness they felt when they realized that it was their son, neighbor and friend who was being attacked outside. “I heard him scream, I knew that he might not survive, but what could I do?” wailed his neighbor. And then frantically, as if she had to justify her (in)action to me: “how was I to know whether it was just bandits or an entire army out there?!” Tears stream down her face as she continues her story in rapid Kiswahili. The atmosphere in the room is almost choking me. I’m having a hard time controlling my breath and I don’t remember ever feeling so scared, powerless, frustrated and utterly unfit and unprepared for life. Then his mother breaks my trance by taking my hands into hers. The neighbor ends her story by looking at me intensely while stating: “**maisha magumu hapa**”\(^5\). I break down and start to cry but Claude and the other women go out of their way to comfort me. Then the oldest lady in the room gets up, kneels down and says “**maintenant, tu es une Burundaise comme nous**”\(^6\). She strokes my hair and I stop crying and try to focus on her words. She continues: “this is the reality of our lives here; every day might be the day that we lose our son, our husband or one of our grandchildren. Now, you understand what this feels like. You are one of us now.” Her sincerity and the overall circumstances might not have warranted it, but her heartfelt words made me smile.

**Doing Research in Rumonge: Violence and the Search for Spaces of Peace**

All of this took place after I had been in Rumonge for less than three weeks. Rumonge is one of the oldest towns in Burundi, a small country in Central Africa that became well-known due to the infamous and violent Hutu-Tutsi strife (cf. Berckmoes 2010, Lemarchand 1994, Mamdani 2001, Mann 2005, Petit Futé 2012: 313, Uvin 2009). Burundi is often said to have been ‘mired in cyclical violence since its independence in 1962’, which culminated in genocide in both 1972 and 1994, while also plunging the country into a brutal (ethnic) civil war which lasted from 1993 up until 2005 (Berckmoes, Reis & De Jong 2014: 1, cf. Berckmoes 2010, Daley 2007, Lemarchand 1994, Mamdani

\(^5\) **Kiswahili** for “it’s a difficult life here” (my translation).

\(^6\) “Now, you are a Burundian, like us” (my translation).
2001, Mann 2005, Uvin 2009). It is one thing to read about all of this, but it is quite another to experience an extremely volatile and at times violent context firsthand. This is why I chose to begin this thesis with a detailed description of a violent incident. Not only is this crucial for understanding the backdrop against which I conducted my three months of fieldwork and the interpretation of my findings, but it also immediately illustrates the need for the kind of research I conducted. My research is part of a broader project led by UNICEF Burundi and the AISSR, which aims to foster an understanding of the intergenerational transmission of violence and resilience that takes place at the community level (Berckmoes, Reis & De Jong 2014). My specific research focused on the school environment, recognizing that schools are important socializing institutions where processes of intergenerational transmission take place and play out (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000).

At school, children are actively engaged in shaping their own worldviews in relation to what is offered to them (Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 17, Davies 2010). In this sense, academics have come to the conclusion that education has ‘two faces’ (Bush & Saltarelli 2000). On the one hand school and education are considered to ‘expand the opportunities available to individuals’ and to ‘promote social cohesion and integration between different groups’ (Shields 2013: 50). While on the other hand education can also (re)produce ‘inequalities, economic exploitation, racial and ethnic stereotyping and gender divisions’ (Shields 2013: 50, Smith 2005: 376). Even when explicit attempts are made to use education in an emancipatory fashion, for example in peace building education, it is possible that (parts of) the curriculum, the ways in which it has been devised or the way in which it is being taught actually affirm the status quo or spark further conflict (Shields 2013: 50, Davies 2005, Paulson 2008). This would then make the school a site ‘for further intolerance (…) instead of serving to promote peace and reconciliation’ and emancipation from conflict (Shields 2013: 55, cf. Leach 2003).

Based on the above, a focus on the school environment and an attempt to explore the ideas of primary school-aged children in Rumonge when it comes to violence and the ways in which they engage with their (violent) environments, may provide valuable insights that can assist UNICEF Burundi in devising their policies. On top of this, it will also add to the (still) limited academic knowledge on intergenerational transmissions of violence (cf. Argenti & Schramm 2012 [2010]) and notions of childhood when it comes to children and violence (cf. Korbin 2003). Ultimately, the overall research project aims to contribute to breaking the vicious cycle of violence that has been profoundly shaping Burundian’s lives for the past decades with unimaginable force (cf. Berckmoes 2010, 2014, Berckmoes & Reis 2013, Uvin 2009). Having violence come as close to me as was described in the introduction, makes me aware of this force even more. Also, in hindsight, this violent incident served as my ‘initiation’ into social life in Rumonge.
Claude’s story quickly became the talk of the town and everywhere I went, people were discussing it. What struck me most however was that nobody seemed to wonder why this violent attack had taken place. The only subject of inquiry was why it had been Claude who had been attacked and not somebody else. When I discussed my amazement about this with my new neighbors and friends, all they did was laugh and occasionally add that I had obviously ‘grown up in peace and wealth’. Some would simply respond ‘c’est comme ça au Burundi’. This was when I remembered that people who would walk me home (whether this was at 22.00hr or at 18.15hr didn’t matter) would usually first grab two rocks in order to be ‘prepared’ and tell me off whenever I would use the light on my phone in order to light the way; this would make us too visible for all the other people still out. Adding all of this together, I quickly gathered that this kind of violence was ‘normal’ or at least, to a very large extent, (actively) normalized.

However, this apparent process of normalization does not preclude divergent attitudes towards (the use of) violence and also I firmly agree with Berckmoes that ‘we should be wary of presenting the present as an inevitable outcome of the past’ (2014: 72). The same holds true, in my opinion, for Burundi’s future. Up until today, the country is said to find itself in a state of ‘no peace, no war’ and the volatility of this state makes that many people, both inside and outside the country, are anxiously awaiting the general elections in May 2015 (Richards 2005 in Berckmoes 2010: 162, cf. Berckmoes 2014). ‘We can only hope for the best’, as my Burundian friends have been telling me. And while hoping for the best, the continuous repetition of violent (hi)stories in order to explain the present and predict the future may lead to effects preceding causes and in fact ‘bring about the past’ (Dummet in Jackson 2005: 356). It is therefore important to remember that the past is ‘less characterized by necessity than by potentiality’: it is not linear but rather multi-interpretable (ibid.).

This multi-interpretability also becomes clear from the many different explanations that were given for the incident that I described at the beginning of this introduction. I will not delve into them here, but instead return to them in my conclusion since each of the explanations that were given to me relate to different aspects of the broader structures and fault lines of social life in Rumonge. All of these different, sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary stories and explanations exist at once and people tend to navigate between them, depending on the context and company that they find themselves in.

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7 Throughout my fieldwork period at least three other robberies/attacks like this one took place, sometimes even inside people’s homes. The inquiries following these cases also centered around the same questions: why this house, why this family, why this family member etc. I never heard anyone talk about the, what I would call, more general why.

8 ‘It’s like that in Burundi’ (my translation).

9 This is in line with the existing academic literature on Burundi and the country’s troubled history (cf. Berckmoes 2014).


11 This is why Berckmoes issues a strong warning about the ‘lack of consensus on Burundi’s past’ (2014: 72).
they find themselves in (cf. Berckmoes 2014, Glissant 2010 [1990]). This is why I will demonstrate in this thesis the potentiality of history and the eternal possibilities for positive change by focusing on the ways in which primary school-aged children attempt to create spaces of peace for themselves and others.

They ways in which they see the world and subsequently act upon it can diverge from the cycles of violence that their country has been involved in for the past decades. It is my hope that their stories will help fashion a different understanding of their lived reality and thereby compel different ways of acting and relating to others. This might inspire adults, while acknowledging that children also sometimes adhere to the hegemonic and divisive stories, and present opportunities leading away from violence towards a peaceful coexistence in which the sanctity of human lives is valued (cf. Butler 2010). This is how, under harsh circumstances, primary school aged children in Rumonge keep the potentiality of primary schools (and Burundi at large) becoming ‘spaces of peace’ alive, despite structures and dynamics that could easily make us believe the opposite. Hence the quote with which I started this introduction: ‘whence the importance in tragedy of the art of unveiling’ (Glissant 2010 [1990]: 52). In this case the latter consists of tracing alternative story lines, emphasizing potentiality and the processes of becoming in the ways in which these children engage with and relate to violence in their (primary school) environment.

**Structure of the Thesis**

In the first chapter I discuss the theoretical framework which draws on Michael Jackson’s existential anthropology (cf. 2012, 2013) and revolves around our ‘storied world’ (Ingold 2011: 141), our being singular-plural (Nancy 2000 [1996]) and our fundamental being in relation (Glissant 2010 [1990]). These theories and theorists have greatly influenced my conceptualizations of violence, resilience and un/intentional messages in the primary school environment, which are my three central concepts. In chapter two I then demonstrate how this theoretical framework relates to my research methods and I also delve into the ethical dimensions of doing research in a volatile political context. The third chapter relates more about Rumonge, emphasizing Burundi’s violent history and the subsequent enactments of mistrust that shape social interactions. I also focus on the specific challenges children in Rumonge face and I describe pieces of their school space. In the two subsequent chapters I then describe my empirical findings.

Chapter four focuses on the relations between different forms of violence that children engage with at school, but also in the community. I highlight social inequalities and the most important dynamics and relations that together co-construct the un/intentional messages children engage with when it comes to violence. Chapter five is devoted to demonstrating children’s resilience and the
strategies they use in their attempts to create spaces of peace. In the sixth and final chapter I then attempt to answer the following questions:

- in what ways do primary schools attempt to create spaces of peace for children?
- what do children un/intentionally learn from the beliefs, attitudes, practices and power structures that they are exposed to in primary school?
- in what ways does the interaction between these un/intentional messages influence children’s behaviors concerning the (re)production of violence and the strengthening of their resilience?

Ultimately, the answers to these three questions combined provide an answer to my main research question:

*How do children in Rumonge engage with un/intentional messages about violence from their primary schools and communities in the search for spaces of peace?*
Figure 2: Rumonge

Figure 3: Rumonge, Swahili Neighborhood
Chapter 1
The Theory of Being in Relation: Relating Concepts

‘Whether our concern is to inhabit this world or to study it – and at root these are the same, since all inhabitants are students and all students are inhabitants – our task is not to take stock of its contents but to follow what is going on, tracing the multiple trails of becoming, wherever they lead.’

(Ingold 2011: 14, emphasis in original)

In this chapter I explore the central concepts of my research: violence, resilience and un/intentional messages. In the last part I then relate all of these by using Glissant’s ideas on the ‘Poetics of Relation’ (2010 [1990]). But first I briefly highlight the importance of understanding children as competent social actors, actively engaged in shaping their lives.

Relating with Children
I believe it to be important to start this section by briefly emphasizing that all children are different – despite obvious similarities such as the physical experiences of growing up and becoming mature – and that even the notion of ‘childhood’ cannot be generalized (cf. Boyden 2003: 20, Punch 2003: 278). The tendency to see childhoods of African children as “abnormal” or conceptualize them as more vulnerable, for example because they are required to work in order to supplement the family income, is a remnant of persistent eurocentrism in the social and pedagogical sciences (ibid.: 277). Research into these childhoods in their own right is therefore of the utmost importance.

It is a well-known African saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. This collective, and yet also profoundly individual socialization process is often said to consist of transmitting values and knowledge from one generation to the next. In this view then, during times of (extreme) violence and war, the process can become problematic (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 11). Gómez has conducted research into ‘the ways people implicitly and explicitly communicate the lessons of the war to their children’ (2002: 147). She argues that children often internalize the messages that they pick up (no matter whether their parents un- or intentionally conveyed these messages) and start to display similar attitudes and sentiments as their parents and communities (ibid.: 425). According to Gómez, this has to do with the fact that these children were constantly surrounded by trauma(tized individuals) and they might also experience a sense of responsibility towards their parents for being unable to alleviate the situation (ibid.: 429). This constant crisis ‘leads to various forms of neglect of
children, who must cope with their harsh circumstances largely on their own and who therefore may also lack the emotional resources to raise children in impoverished environments, when they become parents’ (ibid.: 433). This is, Gómez argues, how the cycle of violence continues.

However in this view children seem to be doing little more than passively incorporate what their parents and communities expose them to (ibid.: 417). There is little attention for children’s coping strategies that might alleviate the situation and provide hope for a (more) peaceful future. The ways in which they are relating to their lifeworlds and thereby negotiating their processes of becoming and the nature of their knowledge, remains largely invisible. But, the way in which Gómez makes her argument, is not surprising. It has been the general tendency to portray children as vulnerable or even helpless victims (cf. Ungar 2004, Boyden 2003, Boyden & Mann 2005, Boyden & Cooper 2007). Critiquing this does not mean that children are never helpless victims, it merely means that sometimes they are and sometimes they are not. By constructing them as victims or helpless ‘their own efforts to cope are often not seen as legitimate or, indeed, even recognized at all’ (Boyden & Mann 2005: 19). While recognizing that children do not have as much power as adults, my research is based on the premise that children have the capability to (partially) shape their own lives (ibid.: 19). They are competent social actors in their own right, but they are not isolated units. They are, like all of us, constantly in relation with the people and the world around them (Boyden 2003: 14, cf. Glissant 2010 [1990]). Now let’s explore how they relate to violence, resilience and un/intentional messages.

**Relating to/with Violence**

Violence can be explained in many ways. Although it is tempting to conceive it as ‘an expression of animal or pathological forces that lie “outside” our humanity’ we must not forget that violence is and always has been ‘an aspect of our humanity itself’ (Jackson 2006 [2002]: 41, cf. Nordstrom & Robben 1995). It is part of our social life and culturally constructed (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 3). This means that ‘as with all cultural products, it is in essence only a potential – one that gives shape and content to specific people within the context of particular histories’ (ibid., my emphasis, TH). Acknowledging that this potentiality exists for all of us and therefore affects all of us, is beginning to imagine that we are all part of a larger, related, whole: mankind (Glissant 2010 [1990]). This also means that any attempt to come up with a definition of violence is doomed to fail: ‘definitions of violence appear too polished and finished’ whereas we and our lived-realities are always in a process of becoming (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 4, cf. Berckmoes 2008: 7, 11). Violence, in all its erratic and incomprehensible forms, thus significantly impacts our ‘constructs of identity in the present, the hopes and potentialities of the future, and even the renditions of the past’ (Nordstrom & Robben...
1995: 5). I will repeatedly come back to this in the empirical chapters where I shall demonstrate that children’s daily experiences with different kinds of violence underline that its uncertainty ‘is invariably related to a summoning of fear, terror, and confusion as well as resistance, survival, hope, and creativity’ (ibid.: 10). By emphasizing all these contradictory aspects that come with living with violence, it is my aim to do justice to these experiences (cf. Glissant 2010 [1990]).

When it comes to the relation between violence and the school environment, or violence and education in general, we will therefore have to assess it from multiple angles and levels while paying special attention to daily practices (cf. Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2007, Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 6). It is, for example, quite obvious that (the expectation of) violent conflict severely affects access to education, but it might be less obvious how violence can be (re)produced in schools through decisions such as who is allowed (or obliged) to sweep the classroom (cf. Davies 2005, Smith 2005). This is why, I believe that Galtung’s “vicious triangle” possesses the most explanatory power when it comes to different kinds of violence and understanding their being in relation (1990).

Galtung argues, in line with Daley (2007), that different types of violence are interrelated and he subsequently distinguishes between direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence (1990). ‘Direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a ‘permanence’” (ibid.: 294). Either one of these three types of violence can potentially reinforce the other two and ultimately Galtung suggests that both structural and cultural violence will lead to direct violence (ibid.: 295). A notion that so far, seems to be supported by Burundi’s history. Because of this, Galtung contends that peacebuilding should focus on all types of violence at the same time ‘not assuming that basic change in one will automatically lead to changes in the other two’ (ibid.: 302). In my research I have therefore also paid special attention to the interrelatedness of different kinds of violence taking place on different levels or aspects of school and community life. I have considered as direct violence events in which people are physically or verbally abused. When this happened to particular (groups of) people consistently, I describe it as structural violence. Cultural violence, then, I consider to be the beliefs, attitudes and practices that legitimize this (re)production of structural inequality (Galtung 1990).

Relating to Resilience – Spaces of Peace
The use of the concept of resilience is part of a discourse that is ideologically biased: it ‘reflects a decidedly political orientation in its recognition of the young as competent social agents rather than inherently vulnerable beings that are wholly dependent on others for their survival and development’ (Boyden & Cooper 2007: 4). Despite going against this vulnerability discourse, the concept does imply ‘a pre-existing understanding of risk’ (ibid.: 6). It follows the normative judgment that the primary school-aged children in Rumonge are (at risk of) being exposed to behaviors and
events for which they will need to be resilient in order to survive and secure their wellbeing (cf. Liebenberg & Ungar 2009). They have to be able to bounce back and overcome adversity.

However, behaviors that can in the short run be termed ‘resilient’ might turn out to increase exposure to risks later on in life: for example quitting school in order to supplement the family income. And at the same time, behaviors that might be considered resilient can also be violent. Such as fighting back when one is beaten (cf. Boyden & Cooper 2007: 7,8, Liebenberg & Ungar 2009: 4,5). When it comes to resilience it is therefore crucial to contextualize children’s behaviors and find out the ‘meaning of the experience’ and behavior for them, while simultaneously taking into account the structures that enable and limit their actions and the ways in which they relate to them (ibid., cf. Seccombe 2002). It is therefore also important to realize that social realities are always in a state of flux; a process of becoming (cf. Glissant 2010 [1990], Nancy 2000 [1996]). This means that being resilient or exhibiting behavior that can be considered (depending on the context) as increasing resilience must not be taken to be a fixed state (cf. Glissant 2010 [1990], Nancy 2000 [1996]).

Based on the above, I have chosen to focus on ‘forms of everyday resilience’ as understood by the children themselves (Scheper-Hughes 2008: 52). I have particularly looked at how gender, language, social class and ethnicity ‘affect … [the children’s] definition of resilience itself’ (Ungar 2004: 360). By spending time and sharing experiences with them in and around their primary schools, I have attempted to disentangle and trace the children’s understandings of resilience and to interpret the consequences of these specific understandings. The focal point has therefore been the ‘plurality of meanings individuals negotiate in their self-constructions as resilient’, linked to the assumption that they need to be resilient in order to safeguard their wellbeing (ibid.: 345). The adoption of this ‘explicitly constructionist orientation to resilience’ also safeguards the production of ‘findings meaningful to research participants’ which will hopefully assist both primary schools and their pupils in becoming, creating and/or sustaining ‘spaces of peace’ (ibid.: 343, Daley 2007: 19, 238).

These spaces of peace are characterized by respect, tolerance and above all equity and inclusion: violence has no place in them (Daley 2007: 19, 238). ‘Reaffirm[ing] the sanctity of African lives’, taking responsibility for one’s actions, caring for each other and being able to set aside differences – no matter what these are said to be based on – are central (ibid.). In my engagements with the children I have therefore explicitly attempted to trace which institutions or (community) spaces they experience or imagine as (possible) spaces of peace and under which conditions.

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12 One could argue that for children and youth, this process of becoming is even more intense: society usually explicitly treats them as (still) becoming adults (cf. Berckmoes 2008: 11). This is however not to mean that children are not also being human beings. We are all – both children and adults - human beings in the constant process of becoming.

13 I stress this due to the processual nature of lived reality which means that experiencing a space as a space of peace is not a fixed attribute of that locality in itself (see also Berckmoes 2008, 2014).
paying attention to why and when they experience or imagine a space as a space of peace it allows me to emphasize that peace is not a fixed attribute of a locality: it is a social space where ‘new ideas can be explored’ and a child does this ‘together with others’ (Lumsden 1997: 380, my emphasis, TH, cf. Berckmoes 2008, 2014). It is in these relations and the intersubjective aspects of our lifeworlds that peace can come into being.

Relating to Un/Intentional Messages
According to Bush and Saltarelli education in general rests on ‘two distinct foundations’: ‘the formal structures of schooling (a teacher who teaches and a pupil who learns) and the informal and non-formal structures of learning – involving the acquisition of ideas, values, beliefs and opinions outside educational institutions, whether in streets, fields, religious settings or the home’ (2000: ix, emphasis in the original). Learning in the broadest sense is therefore an ideological project, a socialization process; teaching children how to act (cf. Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 31). But, beliefs, practices and attitudes learned in school but (strongly) discouraged by the family or community that the child resides in, are unlikely to come across or take root (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 21, Davies 2010: 496). To complicate matters even further, even if all children in one class receive the exact same education, the outcomes will be (slightly) different for all of them (Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 6). This has to do with the fact that children are active agents, engaging with the world around them (cf. Boyden 2003, Boyden & Mann 2005, Boyden & Cooper 2007).

In order to make schools, but also communities in general, credible spaces of peace, we have to be aware of the messages that they send to children and how children interpret these and subsequently act (cf. Leach 2003). Davies: ‘It is always hypocritical of educational institutions to preach tolerance or peace when their own students are not given respect, or to preach democracy when they are hierarchical institutions, or to preach cooperation when they are fiercely competitive places’ (2010: 496). These somewhat hidden, unofficial and/or unintended messages count! Peacebuilding education and community initiatives therefore (have to) focus on demonstrating that it is possible to ‘maintain and articulate credible alternative visions of the future; visions that are inclusive, tolerant, liberal, democratic and just’: future spaces of peace (Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 21). In complex conflicts, or outright war, this is not an easy task but it is never impossible (ibid.: 25, 30). Without neglecting the structural forces and the existing social order within which children are born and raised, this research puts the agentive ways in which children deal with un/intentional messages concerning violence in school- and community contexts central.

Whenever I refer to both the intentional and unintentional messages children pick up in primary schools and their community at large, I write ‘un/intentional messages’ instead of (un)intentional messages, to signify that the unintentional messages are as important as the intentional ones.
How does this take place? First of all, when it comes to education and conflict the curriculum is of extreme importance as it is part of the ‘formal structures of schooling’: the intentional messages that are send to pupils (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000, Davies 2005, 2010, Smith 2005). However, at the same time, schools also send out unintentional or unofficial messages. In order to refer to these, the notion of the hidden curriculum was coined (Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013: 192). This concept refers to ‘unwritten, unofficial and often unintended lessons, values and perspectives that students learn in school’ next to or outside the formal curriculum. Two different versions have been distinguished: a weak and a strong one. The first refers to ‘features inherent in educational processes’ whereas the latter refers to ‘processes of social and cultural reproduction that serve to ensure the preservation of existing social privilege’ (Apple & King in Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013: 193). It is mainly this ‘strong’ version of the hidden curriculum that has severe social implications (cf. Apple 1990, Tekian 2009: 823). Gaining insights into the ways in which it is being ‘produced and maintained’ is therefore of the utmost importance in order to understand how children make sense of the world (Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013: 193). Keeping in mind that every child experiences lived reality in a (slightly) different way and thus uniquely responds to what s/he is exposed to (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 17). The hidden curriculum is thus not static and imposed on children who simply accept and incorporate it all in the same way.

Echoing recent trends in educational research, I have also decided to respond to Kentli’s call to ‘use hidden curriculum theories in new areas’ (2009: 88). The hidden curriculum cannamely, despite the fact that it might remind us of schools and teaching plans, also be defined as ‘a set of influences that function at the level of organizational structure and culture’ (Tekian 2009: 822). From this it clearly follows that they do not only function in schools, but also in other kinds of organizations, institutions and even communities or societies at large. This is why I will refer to the hidden curriculum as ‘unintentional messages’ because it facilitates the use of this theoretical lens for not only my research participants’ primary schools but also Rumonge community in general. In all these contexts unintentional messages – alongside intentional messages – can be conveyed by institutional symbols (such as a flag or anthem), routines, rituals, attitudes, implicit beliefs, reward systems, power structures, ways of disciplining and sanctioning etc. (cf. Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013, Kentli 2009, Mossop et al. 2013). These messages can potentially ‘challenge what … [children] are formally taught’ making a focus on children’s active engagements with them extremely important (Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013: 199).

In the empirical chapters I will focus on the ways in which certain aspects of un/intentional messages and their interplay, might aid primary school-aged children in becoming more resilient and

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15 http://edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum/ (last accessed on 09-05-2014)
which aspects might seduce them to (re)produce violence. As we will see, these two behavioral ‘options’ are not the only ones that can be chosen and frequently, they are not mutually exclusive but intricately linked. In order to understand this paradox and the interrelations that pervade our lifeworlds, I now turn to the theories of Édouard Glissant, Tim Ingold, Jean-Luc Nancy and Michael Jackson.

Relating Relations: Embracing Contradictions and Our Imagination

In his book *Poetics of Relation* Glissant argues that our world is fundamentally a world in ‘Relation’ (2010 [1990]). We are all part of a chaotic, tumultuous totality that can never be fully known and it is riddled with contradictions. Multiple lines of thought and action intersect and exist at the same time: love and hate, chaos and order. This totality is constantly moving, constantly in a process of becoming: always in a state of flux (ibid.). This leads Glissant to believe that every (potential) story forms a part of the totality: ‘totality’s imagination is inexhaustible’ (ibid.: 95). Anything is possible, it’s potentiality limitless: ‘simply to ask the question is to imagine the unimaginable turbulence of Relation’ (ibid.: 138). This unimaginable turbulence contains both good and bad, both positive and negative. These however, cannot be pinned down because they exist – like everything and everyone else – in Relation. What we can do, and which Glissant does, is trace a trail of a story that can lead or has led to violence and suffering. In history, peoples and cultures have come up with divisive myths or epics of origin which sets them apart from the grand Totality of Relation (ibid.). It is this filiation based reasoning that Glissant attacks because the violence that can ensue from it ultimately leads to either attempts of assimilation or annihilation: the forms of ‘absolute exclusion of the other’ (ibid.: 52). Something, that in the Burundian context sounds all too familiar.

Relating Glissant’s ideas to the overall UNICEF Burundi and AISSR research project makes me suspicious of the notion of ‘intergenerational transmission’. Isn’t this belief in intergenerational transmissions also based on this filiation reasoning; namely on the notion that ‘information is being “passed along” the lines of descent linking successive generations’? (Ingold 2011: 157). And wouldn’t that make knowledge inherently classificatory: a human being learning general principles and subsequently organizing, classifying, lived-reality accordingly? (ibid.: 158). I contend that it is rather through *practice* that people learn; ‘through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment’ and structures within which they are raised (ibid.: 159).

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16 See also Van Wolputte’s reflections on how anthropology is continuously trying to engage with this ‘ambiguity and indeterminacy’ that is part of our lifeworlds (2004: 259).

17 See also Galtung’s opinion on the meaning of ‘peace’ – something that he believes would benefit from being determined in Relation (1981).
Learning is then a continuous and embodied process, knowledge is always in the process of becoming and always in Relation (ibid.: 160, cf. Glissant 2010 [1990]). This led Ingold to conclude that our world is a ‘storied world’: ‘a world of movement and becoming’ in which the relations between different elements and their bindings and intertwining form the basis of our knowledge because ‘to tell a story is to relate’ (Ingold 2011.: 160, emphasis in original). Therefore, knowledge cannot be transmitted, it ‘rather subsists in the current of life and consciousness’ (ibid.: 161). And because of the emphasis on the processual nature and the relations involved, ‘stories always, and inevitably, draw together what classification split apart’ (ibid.: 160, emphasis in original). All potential stories that can be imagined form a part of this unknowable totality within which they can contradict, hurt, create and heal, all at the same time, always relating.

Where Ingold sees a way that will lead away from violence in relating stories, Glissant seeks to combat the (potential) violence of filiation based reasoning by calling on the imagination: we have to keep on imagining other possible ways of relating.\(^{18}\) This is a continuous process because ‘whatever born of Relation, contradicts and embodies it’ all at the same time (ibid.: 93). It is up to us, to make a choice and imagine what we believe to be useful (cf. Guadeloupe 2009). Simply responding to what is already out there, might not be enough to break free from destructive processes; imagining new ways potentially is (Glissant 2010 [1990]: 140).\(^{19}\) This is why Glissant links the imagination to poetics. Poetics allows us to express ourselves more freely, giving us more space for creativity. ‘Poetics aims for the space of difference – not exclusion but, rather, where difference is realized in going beyond’ (ibid.: 82). This possibility is always there, at the same time as its impossibility: it’s all in the Totality (Glissant 2010[1990]).

Glissant’s insistence on the use of the imagination as a ‘way out’ is less romantic or novel than it may sound at first. Consider for example the way in which Benedict Anderson, already in 1983, described nations as ‘imagined communities’ (2006 [1983]).\(^{20}\) If nations and nationalism are based on a specific idea of belonging that we create together with our (collective) imagination, it is not hard to realize that communities can also be imagined based on other, hopefully more inclusive, ‘criteria’.\(^{21}\)\(^{22}\) Every time we try to create boundaries between ourselves and others, these turn out to

\(^{18}\) See also the (unpublished) Master Thesis of Jordi Halfman, Sounds of Street-soccer, A semi-acoustic response to human becoming within the street-soccer antiphony, in which she argues a similar point (2013)

\(^{19}\) Guy Debord makes a similar argument in his book The Society of the Spectacle in which he states that we shouldn’t create counter-spectacles to combat the spectacle, but we should oppose the spectacle in its entirety instead of simply responding to it with its opposite (negatively) (1995).

\(^{20}\) See also Mudimbe’s The Invention of Africa on how this continent has been imagined by non-Africans – leading partially to its (current) existence in lived reality (1988).

\(^{21}\) Halfman & Guadeloupe make the same argument in their article Exploring the Liberating Potential of Youthnicities Emerging on Street-Soccer Fields in Europe: The Case of the Netherlands (2013).
be extremely slippery in daily use: they are impossible to maintain when we realize that we can also imagine something else.\(^{23}\)\(^{24}\) So maybe we are not that different and maybe that other, could be us (Jackson 1998: 208). This led Guadeloupe to declare that ‘the human being is indestructible. Indestructible because we contradict all racial, ethnic, and religious divides we impose on ourselves’ (2009: xi).

All of these differences are man-made and part of the totality of relations to and within which we all relate. Therefore being in relation means ‘the possibility for each one at every moment to be both solidary and solitary there’ (ibid.: 131). Relation is everything at once (ibid.: 171). This is why I can argue opposite points in different chapters, and even within one chapter. All of these stories can be traced and are part of the ‘multiple trails of becoming’ that together shape our lifeworlds as we negotiate and weave our way through them (Ingold 2011: 14). It is to this weaving and negotiating that we now turn.\(^{25}\)

Glissant emphasizes that all of us have ‘the right to opacity’; which means that none of us will ever be able to fully know someone else (Glissant 2010 [1990]: 190). There is always something that remains unknowable, much like the grand Totality itself. We are all singular-plural beings in relation to one another (Nancy 2000 [1996]). This means: we are only one, because there are other ones, who are also ‘one’ (ibid.: 32). What it is that makes us ‘one’, a singular human, presents us with the continuous ability to connect to other ‘ones’ and to negotiate this connection based on multiple stories that exist within ourselves (cf. Fumaroli 1997, Nancy 2000 [1996]). Or, as Nancy puts it: ‘we are each time an other, each time with others’ (2000 [1996]: 35).\(^{26}\) It is this opacity and this inability to fully know oneself or others, that can help us ‘coexist and converge, weaving fabrics’ (Glissant 2010 [1990]: 190). When paying attention to the weave, instead of ‘the nature of its components’ we will be able to understand that in relation there are no boundaries: the weave doesn’t weave those (ibid.). Instead, it is a continuous process of becoming of which we are all part, interrelated. And it is ‘in such a world [that] we can understand the nature of things only by attending to their relations, or in other words, by telling their stories’ (Ingold 2011: 160, my emphasis, TH).

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\(^{22}\) See also this article on Kagame’s efforts to let others no longer imagine Rwanda as ‘the country of genocide’, but rather an economic miracle, allowing the country to move on from the past: [http://thisisafrica.me/rwanda-growth-genocide-president-kagame/](http://thisisafrica.me/rwanda-growth-genocide-president-kagame/) (last accessed on 23-10-2014).

\(^{23}\) See for example Geschiere’s analysis of the autochthony and belonging discourses in Cameroon and The Netherlands (2009).

\(^{24}\) See also Gal & Irvine’s analysis on how this process of creating boundaries and the construction of difference(s) takes place between academic disciplines and languages (1995).

\(^{25}\) Had this been a more philosophically oriented research, I would have devoted more attention to exploring the ways in which the ideas of Glissant, Nancy and Ingold relate to each other but also differ on certain points. Glissant namely focuses on relations between humans, as does Nancy, whereas Ingold emphasizes humans’ relations with the world around them; nature, objects etc. However, exploring this in-depth goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

\(^{26}\) See also the article *Hang on to Your Self: Of Bodies, Embodiment, and Selves* (Van Wolfputte 2004).
Following Glissant’s philosophy, it becomes clear, why I have chosen to focus on instances, incidents and the potential for positive change in Burundi: we have a need to actively imagine this and at the same time it is also already there (cf. Uvin 2009, chapter 8)! Too. Because unfortunately I have also seen, heard and experienced many things that could point towards the opposite; violence, or even a spiraling down into another genocide. It is our imagination, our realization that we are all part of this grand totality, singular plural, together, in relation, that can help (to motivate) us (to) find a way to peaceful coexistence. And the primary school-aged children in Rumonge that I have been relating with, have multiple and contradictory ways of doing this.

I started this chapter by discussing my conceptualization of children as social actors. Subsequently I delved into my theoretical take on violence and resilience and how these relate to the creation and maintenance of spaces of peace. I then interpreted the concept of the hidden curriculum which I transformed into unintentional messages. I used this lens to look at not only primary schools in Rumonge, but also the community at large. Last but not least I discussed the overarching theoretical stance of Glissant which emphasizes relations, multiplicity and the imagination. In the following chapters I demonstrate the usefulness of adopting this theoretical lens, but first I will clarify my research methodologies.
Chapter 2

Methodology: Relating Experience and Data

‘Moreover, abstract knowledge of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, of great books and foreign languages, will not help you reach an understanding of others unless you share in their lives as a fellow human being, with tact and sensitivity, care and concern’

(Jackson 2012: 5)

In this chapter I explain the research methodologies that I decided to use during my fieldwork. These were only qualitative methods, namely participant observation; observation; semi-structured interviews and focus groups. I briefly describe all of them and the kinds of data they allowed me to create. Towards the end of the chapter I then highlight the ethical dilemmas that I face(d) mainly related to the context of violence and my position in the field. Lastly, I discuss the limitations to my research that stem from the earlier mentioned choices and circumstances.

Relating to the World

My thesis has a profoundly qualitative basis, as follows from the theoretical framework that has been discussed in the previous chapter. This, however, does bring us to a difficulty that current ethnographic writing is struggling to overcome. Some things, experiences, or ways of relating are hard to put into words, because they are so many things at once to many different people. Taussig: ‘The more you write in your notebook, the more you get this sinking feeling that the reality depicted recedes, that the writing is actually pushing reality off the page’ (2011: 16). This led Taussig to conclude that ‘more often than not’ writing ethnography is accompanied ‘by a feeling of anguish that one cannot communicate the experience without compromising it’ (ibid.: 100). Words have a tendency to ‘fix’ and make certain ways of relating seem more plausible than others, while all of them are potentially possible and often taking place simultaneously (Glissant 2010 [1990]: 115). By explicitly tracing ‘multiple trails of becoming’ I attempt to do justice to the turbulence of relation and highlight future potentialities that are already being imagined by children in Rumonge (Ingold 2011: 14, cf. Glissant 2010 [1990]). Precisely because everything is tangled up in relation and an unknowable always becoming totality, my thesis is no proof or claim that “this is how it is” in

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27 Also, qualitative research methodologies are deemed most suitable for explorations of the hidden curriculum or unintentional messages (cf. Cotton, Winter & Bailey 2013: 195, Mossop et al. 2013: 136).
Rumonge. My story ‘simply adds something to Relation insofar as the latter is a synthesis-genesis that never is complete’ (ibid.: 174). I do not aim to present The Truth; I present a truth which exists among others, in equal relation to them and is therefore equally important (cf. Glissant 2010 [1990], Jackson 1998, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2013, Nancy 2000 [1996]).

This is why I firmly agree with Yanow & Schwart-Shea when they state that: ‘all knowledge is interpretive, and interpretation (of acts, language, and objects) is the only method appropriate to the human, social world, when the research question concerns matters of human meaning’ (2006: 23). The creation of my data is equally informed by interpretation: I was the one who chose the things I focused on (O’Reilly 2005: 186). I therefore also acknowledge that ‘all references – trivial and non-trivial – to empirical data are the results of interpretation’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 5, emphasis in original). Due to the fact that there are countless possible interpretations in the turbulence of relation, and countless different stories that can be traced, I believe it to be important to engage in research in a reflexive manner: constantly explicating my interpretations of events and the ways in which these might have changed over time, depending on the situation that I found myself in and depending on the people that I was with (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 187, 310). Portraying this plurality by providing you with thick descriptions of my field experiences, allows me to do some justice to the chaotic everyday experiences of our lifeworlds – especially in violent and volatile contexts (cf. Geertz 1973, 2005, Nordstrom & Robben 1995).

When it comes to a ‘no war, no peace’ setting such as Rumonge, fostering understandings of the ways in which people interpret their lived reality and subsequently act on these interpretations is of vital importance for imagining (more) peaceful futures (cf. Boyden 2003: 7). One of the ways to do research into this, is by engaging in participant observation and writing an ethnography. Ethnography namely has the ‘capacity to help us see that plurality is not inimical but necessary to our integrity, so inspiring us to accept and celebrate the manifold and contradictory character of existence in the knowledge that any one person embodies the potential to be any other’ (Jackson 1998: 208, my emphasis, TH).

**Relating to Research Methods**

**Participant Observation**

According to Nancy Schep-Hughes anthropology and the ethnographies that are (being) produced in its name, should ‘afflict our comfortable assumptions about what it means to be human’ (1995: 419). In other words, a good ethnography helps you to come to an understanding of the other as yourself, albeit in different circumstances (Jackson 2004: 54, cf. Eriksen 2001: 26, 36). In a ‘no peace no war’ situation such as Burundi this can be difficult because of the traumatic experiences that
people have recently had, which are sometimes impossible to verbalize (cf. Jackson 2004, Nordstrom & Robben 1995). But, I agree with Robbins that this is exactly why there is a need for ‘a way of writing ethnography in which we do not primarily provide cultural context so as to offer lessons in how lives are lived differently elsewhere, but in which we offer accounts of trauma that make us and our readers feel in our bones the vulnerability we as human beings all share’ (2013: 455, cf. Butler 2010 [2009]). Something, that I hope the introduction to this thesis has already done.

To increase my understanding of social life in Rumonge, I wanted to live with Burundians and not stay in a hotel. My evenings I usually spent at Palmotel where many of Rumonge’s influential elite have the habit of dropping in every few days in order to exchange gossip, talk business, watch and discuss the (TV) news and eat and drink together. Not only did I thoroughly enjoy myself on these nights, they were also extremely informative. During the day I always had lunch in a small local restaurant next to the market and hang around the schools as much as possible, even when there were no classes. My ability to speak and understand some Kiswahili allowed me to communicate with the children informally.

Next to my active attempts to engage in informal talks whenever possible with anyone who was interested in doing so (cf. Driessen & Jansen 2013), I have also attended three important community events: the UNFPA project during the World Cup; the independence celebrations and the Primusic festival. I have also kept a fieldwork diary in which I recorded my interpretations of situations but also quotes and remarkable events that took place in my presence or were related to me afterwards by someone else. By doing participant observation I imagine to have come to a more thorough interpretation of the context in which my research participants live, but also I imagine to be able to interpret their interpretations of this context in a more profound way.

Classroom Observations
I have spent over 100 hours doing classroom observations and during these, I was definitely not participating in ways that would warrant me to call it ‘participant observation’. They took place between June 25th and August 20th at three different public primary schools in Rumonge, all of which received help from UNICEF and USAID. Initially I focused on one school, where I was introduced by a UNICEF contact in the field, which allowed for a quick start of my observations. The pupil

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28 Interestingly enough, there is no direct translation for the word ‘violence’ in Kirundi. If translated, one is always specific about the kind of violence one is discussing (for example sexual violence). So it is not the case that there is ‘no word for violence’, rather: there are many.
29 Luckily, after two weeks, I found Chanelle (this is a fictitious name): a single thirty-something Burundian lady who was renting a room on a compound with six other families. For the remainder of my time in Rumonge, Chanelle and I thus shared her room and double bed.
30 UNICEF Burundi wrote an introduction letter (see Appendix A) which assisted me in getting access to the schools. This letter however also gave people the impression that I was working for UNICEF and would make
population of this school was widely held to be representative because it is part of a cluster of schools located in the city center and many of the extra lessons organized by both the government and private parties took place here. My contacts with the director were smooth and she has played a major role in introducing me to other school directors and teachers. The other two schools were chosen based on the good connections to the directors (through the director of the first school), but also because of their geographical locations and the fact that many school activities were still taking place there even during the holiday. My sample was thus created by convenience, through snowball sampling (Bryman 2008 [2001]: 183-4).

Broadly speaking, my classroom observations can be divided into three categories: observations during the last weeks of the official school year; observations during private lessons which were held in public school buildings; observations during the mis a niveau, supplementary lessons that were provided during the summer holiday to increase the education levels of repatriated children. From all my classroom observations, I hold the first category to be most representative of the normal course of events in public primary schools in Rumonge. The other two can only represent small segments of children in Rumonge. During these observations I focused mainly on teacher-pupil interaction, pupil-pupil interaction and disciplining practices because these provided me with examples of the un/intentional messages teachers transmit and children potentially pick up. I always made sure to be at school on time in order not to disturb class by being late, but also to be able to sit in the back to limit distracting the children. This was especially necessary in the lowest two grades.

I have mainly used my classroom observations to establish relations with pupils and as a context for my interviews, focus groups and informal conversations. During these I frequently used examples of my observations to start a discussion or elicit responses on a topic of my interest.

**Interviews**

Most people in Rumonge were more than willing to talk to me, but extremely reluctant to allow me to record our conversation. It often took me several meetings, repeatedly reassuring them that they were in no way forced to answer any of the questions I would ask, that it would be possible to pause the recording themselves and that they were at any time free to stop the interview, before they would agree to do it. Children appeared less concerned than adults, which is probably linked to their marginal societal positions (cf. Punch 2002). Even though I had intended to start my research with sure that their school would receive material benefits from this organization – something I am not capable of doing.

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31 This view was expressed to me in many informal talks, but also in interviews with a UNICEF employee (July 4th), two school directors (July 2nd, July 8th) and two teachers (July 21st, August 12th).

32 One of these schools was also part of the cluster of schools located in the city center, but the other one was located in one of the outskirts.

33 Children in grade 1 and 2 are – on average – between 7 and 9 years of age; they often tended to be more (easily) distracted than children in higher grades.
open interviews, I quickly discovered that people didn’t seem either used to or willing to freely talk about a topic (with me) or make elaborate statements about their personal opinions (cf. Berckmoes 2010: 159). I believe this to be related to issues of trust, which clearly come to the fore in countries with a history like Burundi but also when doing research on sensitive topics such as violence (cf. Berckmoes 2014: 36). Earning people’s trust has therefore been one of my priorities throughout my research: it is not just a box to tick, it is about building relations.

Of all my research methods, interviews were definitely most affected by these trust-issues. They were the hardest to organize and undertake satisfactorily. This is also why my probing during interviews has been limited, so as not to force participants to speak of things that they didn’t want to speak of (cf. Günther 2001). Berckmoes suggests that in these cases researchers can use meta-data to still obtain the information they were looking for (in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 128). I therefore actively relate interview data with data created through other research methods.

In total, I have conducted 22 recorded interviews. Fourteen of these were with adults who occupied relevant positions in the community. I have mainly used these to contextualize the children’s views on their primary schools, violence and Rumonge community at large. The first few interviews I did lasted around 30 to 40 minutes, but the longer I was in the field the longer my interviews started to take. Gradually overcoming trust-issues, eventually, some of the interviews lasted over 120 minutes. The interview locations differed depending on people’s wishes. I always let them decide where the interview would take place, which in practice meant either at their office (the school), the lobby of the hotel where I stayed in my first two weeks or in a local bar during the day (when not many people would be around).

Both adults and children seemed very concerned when other adults (not children!) were in the vicinity during the interview and I had not expected this ‘third party presence’ to be as influential as it was (cf. Beitin 2008, Evans 2011). During interviews with adults, they would simply stop talking when others came too close and cautiously resume their story whenever this third party was believed to be out of earshot again. During interviews with children it was often my translator Nadia or myself who would ask the child to wait a while. I therefore find it safe to say that despite the fact that I didn’t manage to do as many interviews with children as I had wanted to beforehand, the interviews that I did manage to do where immensely informative, not just because of what was

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34 I will return to this issue in Chapter 3 and 5.
35 This also because I am not capable of providing much meaningful assistance in case traumatic experiences would be relived.
36 A complete, anonymized, list of all research participants for the focus groups and interviews can be found in Appendix B.
37 A community leader; journalist; government employee; three NGO-employees; six teachers of three different schools and two school directors.
related to me, but also because of the ways in which this was done – even when interaction was briefly stopped in order to protect oneself.

All my interviews with children have been conducted with the help of my translator and interpreter Nadia Riziki. Originally from Bujumbura, she arrived in Rumonge only one week before I did and was therefore not familiar with many people in town.\(^{38}\) It turned out that children appreciated this because it implied less risk of their parents finding out what they had told us. Nadia, fluent in French, Kiswahili and Kirundi, translated everything on the spot and before and after an interview or focus group, we would always sit down and discuss. Nadia thus became an important research informant as well (cf. Berckmoes 2010). In total, we conducted eight recorded in-depth semi-structured interviews with children between the ages of 6 and 13 years old. Five of these were girls, whom I explicitly targeted for interviews because they were harder to reach than boys. Many girls had to go home straight after school to work at home, whereas the boys often stayed around and played soccer for a while.\(^{39}\)

We always took time for the children to ask questions to either one of us, mostly at the end but sometimes also during the interview. In this way we attempted to make the interview more of a conversation and knowledge exchange instead of an interrogation. No rewards\(^{40}\) were given – only our time and listening ears, which turned out to be enough motivation for them to talk. The in-depth interviews with children lasted between 30 to 70 minutes, depending on the elaborateness of the child’s responses and the available time.\(^{41}\) The older the child was, the longer the interview usually took.\(^{42}\) The interviews were most successful during my last month, when the children were familiar with me. These interviews mainly took place in a quiet corner of the school yard, since this is where we would meet and where they felt comfortable.

\(^{38}\) Unfortunately this sparked a lot of rumors among the parents and adult community members. At one point they thought that Nadia and I were somehow ‘screening’ the children that we or UNICEF would want to take to Holland to go to a good school. This is just one example of the kind of gossip I learned about while spending my evenings at Palmotel (cf. Ansoms in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 48, Besnier 2009, Vorrath in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 64).

\(^{39}\) Girls also often mentioned to me that they actually don’t really enjoy the holidays, because this simply means more work for them. Workload increases during the holidays because children then have more time to assist in the homes – for those in extra private lessons this thus results in even more work (cf. focus groups August 4\(^{th}\), August 7\(^{th}\), Rumonge).

\(^{40}\) I had intended to give sweets as a token of my appreciation to participating children, but this failed from the beginning because it was Ramadan period. Despite the fact that the majority of the children were Christians, I did not want to hand out sweets only to some and not to others.

\(^{41}\) The interviews with the older girls were often “cut short” by remarks from them that they had to get home in order to do their chores.

\(^{42}\) I had anticipated this as children tend to have smaller attention spans than adults (cf. Günther 2001: 360).
Focus Groups
I have conducted six focus groups during which Nadia translated on the spot. On average these lasted a little over an hour and they were mainly conducted at school, right after class when the teachers had left. In total 68 children (35 girls and 33 boys) between the ages of 4 and 17 years old participated. I used a convenience sample for the focus groups, since it turned out to be very difficult to make ‘appointments’ with groups of children (Bryman 2008 [2001]: 183-4). Some of the focus groups took place spontaneously since the child that I had asked for an interview had brought 10 of his friends and some of them took place ‘organized’ when I myself had asked a child to bring other children to have a group discussion. All focus groups were digitally recorded, with permission from the children.

The focus groups provided me with insights in the ways in which children construct meaning in a group setting, whether their opinions and stories were similar to each other, and why or why not (cf. Cronin 2001: 165). My attempts to have them ‘free list’ things that were connected to violence or their school repeatedly failed so as time went by my questions became more specific. We usually started with a game (which is not recorded) but the older children (13 years and older) enjoyed it

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43 This was different for the first focus group, which was translated afterwards by Patrick – a translator I only worked with once because he was a teacher and demanded more money than I could afford.
44 Two focus groups were mixed, but the presence of boys seemed to mute the girls, which is why I later conducted an all-girls focus group. The rest of the focus groups (3) were with boys only.
45 Nadia had already predicted that free listing would be difficult because ‘children are not used to think like that’. This might be the case, however I think it rather points to the normalization of violence (in the school) which made my questions ‘strange’ to them and also the fact that most of the children were unaccustomed to being asked about their opinions, thoughts or experiences by adults directly. For an example of questions that I asked, see Appendix C.
more when we started with questions straight away. Nadia sometimes directed a question directly at someone – especially if silence fell – but usually one of the children would start responding and others would follow. If many children started speaking at once, Nadia would give each a turn. I also actively encouraged the children to ask questions of their own to Nadia or me but also to the other children, in an attempt to make the focus groups as participatory as possible and create space for their opinions and interests (Spyrou 2008). This also helped when it came to keeping their attention and having them enjoy the overall experience.

Relating to Analysis

Unit of Analysis
My unit of analysis follows from the research questions and the explicit request by UNICEF Burundi and the AISSR to focus on primary school-aged children in Rumonge: children between the age of 6 and 17 who go to public primary schools in this community.46

Figure 5: Big age differences between pupils.

Data Analysis
I have transcribed all recorded interviews and focus groups using Express Scribe. I then analyzed the transcripts for recurring themes by means of an open thematic analysis (Bryman 2008 [2001]: 554). I specifically looked for repetitions and differences and similarities between accounts (ibid.: 555). I performed the analysis in an iterative way by incorporating the themes that emerged into

46 Originally I thought to be working with children between 7 and 15, however, I found out that it is not at all uncommon for 20-year olds to be in primary school and for six year olds to be ‘already’ registered. However, because most of the children I spoke to were between 6 and 17 I chose to stick to this age category.
subsequent interviews with participants by means of checking the validity of my interpretations and the context within which they came into being (cf. Bryman 2008 [2001]: 12, Argenti & Schramm 2012 [2010]: 21). The data from my observations and participant observation have resulted in stories and these have been analyzed the same way. I have also used interactional analysis to take a close look at the interactions and relations among people (Bryman 2008 [2001]: 553).

Related Ethical Considerations
I cannot discuss all ethical considerations here, but there are a few things that I want to emphasize. First of all, I agree with Samantha Punch that research with children is not inherently different from doing research with adults because children are children, but rather because of their mostly marginalized social status in many societies (2002). This however cannot be taken to mean that doing research with children is exactly the same as doing research with adults. Throughout the research I have taken great care in order to try and make the children (as well as the adults) that I spoke to, feel comfortable and safe. I always emphasized that whatever they told me in confidence remained between us, unless they would give me permission to speak about it with others (cf. Vorrath in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 62). Because I take children to be competent social actors I have not sought informed consent from their parents: I left the choice to participate to the child. I sincerely hope and believe that all people that I have spoken to have experienced our talk as a little ‘space of peace’ in which tolerance and respect were key.

I also want to explain my position towards the uses of (extreme) violence that I have witnessed. During these incidents, I have not actively attempted to stop the violence from happening. There are two reasons for this. First, ‘in dealing with these issues, we must admit that what counts in one society as a tolerable level of violence may be condemned in another as excessive’ (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 7). This holds true for beating children: something a teacher in the Netherlands would get fired for, but something that is very normal in Burundi. I take it that sometimes, my mere presence was enough for it to stop early or be less severe, but there is of course no way to be sure (cf. Sumner & Tribe 2012 [2008]: 61). However, this does not mean that my non-intervention can be interpreted as a sign of extreme cultural relevance and disregard for the sufferers of violence. Instead, I would have to profess that most of the times it all happened so quickly and even if I wouldn’t have frozen and would have been able to do something, I have no clue what I should have done and – not unimportantly – whether my action would have improved the

47 Some explicitly stated that they wanted to be mentioned with their real names, which is why I have used footnotes to indicate names that are fictitious.
48 I decided this before hand and discussed it in the field with teachers, school directors, Nadia and also parents (some of whose children also participated, but some just advised me on this issue in general).
situation (cf. Krotz 2009). It is therefore my hope, that by telling this story, my acts of ‘seeing, listening, touching, recording can be’ seen as ‘acts of solidarity’ (Schepers-Hughes 1995: 418).

Related to this, I want to allude to my position in the field as a young student. The fact that I was thinking about how to present myself does not preclude other people positioning me (and themselves) as well (cf. Ansoms in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 43). I have always tried to talk and listen to everyone who was willing to talk and listen to me, but a lot of factors out of my control have influenced the stories that I can tell. I will present one example of this as I clearly remember one night when I was informally talking to a government official. When he heard that I am an anthropologist he called the waiter and said: ‘then you should be able to give me the correct answer to the following question: is this man Hutu or Tutsi?’ Silence fell and everybody at the table looked our way. I was shocked, not just because this man reminded me of a dark part of the history of my discipline (cf. Fabian 2002 [1983], Herzfeld 2002, Pels 1997, Wolf 1997[1982]), but also because I knew the waiter quite well and felt bad for the position that he was put in by this blatant demonstration of power.49 I chose to respond by saying: ‘I don’t see the difference, to me they are all human beings’. Everybody remained silent and after looking at me intently, the official quietly said: ‘you are a good person. I’ll buy you a beer’. Which he did and we never talked about this issue again.

That is, until my supervisor came to visit me in the field. Suddenly, my friends seemed concerned that my research might not be found ‘representative’ of Burundi. I believe that these concerns stemmed from their genuine interest in the welfare of my ‘budding career’ in combination with their knowledge of my supervisor; Lidewyde Berckmoes who has conducted a lot of research in Bujumbura (cf. Berckmoes 2008, 2010, 2014). The same government official repeatedly told me that my supervisor was a ‘Hutu-lover’ since she did her research in Kamenge; a Hutu-neighborhood (cf. Berckmoes 2014: 30). ‘Does she even know that these days, it’s the Tutsi who are being oppressed? You have to make her understand that!’50 When Claude walked me home that night and I told him about these remarks he laughed and said: ‘You didn’t know that you have been with Tutsi only? How could you not have seen this?!’ My inability to respond to this question leaves me feeling uncomfortable up until this very day and it shows that, despite my active attempts not to position myself in relation to ethnic identities —did not mean that I didn’t have a position in relation to others. This leads me to consider some of the limitations of my research.

**Related Limitations**

There are four important limitations related to this research. First of all, the primary school was closed during most of the fieldwork period. Even though I did some observations in the normal

49 Also, this particular person had – in private informal conversations – repeatedly alluded to his discomfort with being Hutu and working in a Tutsi province.
50 Informal conversation August 14th, Rumonge.
school year, most of my data relates to school activities that were organized during the summer holiday in which only particular groups of pupils participated. However, because these groups include both the ‘elite’ pupils of relatively rich families who were able to take the private lessons and the relatively poor and marginalized returnee children, I believe that my research is still able to strike a balance and demonstrate how these extremes exist and relate to each other in the same space.

Secondly, there is the short time span in which this research was conducted. The fieldwork lasted for three months and since I was unfamiliar with the Burundian context, it needs to be considered that it took me a lot of time to come to a meaningful way of interpreting my experiences whilst in the field, but also during the writing process. I hope to have partially overcome this limitation by continuously cross-checking my interpretations with the research participants and academic literature.

The third limitation is that French is not my first language (cf. Duranti 1997). Just thinking about all the times where I managed to understand that I had misunderstood or missed something, can only leave me worried about all the times that this happened without my being aware of it. Especially when we add to this that the children usually spoke Kirundi or Kiswahili. This limitation will therefore never be completely overcome, but I have attempted to nuance the potential biases that it can invoke by working closely with Nadia.

Lastly, I am sure that many people are of the opinion that the non-generalizability of my research results is its fourth important limitation. I admit to having engaged with a non-random, non-representative group of children whom I often stumbled across based on contingency – despite my efforts to organize my research (cf. Sumner & Tribe 2012 [2008]: 118). To echo Wilkinsons: ‘my research is the product of circumstance, of serendipity and coincidence, of contingency, of interpretations and being interpreted’ (in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 5). I therefore provide you with as much context as possible because by telling you in all honesty and reflexivity ‘the story behind the findings’, I hope to allow you to judge for yourself what my research could mean or reflect. I however also want to add that in the totality of relation, generalizability is not a relevant criteria because relationships between people are always different, always becoming.

In this chapter I have explicated the qualitative and interpretive approach that I have taken. I then delved in to the four research methodologies that I made use of: participant observation; classroom observations in three different settings; interviews with both children and adults; focus groups. The last three sections of this chapter were devoted to my analysis, some ethical considerations and limitations to this research. We will now turn to the research context.
Chapter 3

Context: Relating to Rumonge

*Ralliement, connivence, collusion, dissension*

*Hutu ou Tutsi, me pose jamais la question*

*Les amours, le cœur, les amis, les tourments*

Gaël Faye featuring Tumi : Blend (2012)

This chapter starts with an elaboration on two important aspects of social life in Rumonge: Burundi’s violent history of ethnic conflict followed by a reflection on mistrustful attitudes. Thereafter I briefly highlight the four main problems, connected to both the past and the widespread attitudes of mistrust, that children in Rumonge are (potentially) exposed to. Lastly I discuss the public primary school space and the four types of related social inequalities that are at play.

Relating to the Past: a Divisive Tale

Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda are often referred to as The Great Lakes Region: a piece of space that has been the center of many violent incidents for the past decades (Young 2006: 301, cf. Van Leeuwen 2008: 394). Not only have their armies repeatedly ‘intervened in civil conflict across the borders’, the flows of refugees that moved across these same borders have also connected them (Young 2006: 316). On my first day in Bujumbura however, I didn’t experience anything that pointed towards this violent being in relation. I do remember realizing that quite a few of the street names refer to peace.⁵¹ I also learned a traditional Kirundi greeting: *Amahoro*. This literally means ‘peace’ and people say it to each other all day long.⁵² This is interesting because looking at Burundi’s post-colonial history, peace is definitely not the first thing that comes to mind. In short: ‘in 1961 the “hero of independence” Prince Louis Rwagasore was assassinated, 1965 marks the year of an aborted *coup d’état* followed by “ethnic” violence; 1972 was the year in which an estimated 200,000 Hutus were massacred; in 1988 several thousand Tutsi civilians were murdered in the north of Burundi; in 1991 a Hutu rebellion attacked Bujumbura and adjacent provinces; and in 1993 the country-wide civil war

⁵¹ Such as: *Avenue de la Paix, Avenue de la Justice, Avenue de la Solidarité* etc. in Bujumbura.
⁵² Even just in passing. [http://burundi2007.blogspot.nl/2008/06/kirundi-basic-phrases.html](http://burundi2007.blogspot.nl/2008/06/kirundi-basic-phrases.html) (last accessed on 05-11-2014)
broke out’ (Berckmoes 2014: 54). This war officially ended when the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement was signed in 2000, but the violence lasted until 2005/6 and even after that violent incidents continue(d) to occur (ibid.: 70, cf. Van Leeuwen 2008, Young 2006).

Before colonialism, Burundi was a Kingdom with a complex socio-political hierarchy (Uvin 2009: 7). Groups of Tutsi and Hutu had different positions of power and with the King representing the entire nation and old wise men charged with the rule of law, the system was quite stable despite internal competitions (ibid.). The concepts of “Hutu” and “Tutsi” ‘had gained currency by the nineteenth century, but without the elaborated ethnic and racial ideologies that later developed’ (Young 2006: 308). This happened during colonialism, aided by the Germans – who ruled Burundi from 1890 to 1916 – and the Belgians who rigidified this ‘European template of ethnic codification’ by assigning an ‘ethnic designation’ to all colonial subjects in the census of 1933-1934 (ibid.: 309, cf. Berckmoes 2014: 67). Throughout the colonial period social inequalities between the newly solidified ethnic groups deepened in favor of the Tutsi and this was transmitted to next generations through the ‘mission school system’ (ibid.).

Eventually, the growing tensions culminated in the mass killings that took place in 1972. Armed Hutu bands, coming from the refugee camps that were located in Tanzania, had infiltrated the southern areas of Burundi and killed thousands of Tutsi in a revenge for the years of inequality and for the ethnic killings that took place in 1965, prior to their fleeing (Young 2006: 313). The Burundian army, largely consisting of Tutsi, retaliated by massacring over 100,000 people. This violence started out in Rumonge, where they began to kill family members of people who were believed to be part of this Hutu movement. For a long time, this led scholars to argue that some kind of innate ethnic rivalry or tribalism had spurred these massacres (cf. Lemarchand 1994: 3, Daley 2007: 231). Academia has however started to disagree with this simplistic perception as the next section will make clear.

Imagining an other other than Ethnicity
Ethnic identities are by many social scientists no longer viewed as ‘fixed’ or innate but rather as a practice (cf. Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 2, Van Hoyweghen & Vlassenroot 2000: 97). Ethnicities are performed in particular situations and power plays a central role in this since in praxis ethnicity – be

53 There is still a lot unclear about Burundi’s history and there is very little consensus. Berckmoes warns that this may lead to history itself becoming ‘a myth that is kept alive as a tool in struggles over truth, power and impunity’ (2014: 72). I therefore want to emphasize that history can be described in different ways, but for the purpose of tracing the line of becoming of ethnic conflict I have chosen to adhere to this frame for this section (cf. Butler 2010).

54 Burundi was also home to a small number of Twa, but these have not figured prominently in the subsequent conflicts (Uvin 2009: 7, Young 2006: 309)

55 Interview with government official, August 20th, Rumonge.

56 These ideas can still be found in contemporary newspaper articles and the dominant discourses about Burundi but also Africa and Africans in general (cf. Berckmoes 2010: 151).
it an embodied feeling or an ascribed socio-cultural identity – is used for something (Van Hoyweghen & Vlassenroot 2000: 97, Willemse 2009: 216). The notion that ‘ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and hence malleable’ should however not be taken to mean that ethnicity cannot be experienced as a ‘timeless’ or ‘unalterable’ identity, causing intense emotions of belonging (Bush & Saltarelli 2000: 2, cf. Geschiere 2009). Quite the contrary – in lived reality ethnicity can have very real consequences for the ways in which people relate to themselves and others. Something that the past and current events in Burundi clearly signify (cf. Berckmoes 2014, Lemarchand 1994, Mamdani 2001, Mann 2005, Uvin 2009). This makes it all the more important to remember that ethnicity as such does not explain a conflict; ‘it is not causing this fault-line but is merely the ideological form of the competition (Van Hoyweghen & Vlassenroot 2000: 104, cf. Jackson 2000).

However by using and perpetuating the ethnicity-discourse social scientists have legitimized its existence and in the process created racialized and tribalized images of “primitive Africans” as the Ultimate Other (cf. Idris in Willmese 2009: 227-8, Fabian 2002 [1983], Mudimbe 1988). This is why I make an attempt to contextualize ‘ethnicized’ stories about Burundi’s conflicts without denying or downplaying the existence of ethnic identifications. This is a way of taking responsibility for assisting in imagining more peaceful ways of relating to one another (cf. Glissant 2010 [1990], Nancy 2000 [1996]: 27-8). Describing more inclusive stories that are also part of the totality of relations, existing side by side with more divisive or violent ones, might help us to move past ethnic identity narratives that are and have been used to justify violent behaviors (cf. Daley 2006, Glissant 2010 [1990], Guadeloupe 2009, Nancy 2000 [1996], Van Hoyweghen & Vlassenroot 2000: 111, Willemse 2009: 229). Hopefully this will prevent ethnicized stories from becoming ‘a pretext for yet another cycle of ethnically motivated action’ (Van Hoyweghen & Vlassenroot 2000: 112, cf. Daley 2006, Lemarchand 1994: 16, 19). And this belief does not stem from my imagination alone.

Already in 2009 Uvin concluded that ‘ordinary people of all ethnicities faced such hardship that they came to realize that ethnic division did not serve them’ (2009: 19, 188). And this sentiment has also often been expressed to me by people in Rumonge. People are tired of war and don’t want the past to repeat itself. In Rumonge, this became especially clear in 1993 when the country-wide civil war broke out after the murder of the first democratically elected (Hutu) president. Several people in Rumonge have told me that it remained relatively calm in the area because the older

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57 This led the Comaroff’s to cynically conclude that ‘ideology’ is giving way to ‘ID-ology’ (2009: 49).

58 Berckmoes: ‘the electoral results fitted remarkably neatly with the estimated ‘ethnic’ composition of society: 85 per cent Hutu, 14 per cent Tutsi and 1 per cent Twa’ (2014: 69). This is what Mann has been describing as ‘the dark side of democracy’: the possibility for majority tyranny, especially in states where minorities are not adequately protected (2005).
generation stopped the younger ones from taking part in the violence. This older generation vividly remembered the horrors of 1972, when Rumonge was the center stage of the mass ethnic killings. They managed to maintain a state of relative peace until 1996, when people from other parts of the country came to the area to fight. This clearly shows that sometimes, people of different ethnicities in the midst of an ethnic war, were still able to collaborate and live together in relative peace: imagining beyond ethnicity. Jackson: ‘the past is not imposed upon the present, but offers itself up, so to speak, to the living as a basis for creatively comprehending their present situation and making informed choices about how it is to be addressed and lived’ (2005: 357-8). Relations are central in these decisions, which is why we now turn to the issue of (lack of) trust that impacts on social interactions in Rumonge significantly.

**Enactments of Mistrust**

It comes as no surprise that the social fabric of a society comes under a lot of pressure and can eventually be torn apart by (lengthy periods of) violence (cf. Argenti & Schramm 2012 [2010], Nordstrom & Robben 1995). This can lead to a lack of trust in others which then inhibits social interactions even further. I vividly remember how I was sensitized to this already on my first night in Bujumbura when someone told me emphatically ‘never reveal more than your interlocutor reveals to you – they might use it against you! Information exchange has to be balanced!’ This clearly points to what I have termed ‘enactments of mistrust’.

According to Lenard mistrust, seemingly paradoxical, depends on trust (2008). It signifies an ‘ambivalence about others’ trustworthiness’ but does not mean that a person distrusts others a priori (ibid.: 318). Distrust is when one is skeptic or suspicious about the other’s intentions or capabilities to live up to what they say and therefore one doesn’t trust the other (ibid.: 316-7). This can be based on past experiences but also solely on suspicion, because ‘the perverse nature of distrust makes it feed on itself, nourished by proofs that it itself constructs’ (Turnaturi 2007: 67). This in sharp contrast to mistrustful persons who are constantly moving between trust and distrust in their social interactions (Lenard 2008: 319). They can thus be convinced to trust someone because they decide anew, in every social interaction, whether at that moment they trust the other(s) involved. Because ‘even though we know that promises, pacts, and treaties can be broken, we persist

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59 Interviews with two government officials on July 26th and August 20th respectively, Rumonge.
60 See also Berckmoes’ discussion on how seemingly small inconsistencies or half-truths are often interpreted as betrayal (2014: 172)
61 Informal conversation, June 15th, Bujumbura.
62 See also De Bruijn’s analysis of the current situation in Chad, which she believes to be reigned by *la peur* – to similar effects as what I describe about Rumonge in this section. ([https://mirjamdebruijn.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/chad-not-yet-a-breeding-ground-for-voices/](https://mirjamdebruijn.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/chad-not-yet-a-breeding-ground-for-voices/) last accessed on 04-11-2014)
in forging interpersonal bonds: we do so necessarily, as we could not even imagine our future otherwise’ (Turnaturi 2007: 40, my emphasis, TH). Trust is therefore extremely important for doing research because it influences ‘the decision to disclose or conceal’ information (Berckmoes in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 128).63

One day, one of my neighbors asked me whether I thought that I was receiving truthful information from the people in Rumonge.64 And he was not the only person who wondered about this. Most people I talked to alluded to ‘Burundians’ saying one thing to your face and something else when you’re not around (cf. Berckmoes in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013, Berckmoes 2014).65 Related to this, is that people, when making a (sensitive) statement, tended to say ‘on dit que’ – which can be translated both as ‘we say’ or ‘it is said’. This leaves in the middle whether the speaker is part of this ‘we’ who said these things or whether they are simply relating something that others said. Nancy refers to this as including oneself in ‘the anonymity of the “one”’; a very effective protection mechanism since we are all people and therefore all tied up in ‘the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity’ (2000 [1996]: 7). I therefore see the use of this expression also as an enactment of mistrust geared towards keeping ones guard up (cf. Turnaturi 2007).66

These enactments of mistrust also take place within and between groups and according to Lenard this attitude ‘emerges under conditions of uncertainty’ (2008: 319).67 These conditions are definitely present in Rumonge because, partly due to the elections, people are very uncertain and therefore fearful about the future (cf. Berckmoes 2014: 173). This became especially clear to me during two important community events: the UNFPA’s initiative to project World Cup matches on a large screen interspersed by educational videos and the big independence celebration on the 1st of July.68 During both events minor incidents quickly changed the atmosphere into one of fear and

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63 Therefore, ‘in order to gain the trust and assure the confidence of the men and women whose stories are our “data”, acknowledging and understanding their fears and anxiety is a critical research strategy’ which I have attempted to follow (Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 6).
64 Informal conversation, July 30th, Rumonge.
65 Chanelle and Nadia were also very fierce in explaining this to me on several occasions and one UN-employee told me that ‘in the past it was necessary for Burundians to lie, but now it is no longer, yet they keep doing it’ (informal conversation, June 28th, Rumonge).
66 ‘Enactments of mistrust’ are closely related to what Berckmoes describes as ‘elusive tactics’ which are geared towards protecting oneself against suspected, latent dangers and to maintain options to seize future opportunities’ (2014: 173).
67 See also Buyandelgeriyn on how ‘uncertainty helps us revisit our preconceived notions and find an opportunity to understand the diversity of practices from a new angle’ (2008: 246). This clearly alludes to the fact that uncertainty can help us imagine new ways of relating, despite the fact that at the same time it can make us wary of ‘the other’ thereby inhibiting (new) ways of relating to each other (cf. Berckmoes 2014).
68 [link](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/burundi/2014/06/06/9916/la_coupe_du_mondeEdition_2014_inspiration_pour_une_jeunesse_engagée_pour_la_paix_et_en_bonne_sante_au_burundi/) (last accessed on 22-10-2014)
I believe that this is what happens when a large group of mistrustful people, expecting that something might happen (to them), is together in one space. This exacerbates specific problems for children, as we will see in the next two sections.

**Being a Child in Rumonge**

Children in Rumonge are being socialized in this environment that is heavily impacted by Burundi’s troubled history and the enactments of mistrust that shape the social interactions (cf. Smith 2010). Rumonge is one of the oldest towns of Burundi and it originally came into being as a trading post of Zanzibari merchants in the 14th century. Up until this day business thrives and the town is still home to many Swahili-speaking Islamic people. Many of them work as fishermen or at the lakeshores, making the port and the fish market on the beach very important economic and social activities. Just before I arrived in Rumonge, OIDEB (*Observatoire Ineza des Droits de l’Enfant Burundi*) had opened a special field office because they felt that children in Rumonge were facing several imminent dangers that warranted their continuous presence. They explained to me the four biggest problems that children in Rumonge potentially face.

First of all, many of these are related to the repatriated children who are coming back from the refugee camps in Tanzania. When they arrive in Rumonge they are not warmly welcomed. This is mainly due to ethnic tensions, since the repatriates are held to be Hutu and Bururi is a province traditionally inhabited by Tutsi, but also to the related land conflicts (cf. Sommers 2013: 9). The government has been promising repatriates that they will get a piece of land when they return to Burundi, something that is necessary for their survival considering that most people depend on farming to meet their basic needs. Some of the repatriates are claiming land ‘back’; the land that their families left behind when they fled the country in 1972 as described above. This land however, has already been ‘taken’ by those who stayed behind or was given to them by the former government. These beneficiaries are mainly Tutsi families, who have now been living on these lands for decades, since they felt protected by the army in 1972. They are hardly ever willing to either return it to the Hutu’s who fled – whom they often hold responsible for the violence in 1972 – or to share it with them, because the parcels are too small to then still be viable for both families (cf. Van

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69 Organizers also told me that they had intentionally spread rumors in advance to make people think that policemen in civilian clothing were among the crowd. All believed that this was necessary to make people behave themselves. If a person stepped out of line or started yelling s/he was immediately forcefully taken away by the police.

70 The *Washawili*, People of the Coast, are a prime example of having been rooted in relation (through long distance trade) with other peoples and cultures from very early on (cf. Middleton 1992).

71 The information in the rest of this section is, unless mentioned otherwise, based on multiple informal conversation with two OIDEB Rumonge employees and on an interview held with them on August 13th, Rumonge.


73 This was also described to me in detail by a government official on August 20th, Rumonge.
Leeuwen 2010: 754). Attempts to settle these land claims peacefully have not been efficient (cf. Van Leeuwen & Haartsen 2005). The consequence for the repatriates and their children often is living in poverty and fear. The former due to lack of land, the latter because of all the rumors and radio news about land conflict related killings.  

Despite help from NGO’s repatriated children are easily recognized in schools since they mostly don’t have uniforms and don’t speak Kirundi (very well) (cf. Sommers 2013: 21-2).

The second category of problems that children in Rumonge face is related to children of fishermen. Their parents are working away from home all day every day and the children are therefore largely left on their own and spend a lot of time on the beach as well. This often results in a very limited interest in education from both the children, who’d rather just earn money like their parents, and the parents, who need the extra money to supplement the family income. This ‘business-mentality’ is widely acknowledged and many people in Rumonge are proud of it, not just fishermen and their children. It so happens to be that on Mondays and Thursdays, when the fish market is held on the beach, teachers can even find their classrooms nearly empty: many children tend to hang around on the beach those days, looking for little jobs. This environment is particularly unsafe for girls because they run a great risk of getting abused, pregnant and/or contracting HIV when they spend a lot of time working on the beaches (at night).

The latter closely relates to the third problem children potentially face in Rumonge: (sexual) abuse. This unfortunately takes place all over the world, but the situation in Rumonge is considered

74 Offering repatriates a meal when they claim your land and then subsequently killing them by giving them poisoned food has become a well-known and often used strategy to get rid of them (regular informal talks and radio emissions, July, August 2014, Rumonge).

75 This was explained to me by several people and it was also mentioned in many interviews, for example with a school director July 2nd, a UNICEF employee July 4th and a teacher, July 21st. In everyday interactions with other children this language barrier is not present, because most children who grow up in Rumonge know Kiswahili. Some people suggested to me that this is also why repatriates like settling in Rumonge and its surroundings: they can appear to be traders instead of returnees – speaking Kiswahili won’t raise suspicion about one’s family background immediately. (Informal conversations, July, August, Rumonge).

76 As someone in Bujumbura told me ‘les enfants de Rumonge ne sont pas incité à aller à l’école parce que la plupart de leurs parents n’ont pas fait de l’école. Ils sont motivés par le business’ (informal talk with a waiter who was born in Rumonge and grew up there until he was eight years old, June 20th, Bujumbura. Translation: The children in Rumonge are not encouraged to go to school because most of their parents haven’t gone to school either. They are motivated by the business (my translation). This was also mentioned in my interview with a primary school teacher on August 12th, Rumonge.

77 See for example UNICEF’s facebook status of May 22nd, 2013: “In one school in Rumonge, school administrators noticed that two-thirds of boys enrolled in 1st grade had abandoned school by 6th grade. They believe the dropouts have to do with poverty and the numerous job opportunities in the Rumonge area. What do you think? How can we keep these children in school?” (https://www.facebook.com/UNICEFBurundi/posts/174028669429177)

78 Interview with teacher, July 21st, Rumonge.

79 Informal conversation with one of my neighbors who worked for a local NGO that aimed at sensitizing fishermen to the dangers of HIV and AIDS, July 30th, Rumonge.
to be relatively worse due to the fact that it is a business town which attracts a lot of visitors on business trips, generating incentives for prostitution. Also, the frequency of sexual abuse cases of minors is alarmingly high, something that was mentioned to me not only by OIDEB employees, but also by teachers and children themselves. Some relate this explicitly to Muslim cultural practices, where older men are allowed to marry minors, also if they already have a wife or wives. The frequent cases of non-sexual child abuse mostly relate to children who have come or were brought to Rumonge to work. They are often underpaid, kept away from school and their families or friends and are physically abused. This can happen to both boys and girls, but so far, OIDEB had more cases in which this happened to girls.

The last problem that children in Rumonge face that I will discuss here, is the problem of illegal marriages. This is again often linked to Muslim cultural practices in which one man can have multiple wives, but it is also widely acknowledged that this is an aspect of non-Muslim Burundian culture. Some men can marry up to five different wives and thus end up with more than fifteen children – which they cannot afford. Also, if men have children with more than one wife, these children cannot all be registered. This means that when they grow up, they will not be able to claim land based on family heritage. Violent family feuds ensue from these situations. It is also often the case that men leave their first wife after they marry a second one, leaving the first one to fend for herself and her children. Moreover, because income from fishing is relatively unstable, people tend to immediately spend the money they earn if they have a lucky day. In practice this means that they either go out and party (including prostitute visits) or they ‘buy’ a new wife. When their income dries up later on, they are no longer able to afford this. And, to top it all off, girls are not free to choose whom they’ll marry: it is mostly their parents who decide this for them. They can therefore be forced into illegal marriages, which is especially a risk for girls from poor families because parents usually receive money from the family of the groom.

These four problems that children in Rumonge are believed to be exposed to more than children in other localities point to four different yet interrelated types of social inequality: ethnicity, language, social class and gender. The interrelations between these different aspects of a pupil’s

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80 Notably in the focus group with only girls, August 7th, Rumonge.
81 The problems with illegal marriages and the different meanings for this term (e.g. whether it refers to polygamous families, Mosque-marriages etc.) are acknowledged in many places in Burundi (personal communication with Lidewyde Berckmoes, November 21st 2014). I mention it here because OIDEB registered it as one of the biggest problems for children in Rumonge.
82 As stated before, even if they could claim land, the land of the father will not be viable after it has been divided into fifteen pieces.
83 This was also extensively debated in the all-girl focus group, August 7th, Rumonge.
84 I have chosen to focus on the four most relevant axes of inequality which I could identify for primary school-aged children, which is why I have not included ‘religion’. This does not mean that religion is not an important social marker in Rumonge community.
identity, societal position and the larger societal structures together create a dynamic school space in which these inequalities can undermine and/or exacerbate one another at the same time. I will discuss this more in-depth in the next chapter but let us first take a look at primary school space in Burundi.

**Being a Child in Primary School**

In Burundi ‘access to education has been a long-standing source of inequality, tension and conflict’ (Verwimp & Van Bavel 2013: 391, cf. Jackson 2000, Skonhoft 2000). In brief, colonial powers favored educational access for the (partly by them created) Tutsi-elite which led to increased discrimination against the Hutu masses (ibid.: 118). Also, during the outbreaks of violence in 1972 and 1988 the Tutsi army consciously targeted educated Hutu’s, because of their fears that these would threaten their powerful position. This made ‘being educated’ into a marker of vulnerability for many Hutu and it also greatly increased regional inequalities in terms of access to education (Skonhoft 2000, Jackson 2000). In the (recent) past ‘the education system and jobs in the administration were dominated by Tutsi from the southern region of Bururi’, which explains why up until today Bururi is one of the most educated provinces (Verwimp & Van Bavel 2013: 391). But, since the end of the civil war efforts are being made to address these inequalities.

In 2005 Burundi’s president, Pierre Nkurunziza, decided to provide free primary education ‘for all the country’s children’ in an attempt to boost enrollment rates – especially also for girls. The impacts of this decision are clearly visible in the public primary school where I did most of my research: a total of 904 pupils were enrolled, consisting of 432 boys and 472 girls. However, even though we can be content that these pupils have found their way to school, the president’s decision and subsequent policies have also created multiple problems (cf. Ntibashirakandi 2011). The two most prominent ones are the lack of school buildings and the lack of educated teachers.

The insufficient amount of classrooms is a problem that has long since been recognized by UNICEF and they have been assisting many schools to build more (UNICEF 2009). However, in Rumonge this problem remains particularly pressing because on top of the ‘ordinary’ pupils enrollment increase they are also dealing with the continuous influx of repatriated children (cf.

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85 An example of this is Verwimp & Van Bavel’s conclusion that gender disparity in primary education in Burundi declines during times of violence and increases during times of peace (2013).
86 This action was no doubt also heavily inspired by the Millenium Development Goals and international donor pressure. [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burundi_28197.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burundi_28197.html) (last accessed on 10-11-2014)
87 Interview with the school director, July 2nd, Rumonge.
88 See also the important critique that the MDG’s have focused mainly on quantity and not on quality of education – which is severely under pressure due to the massive influx of pupils (cf. UNESCO 2013).
89 UNICEF employee, Interview July 4th, Rumonge.
90 Interview with UNICEF employee, July 4th, Rumonge.
This also has severe implications for teachers because they are suddenly faced with children who do not speak Kirundi yet they have to educate them in that language (cf. Sommers 2013: 22). The need for more and well educated teachers therefore relates to the first problem in several ways. Not only do more pupils imply the need for more teachers, teachers were also often targeted during the years of conflict and subsequently replaced by unqualified personnel (Jackson 2000: 8). All of this has been acknowledged but on the ground not much seems to have changed (cf. UNICEF 2009). On top of this, teacher salary is very low and coupled with the tedious reforms this impacts negatively on teachers’ motivation and performance (Ntibashirakande 2011: 8, cf. Akiba et al. 2012, Verger, Altinyelken & De Koning 2013, Sommers 2013: 22).

Both of the aforementioned problems have recently become increasingly poignant due to the newest education policy changes in the country that were first mentioned in 2010 (Ntibashirakandi 2011: 15). Before, primary school used to take six years but the government has decided to add three years (grade 7, 8 and 9) to primary school. Even though the national examination is still taking place in grade 6, officially children will be going to primary school until they have finished the 9th grade. These changes should have been implemented starting last school year (September 2013), however most primary schools in Rumonge are not (yet) doing so because they are not equipped. Adding these three grades does not only negatively impact on the availability of classrooms but also on the quality of teaching, especially since teachers are now expected to teach more subjects on a higher level while only having received three weeks of extra training. As one teacher told me: ‘On donne ce que on a’ and if we don’t have it because we don’t know it, we can’t teach it to others.

Over the years, it is however not just the extra grades that have been added, the curriculum has changed as well. In 2006 it was decided that civic education and lessons in English and Kiswahili would be added to the curriculum (Ntibashirakandi 2011: 10). The latter has been mainly inspired by Burundi’s wish to become a viable member of the East African community, in which they are the only

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91 A whopping 119 (more than 10% of the pupil total!) at the school where I did my research. At another primary school in Rumonge city center 128 repatriated children were registered, interview with the director, July 8th, Rumonge.
92 See also Benson 2004 and Brock-Utne 2001, 2012 for the importance of language in education.
93 The director of the school explained to me that she only receives money to employ 28 teachers, no matter how many pupils will enroll (informal conversation, June 25th, Rumonge).
94 This was also related to me during interviews with teachers on July 21st, July 31st, August 8th, Rumonge.
95 See also http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002217/221755f.pdf (last accessed on 11-11-2014)
96 http://www.arib.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7888 (last accessed on 11-11-2014)
97 Interviews with teachers, July 31st, August 12th, Rumonge.
99 One of the teachers said: ‘le calcul on apprends encore avec les élèves’ (Interview, July 21st, Rumonge).
100 ‘We give what we have’ (my translation), quote from Janvier Nyandwi, July 31st, Rumonge. Also I know that in Rumonge three of these training days have actually taken place, the rest was still ‘scheduled’ (informal talks and observations August 19th, Rumonge).
Francophone country (left). But, this decision has been criticized because it is said to have ‘complètement désorienté les enfants, qui avaient déjà du mal à maitriser leur langue maternel ainsi que la deuxième langue national’ which is French. In Rumonge these 2006 changes have just been implemented but the newest changes haven’t yet. Unfortunately, despite these continuous efforts, education quality in Burundi remains low– and runs the risk of becoming lower due to increasing class sizes, lack of teacher training and endemic poverty. How this quality of education is interlinked with the pupil population and how ‘school space’ in itself also consists of different pieces of space is discussed in the next sub-section.

Converging Pieces of Space: Public, Private and Supplementary
School space itself consists of different pieces of space. This is the case throughout the school year when classrooms are also used for extra paid lessons, evening classes and parent meetings but even more so during the holidays. In Rumonge the cluster of schools located in the city center was used for UNICEF teacher trainings, private holiday lessons of the local NGO P.E.DE.PRO and the supplementary mise à niveau for repatriates. Each of these different activities and ways of relating profoundly shaped the interactions that took place, despite the fact that these all happened in the same location. In what follows I briefly discuss the three activities on which my analysis of school space is based: public lessons, private lessons and the supplementary lessons for repatriates.

Public primary schools start at 7.15 by hoisting the flag and singing the national anthem. Classes start at 7.30 and last until 12.45, with a thirty minute break at 10.00 during which boys and girls usually play separately. Due to the lack of classrooms the second half of pupils follows classes in the afternoon from 13.15 up to 17.30. In the first two grades classes consist of approximately 90 pupils, which boils down to six pupils sharing one school bench. In grade three to six, numbers decrease amounting to an average of 60 children in one class, four in one bench. Boys and girls sit together. Each class is supervised by two (mostly female) teachers: one to teach and one to

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101 Rwanda used to be Francophone as well but has changed to English and even cut political ties with France in 2006 (http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0925/p01s05-woaf.html last accessed on 11-11-2014)
102 ‘completely disoriented the children, who are already struggling to learn their mother tongue as well as the second national language’ (my translation). Also, most people I spoke to voiced concerns about this, stating that it is too much for young children (informal talks and an interview with a teacher, August 12th, Rumonge).
103 See Altinyelken on the difficulties of implementing curricular or pedagogical changes (2010). This also explains why I do not have much information on these newest changes, which is only partially due to the fact that the school year ended on July 11th.
104 ‘According to UNICEF, a third of children retook a year of school in 2012, while 38% dropped out’ http://www.enca.com/africa/quantity-no-quality-burundi-education (last accessed on 11-11-2014)
105 Promotion d’Encadrement pour le (inaudible) de Production. Interview July 31st, Rumonge.
106 These groups are referred to as group ‘A’ and ‘B’ and they change schedules every week so that children will have one week of morning classes followed by one week of afternoon classes.
107 The school where I did most of my research employed only 3 male teachers, the rest were women. The school director and UNICEF-employee both agreed that this was a normal male-female ratio for schools in city centers – in rural areas teachers are more often male (informal conversation June 25th, Rumonge).
maintain order. Especially the latter tends to employ direct violence, for example by slapping children who are (seemingly) not paying attention. After each lesson, teachers encourage the children to sing a few songs and then the teachers switch roles and the next lessons starts. Both teachers consistently behave the same way when they are maintaining order. I have never seen pupils asking a question and even if they dared to respond negatively to the question ‘have you understood’, no additional elucidation was provided. Pupils are supposed to wear a khaki uniform, but most of the time many without school uniforms were also present.

The private lessons start at 8.00 and last until 11.00 every weekday, sometimes including Saturdays for checking the pupils’ notebooks. The break lasts from 9.30 to 10.00 and boys and girls play separately. Only French and English are taught and only to sixth, seventh or eighth grade pupils. Classes consist of 30 pupils and are taught by one teacher – without a stick. Pupils were mainly girls from relatively well-of families, all in the possession of at least one pen, several notebooks and fancy-looking clothes (a uniforms was not required). Boys and girls sit separately and despite the presence of empty benches pupils still preferred to sit next to one or two others. Teachers often ask whether pupils understood and on quite a few occasions course material was calmly repeated on their request. Pupils also spontaneously asked questions and sometimes even challenged teachers to explain it better, which they nearly always at least attempted. The atmosphere was amicable and teachers and pupils continued to interact during the break.

The supplementary lessons took place every week day from 7.30 to 12.00. Classes are only for first and second grade pupils and only math, French and Kirundi are taught. The emphasis is on the latter two because repatriates often experience difficulties in understanding French and Kirundi. Classes consisted of at least 100 pupils; many of them would sit on the ground. Hardly anyone wore a school uniform and there was only one teacher per class. Age differences between the pupils were huge: sixteen year old girls sitting next to five year old boys, which led to many disturbances. Due to hunger pupils frequently fell asleep, especially after the break which was from 10.00 to 10.30. At some point teachers would even stop waking them because they would just fall asleep again.

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108 For this, parents pay 5000 fbu per month and 2000 fbu registration fees (in total, this is the equivalent of €6.).
109 The idea is that these grades are very important and if children master these languages all the other courses in school will be easier for them to understand (interview with initiator Janvier Nyandwi, July 31st, Rumonge).
Figure 6: Public primary school

Notice how there are two teachers, every pupil has a place to sit, a pen and a notebook. The ones without school uniforms tend to sit in the back.

Figure 7: Private lessons

(These are two classes in one classroom, during one of my group discussion with them.)

Notice how most of the pupils are well-dressed girls.

Figure 8: Mise à Niveau

Notice that there is only one teacher, hardly any of the children have a school uniform and not everybody has a seat.
As the above has made clear, each of these different activities create a different meaning and experience of school space and also warrants different relations and ways of acting from and between both teachers and pupils. This is interesting because – except for the teachers of the private lessons – the teachers and pupils that take part in these activities are the same. Clearly when relationships are fashioned in different ways, behaviors (of both pupils and teachers!) change as well. This means that for children, each of these pieces of space offers different engagements with (direct) violence and different possibilities for protecting oneself from it.

In this chapter I have discussed Burundi’s troublesome history in which Rumonge figured prominently in 1972. I then traced the enactments of mistrust that profoundly shape social interactions in Rumonge commune. Subsequently I discussed the four main problems children in Rumonge face and the four types of social inequalities that play an important role in their lives. Lastly I described the particularities of public primary school space while paying attention to three different pieces of space within it: public lessons, private lessons and supplementary ones. In the next chapter I will build on the four types of social inequality and relate these to the pieces of space and the violence that takes place in them.
Chapter 4

School Spaces and Violence

In this chapter I relate four types of social inequalities to manifestations of violence in school space. First I discuss the messages regarding violence that teachers intend to send to their pupils. Next I present several occurrences of direct violence followed by children’s beliefs and their attitudes towards this. In the final section I explore how this direct violence is related to other kinds of violence based on social inequalities due to ethnicity, language, social class and gender.

Violence in School Space

All the children that I spoke to were generally very positive about school and their education. ‘School is the future’ they would say or ‘at school we learn to read and at home we read to our parents who don’t know it’. One boy even stated ‘school is important for me because even when I’m at home I can’t get peace, I get peace when I’m at school’. He, like the others, emphasized how he enjoys studying and overall their hopes for the future are high: ‘I want to become a president. And I want to help my parents and I also want to help the population’. Getting an education is seen as a way to escape poverty: ‘Yes, when you go to school, you learn a lot, when you grow up you will see. You will have, you will see why it will help you, you see when you finish your studies you find a job, so you will be happy’ (cf. Uvin 2009).

In order to understand what they like and didn’t like about school, I asked the children from the private lessons to write down three of each of these things. The three things they liked most were subjects (especially English), good teachers and studying in general. The three things they didn’t

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110 Two boys, focus group July 9th, Rumonge.
111 Firmin (eleven year old boy, Grade 4) July 22nd, Rumonge.
112 Fidola (thirteen year old boy, Grade 6) August 18th, Rumonge.
113 I made it clear that this referred to normal public lessons and not the private ones that they were taking during their holidays.
like were beating, disturbing in class and teachers who injure pupils. This beating and disturbing could refer both to teachers but also to other pupils, which clearly points at the sometimes tense social interaction in an overloaded classroom and to the fact that children themselves can also be perpetrators of violence (cf. Korbin 2003, Sommers 2013: 19). Below, I first discuss what teachers intend to convey to their pupils when it comes to violence. Then I present instances of direct violence the children are or believe themselves to be exposed to at school and subsequently I will relate this to forms of structural and cultural violence that also take place at school and in the community at large. Understanding these relations will hopefully assist us in exploring new ways of relating that can lead to more peaceful ways of co-existing.

**Intentional Messages About Violence**

The directors of the schools where I did my research emphasized that in their schools, children were not beaten when they made a mistake: ‘we don’t punish the children. We can only give them advice’. Giving advice meant talking to them, listening to their problems and engaging in dialogue. They also promoted dialogue between pupils if there had been a fight. When I asked about the sticks that I had seen in the classrooms and sometimes in the teachers’ hands one of the directors stated: ‘it is for reading [on the blackboard], not for beating’. Teachers also agreed to this and made statements like ‘le baton touche le corps, ne touche pas le coeur’ to explain why they didn’t use it to punish children. One of them added that beating children might discourage them from coming to school, which is why ‘we show them that it is good to go to school’, by not beating them. Corporal punishments are also legally prohibited. However, the longer I stayed in the field and the more people got to know me, the more their responses started to correspond to what children had been telling me and to what I had been seeing in practice.

A teacher who had previously told me that she only advises children, one day told me that if pupils don’t respond to her advice she has to beat them: ‘if they don’t want to, we beat them’.

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114 For the full results of this ‘writing exercise’ at the end of a group discussion see Appendix D, July 30th & August 12th, Rumonge.
115 Interview, July 8th, Rumonge.
116 Interestingly enough, one of the directors mentioned that children learn to respond with violence because this is what they see at their homes: ‘here at school, we tell them that it is bad, but at their homes, at their homes, with their parents, it is the things, the behavior they have’. Interview July 8th, Rumonge.
117 Interview, July 2nd, Rumonge.
118 The stick touches only the body, not the heart (my translation). Meaning that beating will not make children change their behavior. Interview, July 21st, Rumonge.
119 Interview, July 2nd, Rumonge.
120 Interview with UNICEF-employee, July 4th, Rumonge.
121 Interview, July 21st, Rumonge.
this was definitely the last resort, she assured me. Another teacher, with whom I spoke towards the end of my stay, however told me:122

‘Children in Burundi cannot do anything without us giving them advice or punishing them, or forcing them to do something. You always have to be ready. In class we teach with a stick, because you have to make them pay attention’.

He continued by saying ‘si tu n’as pas de baton, tu peux pas faire quelque chose’.123

Figure 9 & 10 : Two teachers with their sticks.

But you don’t always have to use the stick: just by seeing it pupils can be made to behave because they are afraid that you might use it. If you have to use it, you can simply beat them ‘one, two or three times’. Preferably ‘in front of all the others, in order for him to correct himself’.124 By far the biggest punishment teachers could give was to ask a child to bring his parents to school. This might seem like this is just for giving advice, which is the official reason that was often explained to me, but everybody (teachers, parents and pupils included) is aware of the fact that children then often

122 Interview, August 12th, Rumonge.
123 If you don’t have a stick, you can’t do anything (my translation). Interview, August 12th, Rumonge.
124 Interview, August 12th, Rumonge.
receive double beatings: both at school and at home. Safe to say that although officially violence in school space is neither allowed nor propagated, it frequently occurs.

**Direct Violence**

During my time in the classrooms I have seen a lot of direct violence taking place. Children beating each other with their hands or with sticks, pens, rocks, slippers, they push each other out of the school benches, let each other trip onto the concrete floor, take away each other’s things (pens, notebooks etc.) or involve themselves in bullying and teasing by wiping chalk on someone’s face or clothing. During breaks this direct violence gets even worse as some children will chase each other while throwing rocks, wrestle in the sand and beat each other up (cf. Sommers 2013: 19). Teachers do nothing to stop this – not even when boys are attempting to lift girls’ skirts by force while they are on their way to the toilets – and when asked about it they only state that the children are just playing: they need to blow off steam otherwise they won’t be able to concentrate in the lesson afterwards. Or those who fight are not part of their school and therefore not their responsibility. Children also repeatedly told me that regulating exposure to direct violence in the school environment is very difficult – as Ibrahim (8) aptly explains:

> ‘When we make a mistake they beat us. And when we were absent, when you come back they beat you. If you, if you are late. Or when you have had a fight with your friend, your friend. Or when you fail, during a lesson, when the teacher asks you something and you fail they beat you.’

Other reasons for taking a beating (with or without a stick) that were often mentioned to me are: no reason at all; not having (the proper) school materials, including a uniform; not doing your homework; falling asleep during class; something your parents did or didn’t do. This last issue of children being punished because of something that their parents did, often came back in group discussion and informal conversations and could refer to either an argument between the teacher and the parents, for example parents refusing to pay for extra evening classes, something many teachers provide in order to supplement their salary. Not taking part in these can lead to reduced

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125 Teacher: ‘That’s a very big punishment. Because they have parents who, who will seriously beat them’. Interview, August 12th, Rumonge.

126 My focus is on direct violence because this was omnipresent during my observations which made it easier to discuss it with the children. Also, the general awareness and acceptance that direct violence is employed a lot, made it a topic research participants came up with on their own account. I am convinced that if I had not done this research during the summer holidays, I would have been able to observe and discuss other instances of violence, such as teasing and bullying, more in-depth.

127 The schools of the center cluster are very close to each other; it is therefore not possible to see at first glance to which school a child belongs. (They are also all supposed to wear the same uniform; khaki).

128 Focus group, July 22nd, Rumonge.
marks not only because the children will have studied less than the others but also because the teachers tend to punish those who don’t join – something the children refer to as ‘corruption’.  

This corruption allegation points to children’s awareness of the influence of social inequalities but also politics in school space. Their importance differs per piece of school space but in general it is safe to say that politics play a prominent role in everyday school life. This has to do with the fact that in order to be(come) a school director, one has to be a member of the ruling party. This not only means active engagement in politics, but also forced regular payments to the party. In order to collect enough money for this, many directors increase school costs such as payments for food or fees for extra lessons. This sometimes causes arguments or even fights between directors and teachers, who have opposite interests in these cases. Also, the ruling party is held to be Hutu, in that sense disadvantaging Tutsi children because their parents do not want to be associated with (or pay money to) the ruling powers.

If not beaten, there are several other (corporal) punishments that children have to undergo: having their ears pulled; being insulted; made to kneel on their bare knees, sometimes in rocks or while carrying rocks; being pinched; cleaning the toilets. The latter was especially hated during the cholera outbreak that scoured Rumonge in July and August because the children were very aware of how one could contract this (potentially fatal) disease. Another dissatisfaction with the penal system at school was that punishments were often distributed differently – or rather, unequally. I have not been able to trace a clear pattern but some of the inequalities that came to the fore were that girls were often able to escape punishments from male teachers, to the dismay of the boys. However, girls would often deny this or state that when favored by a male teacher they would have to be very careful with him in the future because he probably only favored them because he wants something from them: a sexual favor or a relationship. Punishments also differed based on whether your parents were important at school, well known in the community, friends with the teacher or rich: if so, your punishment would be less severe. Pupils also mentioned that if they

129 See for example Firmin (boy, 11 years old), Interview August 4th, Rumonge.
130 Interviews on August 12th, August 20th, Rumonge. One of the teachers said: ‘On est directrice parce que on est dans le parti au pouvoir. C’est ça. Actuellement, c’est comme ça.’ (Interview, July 21st, Rumonge).
131 This can be concealed as ‘rent’ for the classrooms etc. (interview, August 12th, Rumonge but also several informal conversations July, August, Rumonge)
132 Interview with an ex-school director who was sent away because of his refusal to become a member of the ruling party, August 12th, Rumonge. Also, many school directors in Rumonge came from elsewhere and were awarded their position by the ruling party, but the teacher staff was often local. This means that fierce ethnic oppositions sometimes play out in school space. I have not observed this – due to the holidays – but I did hear stories about it (all informally).
133 Informal conversations July, August, Rumonge.
135 Focus group, July 18th, Rumonge.
136 Focus group, August 7th, Rumonge.
misbehaved in a big group only some of them would get punished, not everybody. When this happened children’s biggest complaint seemed to be that there was no way of knowing why they had been chosen for a particular punishment that particular time.

The physical punishments also differ sharply per piece of school space. Direct violence was omnipresent in the *mise à niveau* for repatriated children, yet it hardly took place during the private lessons.\(^{137}\) I believe this is mostly related to the difference in amounts of pupils that teachers have to deal with (a whopping 100 in *mise à niveau* versus 30 in private lessons), but this doesn’t explain the differences in punishments. The only direct violence that I saw in private lessons was teachers pulling pupil’s ears, which is definitely unpleasant but pupils assured me that it doesn’t hurt a lot.\(^{138}\) Also, the atmosphere during private lessons was much more amicable than during other ones. Once I wrote down:\(^{139}\)

> One of the girls is talking to someone in the doorway. She mockingly puts her hands on her ears to protect them after she’s been caught by the teacher – but she still has them pulled.

Such a mocking and halfhearted attempt to protect ones ears happened at least once every lesson and they were always allowed by the teachers. Often they would smile and wait in front of the pupil’s desk until they lowered their arms – the fact that pupils felt safe enough to do this marks a huge difference between these private lessons and the public and supplementary ones. It also indicates that teachers ‘lose’ power in relation to richer pupils, which the latter can add to their repertoire to protect themselves. Exposure to direct violence during public, private and supplementary lessons also appears to be linked to the child’s seating position. All pupils are squeezed into the available classrooms which led the director to state ‘*c’est comme l’église ici*’.\(^{140}\) It also leads to quite a bit of interaction in the benches:\(^{141}\)

> Many children push each other inside the benches or they pinch and hit. Induced by boredom probably. And sincere lack of space. If you put children this close together, you can be sure that they will start to annoy each other.

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137 Claude, who always went to private schools, and Nadia also mentioned to me that ‘in private schools children are not beaten’.
138 Informal conversations, August, Rumonge.
139 Classroom observation, private lesson, August 5\(^{th}\), Rumonge.
140 ‘It’s like in church here’ – referring to the massive amounts of people who show up for church services, July 3\(^{rd}\), Rumonge.
141 Classroom observation 3\(^{rd}\) Grade, June 26th, Rumonge.
Seating patterns seemed to emerge out of an interplay between pupils wishes – the older ones seem to enjoy the little bit of ‘autonomy’ they can claim in the back – and the teachers’ will because they tend to put the little ones in front in order to help them see the blackboard.¹⁴² Those in the first rows are more likely to be asked questions, or to be allowed to respond.¹⁴³ Also, after the third row, hardly anyone is able to give the correct answer to a question. This indicates that older pupils (and some only start school at the age of 10 or 12) tend to be disadvantaged when it comes to learning, yet they are safer from direct violence because it will take the teacher a long(er) time to reach them.

**Children’s Attitudes Towards Direct Violence**

This brings us to the children’s attitudes towards direct violence. All of them agreed that if they had made a mistake¹⁴⁴ or done something stupid, beating them was a very appropriate reaction to prevent them from doing it again:¹⁴⁵

> ‘It depends. If we have made mistakes, or done stupid here there are no problems. But sometimes there are those teachers who can beat you without any, without any reason (...).’

The children thus seem not to be troubled much by the fact that they are beaten at school, but rather by the fact that there appears to be no reason or that they perceive the reason as invalid. Beating them is OK, as long as it can be justified. This became more clear to me when Firmin (11) explained to me what good teaching is: ‘teaching in a good way is when you do something and you cannot find it, they come, they beat you, but after they show you how you can do it’.¹⁴⁶ When I asked Nilifriend (6) why she likes her teacher she said: ‘because she beats me when I do something stupid’.¹⁴⁷ A few children also stated that teachers who use direct violence are good teachers because they make them concentrate:¹⁴⁸

> **Child:** When they beat you, when eh, after having received the, when the when the teacher eh

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¹⁴² Informal talks with both pupils and teachers, June, July, Rumonge.
¹⁴³ In grade 1 and 2 pupils tend to run towards the teacher when she asks a question but from on of grade 3 pupils tend to stay seated and make a hand motion: they slap their fingers in order to produce a clicking noise while they yell (at the top of their lungs) ‘s’il vous plait’.
¹⁴⁴ I have used the children’s own words. Therefore, when I talk about ‘mistakes’ or ‘doing something stupid’ this is not my judgment of what the children did, it is simply their way of talking about when they are punished.
¹⁴⁵ The excerpt stems from the focus group that was held on August 4ᵗʰ, Rumonge.
¹⁴⁶ Interview, August 4ᵗʰ, Rumonge.
¹⁴⁷ Interview, August 13ᵗʰ, Rumonge.
¹⁴⁸ Focus group, July 22ⁿᵈ, Rumonge.
Me: Has beaten you

Child: Yes, that’s when you are paying attention because you are afraid that they can do it again.

This was simply part of normal school life, something that parents also agreed to (cf. Sommers 2013: 19, 20). Children also stated that by now they were used to being beaten and it had become a habit. Only once did one of the statements deviate from this general opinion by adding that this normalization of violence is a bad thing because it doesn’t necessarily achieve the intended result. Ornella (14):

‘We can be beaten, but that doesn’t automatically mean that you will change your habits or that you will be polite. Because instead of being corrected or instead of being someone good the way they want it, you can be someone who is less pure than before. Because you will say, no right now I have the habit of being beaten, that’s fine. That doesn’t work.’

Galtung once wrote that the use of ‘violence only breeds more violence’ (2002: 67). In the case of primary school-aged children in Rumonge, this statement might be too simplistic yet it points in an important direction. Sometimes violence can put a stop to violence or expose certain types of violence which can then subsequently be addressed precisely because they have been so violently exposed. It is to this that we now turn because I will relate these instances, beliefs and attitudes about direct violence to the structural and cultural violence that I observed and discussed with the children (cf. Galtung 1990). This clearly alludes to the fact that there is not just a poetics of relation, as Glissant argues, but also a ‘politics of relation’. These politics are based on four types of social inequality that exist in different proportions in all three (public, private, supplementary) pieces of school space and of course, in relation to each other. In the next section I demonstrate how these types of violence relate to interactions in the school spaces but also in the community at large.

Relating Direct, Cultural and Structural Violence to Social Inequalities

The first of these types of social inequality is linked to ethnicity. A person’s ethnic identification to a large extent influences a persons’ social relations in Rumonge. Repatriated children are assumed to be Hutu and are therefore regularly disadvantaged by Tutsi elders. This can be seen in schools where

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149 Part of the focus group of August 6th, Rumonge.
150 Focus groups, July 18th and August 4th, Rumonge.
151 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
152 It was my supervisor, Graciela Paillet who mentioned this term to me.
children without uniforms, who come from poorer families which are mostly repatriated ones, are
discriminated against: sometimes they are not allowed in class and they take more beatings because
they don’t have the right materials (cf. Sommers 2013: 21). Also, they were chased from the walk
with the other school children in the Independence celebration march.\textsuperscript{153} But, in some of the schools
the directors themselves were repatriates. This was clearly visible in their policies because they did
not send children without uniforms away. Some directors had told me that repatriated children often
have to repeat a year because they are poor and/or stupid, but the repatriated directors stated the
opposite, saying that repatriates tend to be much smarter than the non-repatriated children.\textsuperscript{154} I
expect that these dynamics are visible in everyday school life, but due to the holidays I have mostly
just heard stories about it, mainly from adults. Some also explained to me that ethnic differences can
distort children’s friendships:\textsuperscript{155}

‘When we are small, we all play together. But after some time, you take your friend
home and then your parents will explain to you that you have to stop being friends
with this person. They don’t stop immediately, but after a while, that comes.
Inevitably.’

Both repatriates and non-repatriates suffer from these social inequalities. One could argue that
repatriated children are structurally disadvantaged but there are also those who make the argument
the other way around. Repatriated children are sometimes disadvantaged by non-repatriated
directors, yet they are sometimes advantaged by repatriated ones. These different stories exist next
to each other and both contain elements of truth depending on the relationships between the
people in the different spaces. I myself have neither observed nor heard children explain teasing or
bullying in ethnic terms.

Inequality based on language forms another type of both structural and cultural violence that
is closely related to this first type. First of all there is French, the language of the educated. Second of
all, now there is the increasing presence of English, the language for the super-educated. During the
Primusic festival, the contestants who sang in English (and to a lesser extent in French) were booed
by the crowd and mocked by the jury for attempting to portray their superiority to the ‘rural
public’.\textsuperscript{156} The girl who sang her song in Kirundi, eventually won this part of the contest.\textsuperscript{157} At school

\textsuperscript{153} Participant observation, July 1\textsuperscript{st}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{154} Interview, July 8\textsuperscript{th}, Rumonge (and several informal conversations).
\textsuperscript{155} This was explained to me by a government official, August 20\textsuperscript{th}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{156} Participant observation, July 20th, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{157} In each of the provinces where this singing contest was held a regional winner was elected to compete in
the grand finale later on.
inequalities based on language particularly affect repatriated children because they do not speak Kirundi, but Kiswahili. During the supplementary Kirundi lesson, children often had difficulties with pronunciation because they would mix up Kirundi and Kiswahili, thereby changing entire sentences and becoming utterly incomprehensible in both languages. This also means that they are more likely to disobey teachers, simply because they don’t understand the command given, or give wrong answers which leads to more beatings. This is similar when it comes to learning French, but when it comes to learning English, repatriated children are in general much stronger than the others. So during English classes, it is the non-repatriated ones who run a higher risk of taking a beating.

Inequalities based on social class are deeply rooted in all societies and can also be seen in Rumonge’s schools (cf. Holloway 2010 [2002], Leech 2012). Children from poor families are less likely to have school uniforms and materials and they have less time to study at home because they have to perform more chores. They are also more likely to come to school with empty bellies which makes concentrating on learning very difficult. The food distribution at the schools requires payment – not for the food, but for the cooks – something that poorer families often cannot afford. I have occasionally seen children share their food, but in general those who don’t pay, don’t receive. This inequality mainly affects the pupils vis à vis their teachers – who expect them to concentrate and not fall asleep – and not so much in the face of the other pupils, as the following clearly underlines:

‘Here at school there is a system that they give us, they give food to the pupils, but sometimes it can happen that even eh the trimester without even doing, without giving food to pupils. So, if it is possible, we want that, at least, even if we haven’t found food for all the pupils, that we can look for those people who don’t have the means, so we can give them. We can even leave the rest.’

All children in Rumonge that I spoke to understand the importance of food and their solidarity when it comes to sharing it is admirable. I have not seen anyone bullying anyone else because of lack of food. But, social class not only effects schooling in this fashion: there is also the difference between

158 It is interesting to note that these kind of language barriers also exist in schools in the Netherlands, where children of refugees tend to be disadvantaged because of it. ([http://nu.nl/binnenland/3895951/scholen-worstelen-met-toestroom-asielkinderen.html](http://nu.nl/binnenland/3895951/scholen-worstelen-met-toestroom-asielkinderen.html) last accessed on November 21st 2014).

159 One of the directors mentioned to me that school uniforms had been made obligatory by the state ‘to put all the children at the same level’ (Interview, July 8th, Rumonge.) This policy sounds great in theory, but in practice actually renders socio-economic inequalities more visible because it makes children without uniforms stand out even more.

160 This is denied by school directors (Interview, July 8th, Rumonge).

161 Statement made by Ornella (14) in the focus group on August 4th, Rumonge.
private lessons and the public ones. In the private lessons, children are better able to learn for example because there are less pupils: 162

Yes, that’s true they say. And it’s because of, because here we pay money so they have, eh there [normal school] we study, we like money, there are those who have money and there are those who don’t have. It is for that reason that we are many. But here, here we are little because we pay money.

The difference between private lessons and public and supplementary ones was also huge when it came to learning materials. Public lessons functioned with a minimum of material whereas private lessons were well-stocked. During supplementary lessons material was blatantly lacking. One day, I thought the break had started early but it turned out that all pupils had to go outside to collect ten rocks for the math lesson. 163 Differences in social class were also visible when it came to the results of the National Examination. I was present during the correction session when pupils were able to check whether their exams had been corrected correctly. If pupils found a mistake, they had to make a copy of their result-sheet which costs 50fbu per page. ‘No wonder some of them don’t go for reclamation’, I wrote down. 164 When I shared my thoughts with the director, she handed out some money to some of the children; those whom she had earlier pointed out as poor repatriates, which she herself had once been. Again, relationships matter when it comes to intersections of social inequalities: in this case, being a (poor) repatriate was actually favorable.

The last type of social inequality that I will discuss is inequalities based on gender. Gender influences the ways in which pupils treat each other. 165 Here is an example of Nadia who translates an interaction between Moses (15) and his big sister:

‘Him [Moses] he says that one day he had fought with his sister, his big sister. And they had resolved the problem between them, but after, he had seen that, after eh. Well, I [Nadia] asked him, was it, can you tell me the problem that was there and he he has said ‘no no, it was just because I know that I am a man, I am a boy and she she is a girl, I had to do it’.

The idea that men are supposed to be stronger than women and that they are allowed to portray this in violent ways was frequently narrated to me, mainly by girls. 166 In general, girls have very busy lives

162 Focus Group, August 4th, Rumonge.
163 Classroom observation, August 13th, Rumonge.
164 Classroom observation, July 7th, Rumonge.
165 Focus Group, July 18th, Rumonge.
because they have many chores to do at home which sometimes hinders their studies. When asked why this gender difference is in place one boy stated: ‘it is the parents who separate the work. If it weren’t for this, the boys could do also what the girls are doing’. 167 Girls also insisted that they were lucky to even be in school, because if their parents would need the money they could also be made to marry very young. 168 Their parents would then receive a dowry. 169 Some girls who took the private lessons even told me that they believed to be allowed to take these, so that their parents would be able to ask for a higher bride price. Most pupils who participated in the private lessons were girls, but according to many adults this had to do with boys not wanting to study during their holidays because they like money. 170 ‘The girls will otherwise just stay at home, so they have time to come to school’. 171 The girls agreed with this and some boys that I spoke to actually stated that they would have liked to take extra lessons, but their parents deemed it unnecessary for them. 172 So girls are not only disadvantaged; in some relations and pieces of space being a girl is an advantage. Girls also admitted sometimes using their femininity by flirting with the teacher in order not to get punished. Boys often complained about this. 173

Figure 11: Girls taking part in private lessons.

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166 Focus group, August 7th, Rumonge.
167 Focus Group, July 22nd, Rumonge.
168 This was confirmed to me by teachers. (For example in the Interview on July 21st, Rumonge.)
169 Focus Group, August 7th, Rumonge. This is also linked to the illegal marriages I mentioned in chapter three.
170 Interview, July 31st, Rumonge.
171 Interview with two of the program’s teachers, August 1st, Rumonge.
172 Informal conversations, August, Rumonge.
173 Informal conversations and Focus group August 4th, Focus group August 7th.
All the above clearly demonstrates how instances of direct violence are intimately and intricately related to both structural and cultural violence and four important underlying social inequalities (cf. Galtung 1990). Effects of these subsequently depend on the ways in which each person relates to others in each piece of space and even in school space in general, social inequalities do not always trigger the same effects. One could however argue that social class appears to have the most profound effect on children, both in school space and beyond, because this type of inequality tends to exacerbate all others.

In this chapter I have described children’s engagements with un/intentional messages about violence in the school space. I first discussed schools’ official take on violence and proceeded by presenting occurrences of direct violence in school space, which demonstrated that the gradations and kinds of violence children were exposed to differed remarkably depending on relations in the specific piece of space. Thereafter I looked at the ways in which inequalities based on ethnicity, language, social class and gender are interrelated and related to forms of direct, cultural and structural violence. In the next chapter, I will focus on resilience and discuss children’s strategies to minimize their exposure to violence and the ways in which they attempt to create spaces of peace for themselves and others.
In this chapter I discuss the ways in which primary school-aged children in Rumonge attempt to create spaces of peace for themselves and others. In the first section I discuss strategies that children (attempt to) implement in order to protect themselves from (direct) violence both at school, in their homes and in the public space. In the second section I then introduce Donavine and Grace in order to demonstrate in-depth how the circumstances in which these two girls find themselves shape their resilience to violence and their attempts to transform pieces of space into spaces of peace.

Strategizing Resilience & Children’s Imagination

Despite the normalization of (the use of) direct violence, children have different ways to deal with its occurrences, depending on their relations with the people that are exposing them to it. In the following I sketch several situations in which children state or imagine how they behave themselves in different pieces of space when confronted with different kinds of violence. This highlights their roles as competent social actors within the dynamics of the poetics of relation but also the politics of relation, since power structures underlie their strategic movements. The latter becomes clear from the following excerpt when I was asking children whether they always have to do what others tell them:174

Child: We have to do it.

Me: oh. You have to do it? You cannot say that you don’t want to?

Child: No. You cannot, because they will beat you immediately.

Me: Oh. And if it is, if it is a friend who tells you, who took the ball and does this [shoots away the football] and says, ‘you, bring the ball’. What will you say?

174 Excerpt from a focus group on August 6th, Rumonge.
Child: No, me I don’t like that. I will not be happy then. Or maybe, I will fight with him.

Me: Ok. But if it is a teacher, you have to do it?

Children: Yes.

Me: And if it is your parents?

Child: Yes.

Me: You have to do it?

Child: Yes.

From this it becomes clear that children actively attempt to avoid direct violence by not providing parents, teachers or others with a reason to use it against them. Osama (11): ‘we should just do what they say, so that they cannot beat us’. When it comes to their peers or fights that they are not directly implicated in, the choice of whether to use direct violence or take the risk that it might be used against you, is taken based on a strategic estimate of the other’s strength in comparison to your own. Raki (13): ‘Ok, if you see that that [intervening or coming close to a conflict] can bring you or create problems for you, you retreat, but if you see that it will not hurt you look’. When I asked how they know the difference Brice (13) simply stated ‘you look at the others’:

‘If you see that the others will not go close, you will also not go close. But if you see that the others are coming closer, you also, you will go closer’.176

This also holds for the decision whether to intervene in a conflict between other children or not.177 Many children stated that an intervention usually has to be physical: you have to beat those who are fighting to make them stop:

‘When you pull the one who is fighting, he can’t agree, that’s why you take the decision to fight him. And when you fight him, he can be afraid and stop fighting’.178

Again others stated that, if they knew they could take on the other child, they would definitely fight back. This they did in order to prevent themselves from looking vulnerable: you have to fight back otherwise you will look weak and be targeted more often in the future.179 Not wanting to look weak

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175 Focus group, July 18th, Rumonge. I also observed this during classroom observations several times, for example on August 20th, Rumonge.
176 This quote and the one above stem from the focus group on August 6th, Rumonge.
177 If there is a conflict between adults, children do not intervene physically but they might call for help. Interview with Harriet (13) on August 13th, Rumonge.
178 Focus group, July 9th, Rumonge.
179 Focus group, July 22nd, Rumonge.
also influences how children respond when they have been exposed to direct violence. The first thing is to hide the pain and not let anyone know that they’ve been hurt.\textsuperscript{180} This is also why violent incidents have to be concealed, preferably from everyone, but at least from people who weren’t present:\textsuperscript{181}

\textit{Child}: ‘So, in order not to be beaten, we we we don’t speak about it’.

\textit{Me}: ‘But do you talk about that with your friends?’

\textit{Child}: No, we cannot speak about that.

\textit{Me}: Oh. Why?

\textit{Child}: Because they will, they will mock you. If you talk to your friends about this, they will mock you.

\textit{Me}: So, what can you do?

\textit{Child}: We keep silent.

Another strategy is to flee the space in which the violence is taking place, but whether children use this strategy depends on the relationships and the kind of space that they find themselves in.\textsuperscript{182} Keshia (7) stated ‘when they beat me at school, I don’t cry. But if they beat me here at home, I cry’.\textsuperscript{183} This has to do with the fact that she believes that her father will stop beating her if he sees that she is in pain whereas teachers do not care very much. And, because of her strong relationships in the household she isn’t afraid of being ridiculed if she cries – something that prevents her from crying in more public spaces such as the school: ‘you feel bad if you cry in front of the others, so then we calm ourselves in order not to be ridiculed’.\textsuperscript{184} While Keshia was explaining this to me, her father walked in. I therefore asked him how he felt when he heard his children talking about being beaten in school and he simply laughed and stated ‘what can you do? It is normal’ (cf. Sommers 2013: 19).\textsuperscript{185} Something that the children wholeheartedly agreed to.

Despite this normalization of the presence of direct violence, a clear sign of the politics of relation is that children distinguish different gradations of violence as ‘normal’ per space that they find themselves in. Violence in the home is considered to be ‘more’ than at school and violence during public lessons is ‘more’ than during private ones:

\textsuperscript{180} Focus group, July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{181} Focus group, July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{182} This is often done, as will become more clear when I introduce Donavine and Grace in the second part of this chapter. It was also explicitly mentioned as the most successful protection strategies in the focus group on July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{183} Focus group, August 6\textsuperscript{th}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{184} Focus group, August 6\textsuperscript{th}, Rumonge.
\textsuperscript{185} Focus group, August 6\textsuperscript{th}, Rumonge.
‘Here, here they don’t beat us a lot. Even though they beat us, it is not a lot. Because here it is not like when you go to class. Here it is during special lessons, it’s like extra lessons, these are extra lessons. They cannot beat us. But, in the classroom they do beat us’.  

This differentiation apparently depends not so much on the spatial characteristics (since the private and public lessons are held in the exact same locality) but more on the relationships between the people who occupy that space at that moment in time. As I discussed in the previous chapter, even though the teachers in public lessons and in the mise à niveau are the same ones, they tend to behave more violent during the latter than during the first. This makes it harder for children to imagine the latter as a space of peace than to imagine the first as one.

There is also one space that is intimately related to school space, but that I hadn’t considered before going to the field: the way to school. Most children emphasized that to get to school safely, they have to traverse town which can be dangerous and exposes them to potential violence: ‘there are too many cars, too many bikes, too many motorcycles. So we can meet with anyone’. Girls emphasized the presence of men who lurk around trying to seduce them by the side of the road by offering them sweets. If they don’t give in, they run the risk of being taken by force:

‘Sometimes that, sometimes that happens, because us, we can go back at six o’clock, half past six and then we will pass by the path, it is far from eh the school is far from us. So we return with a lot of fear and scares because we don’t know if we will arrive there. If we are going to arrive at home or not’.  

This poses a problem for them both early in the morning when they go to school and late in the afternoon, when the night begins to fall. It also poses a bigger problem to children from poorer families because their houses are usually further from school because they are out of the city center because there houses are cheaper. In an attempt to protect themselves, children (especially girls) tend to move around in groups. However, their parents don’t like this ‘because you can leave with your friend, you linger in the streets, you play and you forget to go to where you were going’. Most children admitted that this had happened to them at least once, which earned them a beating for

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186 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
187 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
188 Focus groups, August 4th, August 7th, Rumonge. This was also mentioned in my interview with OIDEB personnel, August 13th, Rumonge.
189 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
190 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
missing school, however they see no other alternative which is why they continue using this strategy
in the public space. Something that assists them and protects them in this space is something that is
sometimes disliked in the school space itself: the khaki school uniform. Moses (15): 

Moses: Me, I like the uniform because it is my identity card, like a pupil.
Me: Your identity card?
Moses: Yes. That’s what shows that I am a pupil, without saying anything.

This is important because it means that people will assist you, when you run into trouble on your way
to school or on your way back home: ‘if they see that you are wearing a uniform, even the teacher or
male teacher, if they see you they help you’. The fact that Raki (13) explicitly mentions that even
teachers will help you when they know that you’re a pupil clearly means that the uniform is a
powerful form of protection outside school space – despite its khaki color, something the girls very
much dislike. In school itself it also functions as a protection because not-having one makes you
more vulnerable to be bullied, sent home or beaten by the teacher (cf. Sommers 2013: 21).

Now before turning to two children’s stories in-depth, I want to remind you that children are
not just victims of direct violence: they also employ it themselves, mainly among themselves (cf.
Korbin 2003, Sommers 2013: 19). While doing this, children also distinguish between different spaces
and their relational aspects, which I will make clear in the following. Violence can be needed to
protect oneself and not feel or demonstrate vulnerability, but it can also be ‘needed’ when someone
doesn’t do what you want him or her to do:

Child: Sometimes they can do the things that I don’t want to or they don’t want to do,
things like that then we fight.
Me: So, in order for the conflict to end, you have to fight with them, in order to solve
the problem?
Child: No.
Me: So then, why do you fight?

191 Some pupils liked the uniforms and having to wear it, others didn’t. Especially girls emphasized their dislike,
although this mainly seemed to be due to its khaki color (informal conversations but also the focus group,
August 4th, Rumonge). Some pupils said they’d rather go to school in their own clothing, others liked going to
school in their uniform, mainly because of what Moses states as well: it identifies them as pupils, which is a
source of pride and protection.
192 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
193 Focus group, August 6th, Rumonge.
194 Focus group, August
195 Focus group, August 6th, Rumonge.
Child: You can do it because you are angry, because of anger, because you feel like fighting him, so we fight.

Me: Mh.

Child: If we, if we stop fighting, we can start playing again.

Especially the last sentence emphasizes the normality of using violence against each other, because afterwards you can simply ‘start playing again’. In general children tend to ‘resort to violence to resolve immediate problems’ (Sommers 2013: 20). This is what they see happening in school and in their homes. But, sometimes conflicts last longer or direct violence is not employed: ‘sometimes I do not go well with others and sometimes I will beat them’. The choice whether to use direct violence themselves is therefore influenced by the space children find themselves in and how big their room to maneuver is (which depends on their relations), whether they judge the use of violence effective and also their emotional state: are they are angry or not.

(Imaginary) Solutions

The above demonstrates that children in Rumonge have a plurality of ways to ‘negotiate their self-constructions as resilient’ (Ungar 2004: 345). Sometimes they choose to ‘run and hide’, sometimes they fight. Their divergent responses, shaped by the relations of the space they find themselves in, demonstrate their understandings of the risks they face and also their capability to imagine how these risks can be prevented (cf. Boyden & Cooper 2007, Ungar 2004). Examples are walking to school in groups in order to protect oneself from traffic or (male) aggressors but also beating back when beaten in school by another pupil yet quietly undergoing (physical) punishments from a teacher. Clearly, being resilient to violence does not automatically mean that one doesn’t employ violence oneself.

Sometimes, the solutions that the children imagine are not put into practice. An example of this is the children’s suggestion to donate busses to the schools, so that these can take them from and to school every day. This would mean that they can participate in traffic more safely and they would also be shielded from aggressors. Their ability to solve this problem by using their imagination is hopeful: it shows their resilience and their active engagement with their lifeworlds. However, it also points at structures that in a way force them to be resilient, which we must not forget. In order to do justice to their imaginary solutions, I do suggest that the simple fact that they are capable of imagining them not only indicates their resilience but also provides them with a sense of safety and hope for the future (cf. Ungar 2004). The latter is much needed in an environment as volatile and

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196 Focus group, August 7th, Rumonge.
197 Focus group, August 4th, Rumonge.
potentially violent as Rumonge. This will become more clear in the next section where I introduce Donavine and Grace and how they attempt to create spaces of peace for themselves and others.

Relating to Donavine & Grace: Understanding their Imagination
Below I will narrate the situations of two thirteen year old girls. Both of them go to the same school in Rumonge, they come from big families and they live in the same central neighborhood. But, despite these similarities, there are also important differences. These profoundly shape their outlook on the world and therefore the strategies they use in their attempts to create spaces of peace for themselves and others.

Donavine: ‘There is peace when I’m not there.’
Donavine lives with her father, mother, three brothers and her baby sister. Her mother sells akabamo and her father is a fisherman. She is the only girl in the household that is old enough to perform chores, which include cleaning; doing the dishes; cooking and sweeping. Her brothers don’t have to do this ‘because they are boys’. Due to her chores, she often arrives at school late. As a result she is regularly beaten by her teacher. Some children then decide to quit school, but not Donavine. She decided to change to a school closer to home: ‘it is me who wanted that because I was always late and then they beat me’. This way, she attempts to protect herself from not being late anymore and therefore from direct violence. Schools can be peaceful, she assures me, but then ‘the stick has to go’.

I ask her what she does if other pupils are beaten by the teacher. She hesitates but then states that she can ask the teacher to excuse the ones who are receiving the beating. But she cannot intervene for then she will also be beaten. By way of protecting herself she therefore usually doesn’t get involved when others are taking a beating. This changes if it is two pupils who are beating each other: ‘we go inside and we say “stop, stop”. If they refuse, we will take a stick and we will beat them as well’. Combating violence with violence is Donavine’s final solution in cases where she feels that she can make peace return. However at home, this strategy doesn’t work. There, whenever her parents or older brothers beat her, she pleads with them:

‘They beat me, they beat me, they beat me, but after, when I, they will say, when I will say “leave me, leave me, leave me, I’m sorry”, they will say: “OK, we will leave you, but if you start making the same mistake, what can we do to you”? After that I said, “you can beat me”’.

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198 See also Cohen, Manion & Morrison for the value of stories in educational research (2007: 394, 395).
199 This sub-section is based on my interview with Donavine on August 22nd, Rumonge.
200 Cold cassava bread, a local delicacy.
I asked for which reasons her parents can beat her. She looked at Nadia, my translator, utterly puzzled and then explained: ‘there is no problem when they beat me when I’ve made a mistake’.²⁰¹ It is only a problem when she hasn’t done anything. But then Donavine explains that sometimes, even though she did something for which she deserves a beating, she will not be beaten. I ask her to explain how she knows when she will and when she won’t be beaten:

‘When you return in the evening, no, if you stay there in the afternoon they will beat you and hurt you a lot, but when we disappear and when you come back to eat in the evening, when they start to scare you that they will beat you after having eaten, they will not do it. But when they let you, that’s when you know that they will beat you’.

This quote clearly shows Donavine’s strategy to avoid (severe) beatings: she runs away and attempts to stay away long enough for peace to return to the household before coming back herself. ‘Often when they beat me (…) I leave to go far and I stay the night there as well’. Her strategy has however become well-known so sometimes when she is trying to run away, neighbors or strangers can prevent her from doing so. She never receives advice from her parents: ‘they just beat me’. When I ask what could be done to make her house more peaceful, she says: ‘it is necessary to give advice to my father’. He insults her often but when he does she pretends not to hear him and runs away because she knows that if she responds, she will be beaten. Sometimes her mother intervenes, but she only does this when Donavine is carrying her baby sister on her back; the mother is afraid that the father’s curses might kill the newborn. Also, her parents sometimes fight physically. But her father is afraid of her mother, because Donavine’s older brothers will beat her father if he touches her mother. All of this led Donavine to the conclude that at her home ‘there is peace, when I am not there’. When she runs away, escapes as it were, she creates peace for herself.

So where does she go when she runs away? Sometimes she stays at another family, sometimes she just walks around with friends, playing games: ‘then I am really happy’. Despite the hardships, Donavine is very determined to finish her education. This will be difficult, not only because she is a girl, but also because her parents do not have much money which is needed for school materials. She wants to become a teacher or a doctor. About becoming a teacher, I had expected her to say that she would handle things differently from the way they are now. However, Donavine made it very clear that if she becomes a teacher she will be tough on her pupils:

²⁰¹ See also Sommers’ experiences when asking people about direct violence in the school and domestic space (2013: 19).
‘Me, I want to beat very heavily. You do not know how much they have beaten me. (...) Those who disturb me, those who stress me, I want to beat them. (...) Because if you don’t beat them, they will disturb you very strongly’.

202 Grace: ‘Me, I feel peace when, and I feel happy when I am in Bujumbura, alone.’ Grace lives with her father, mother, six sisters and brother and she is the seventh child. She is currently in the sixth grade and she hopes to perform well in the National Exams that are to be held in May. Her parents are farmers of manioc, fruit and bananas. Sometimes she has to help out in the field, but she has enough time to study at home and doesn’t feel like she has many chores to do – despite the fact that she has many more than her brother. ‘It is like that. At home, it is, we always say that it is us who will do the work that the boys do not want to do’. It is impossible to refuse to do so because she is a child: ‘we cannot do anything to adults. (...) They cannot, they cannot listen to us’. It is the same with teachers: no matter what it is, ‘because the teacher told us that, we have to do what he or she wants.’ Even if that means cleaning the toilets or taking a beating for no apparent reason. Grace conveys that it is best to just go along with this, because refusing or resisting will only result in more severe physical punishments: it is impossible to be punished without being beaten. Sometimes she discusses this with her friends and then they conclude that ‘the teacher has a bad heart’ and ‘he has hatred’. Luckily she can always talk to her older sister for advice.

Teachers and parents don’t always punish everybody in the same way: ‘sometimes they punish us the same ways, but sometimes if we have made a mistake with many of us, maybe they can beat me a lot and someone else not a lot’. When I ask what this depends on, Grace explains that it depends on when the adults find out about your mistake:

‘OK, sometimes, I can make a mistake, today it is Thursday and the other has made a mistake when it was Monday. Then, they will beat us, me because I did something today Thursday, they will beat me a lot, and if I were to remind them that the other has done the other thing they will beat her for the things that she did on Monday. And they will not beat her the same way. For her it is a little.’

Sometimes, they can also only give you advice, which is what her parents have done after they found out that she had been going to the lake shore regularly: ‘they will tell me, you should not go there again, because you can meet with many problems there’. She sums up the dangers that her parents warned her for: meeting with wild animals or bad spirits, drowning or being violated. I remark that

202 This sub-section is based on my interview with Grace on August 21st, Rumonge.
this advice seems to have impressed Grace more than any of the beatings that she received. She agrees and I subsequently ask her how her home could be made more peaceful for her. Grace:

‘Me, what I can say, at home for example, I want to be able to stay there without someone who beats me. And that, that they leave me, studying at home without anyone who disturbs me. That’s what I want.’

She says that ‘it is impossible’ to protect herself from these disturbances because if you refuse to do something that your parents tell you to do, you will be beaten. Sometimes you might be lucky and they will only advice you, ‘but you cannot know when they will beat you and when they won’t’. Grace therefore finds it safest not to refuse. In this way, she protects herself from direct violence. When I ask her when she feels most at peace, she says: ‘I feel peace when, and I feel happy when I am in Bujumbura, alone’. Bujumbura should in this case probably not be taken as the actual locality but rather as a metaphor: an imaginary space of peace. Grace namely only goes to Bujumbura once a year and was then always brought to a place ‘in order to enjoy’, like a restaurant for example. She is quick to respond that ‘here in Rumonge there is not any space’ where she feels peace because there are always people who can disturb her. Whereas when you are alone in a big city, people can’t disturb you. That’s when Grace is happy, when she is alone or with her friends and ‘when people are not disturbing me, when nobody is telling me to do something’. When she grows up, she wants to become a teacher ‘to educate the others’.

Comparing Strategies
It is interesting to compare the strategies that Donavine and Grace employ in their attempts to create spaces of peace. Both of them emphasize the need to obey adults as a way of avoiding direct violence. They also elaborate on a similar strategy to minimize its impacts: running away (Donavine) or trying to conceal your actions for your parents so they will only find out later and the punishment will be less severe (Grace). Both do not regard their school or their homes as spaces of peace, but they do imagine what needs to change in order for it to become a space of peace: giving advice to the father (Donavine) and stop people from telling you what to do (Grace). But, there are also some important differences between these two girls. First of all, Donavine seems more prone to use violence (albeit in an attempt to combat it) than Grace. Second of all Grace appears to have more people to talk to who can give her advice, whereas Donavine relates that she only receives beatings and feels rather isolated within her family. Both of these differences could be explained by the fact that Donavine is the only girl in her household whereas Grace has six older sisters. I also know, from informal conversations, that Grace’s family is richer than Donavine’s which could explain Donavine’s
“fighter” mentality as well. For her it is a struggle to stay in school, whereas for Grace (who is also already two grades higher) it is normal to go to school and she only has to worry about her performance.

Their attempts to create spaces of peace are however not limited to themselves, their schools and their homes. They also have ideas about Rumonge and Burundi in general. These came to the fore when I tried to discuss the upcoming elections with them. Contrary to Grace, Donavine knew what these were about: ‘it is to choose a president’. Grace thought that it must be something for the parties. Donavine talked about this and said that it is now dangerous to walk in the forests because you can meet people from different parties who will ask you whom you voted for. If they don’t like your answer they will kill you, she says. 203 Grace recounts a similar story; she’s heard on the television that ‘if we vote for Peter,204 we can continue normally. But if we don’t vote, there will be war.’ Both stated that their parents do not talk (with them) about these kind of things and that they pick them up from their friends’ parents, the radio or television.

When I asked them about the past wars they seemed even more hesitant to respond. Donavine initially only stated ‘when the war was in Burundi I was small’ but afterwards she continued by describing several torture tactics that people used at the time. When I asked what the conflict was about she said: ‘the Hutu were against the Tutsi’ to add later that ‘sometimes the Tutsi were against the Hutu’ as well. Grace initially dodged the question as well by narrating Burundi’s history starting in 1850 with the Arabs who came for war. She slowly worked her way up to the recent past and then talked about her teacher who had told them that people in Rumonge at that time couldn’t leave their house or go to their fields because then they would be shot – this greatly impressed Grace because both her parents are farmers. He also told them how he had hidden himself between dead bodies in order to survive an attack. Grace: ‘But no, he said, “no, I stop, because if I continue to tell you about that, I can be sick in my head”’. Both Donavine and Grace conveyed that they were not sure whose side they were (supposed to be) on, or whether they were Hutu or Tutsi. Donavine initially said that she didn’t know yet, but when I asked whether she expected to learn this in the near-future she simply said no. Grace seemed more afraid of the upcoming elections leading to war than Donavine, which could be because her class (the sixth grade) had already started their school year; ‘it is because of the elections that we have started earlier, for this to not disturb or take time, so we want to finish before’. Taking the national exam is important to her and having this schedule changed clearly alerted her to the seriousness of the matter.

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203 This is probably linked to the increasing activities of _Imbonerakure_, the youth movement of the ruling party, in Rumonge and its surroundings. They train every Saturday morning and people tend to be scared of them.
204 Burundi’s current president Nkurunziza.
Both Donavine and Grace acted increasingly mistrustful during the questions about Burundi’s history and politics. The clearest example is Donavine who stated in the beginning that her mother doesn’t beat her when she refuses to do something whereas in the rest of the interview she discusses all the beatings she receives at home – mostly from her mother or ‘ordered’ by her mother. Both Donavine and Grace (and also most of the other children that I spoke to) tended to argue a point yet when I would ask them a direct question about it they would renounce or nuance it. Below you can find two examples of this:

**Donavine:** Papa he is afraid of mama because when he starts to insult mama, the big brother speaks for mama. They are adults now, so yes. Even when mama is fighting with papa physically.

**Me:** Fighting with papa. They fight?

**Donavine:** No.

**Grace:** It is my mother who will tell me to go and do those things for him.

**Me:** Oh. So it is your mother who taught you that the women have to work for the men?

**Grace:** No.

I believe that their use of elusive tactics is related to the enactments of mistrust and the volatile context that they find themselves in. By using them during the interview, they were able to create a space of peace for themselves, or at least prevented transforming a piece of space into a potential warzone: now nobody would be able to accuse them of revealing intimate family things to me, even though they had.

Their stories illustrate how the four types of social inequality that I discussed in the previous chapter relate to each other and assist or frustrate children’s attempts to create spaces of peace. Both Grace and Donavine are girls, which renders them exposed to violence in a more profound way than boys: they have more chores to do – refusal means taking a beating – and they are actively warned to be careful in order not to be violated. Donavine is the only girl in her household and she also comes from a poorer family – rendering her more vulnerable to violence than Grace. This is reflected in her somewhat bitter attitude towards the use of violence: she has been beaten and she will therefore beat others more severely. Both the language and ethnicity dimension do not seem to be at play in the forefront of their lives: both speak Kirundi and Kiswahili because they grew up in Rumonge and they are not repatriates. However, their uncertainty about their ethnic identification does add to their renunciation of pieces of space in Rumonge as spaces of peace: even the forest isn’t safe these days and war might be coming.
Their stories however also point out a flaw in my original conceptualization of a space of peace. I earlier mentioned that this is a space ‘characterized by respect, tolerance and above all equity and inclusion: violence has no place in them (Daley 2007: 19, 238)’. \[^{205}\] Listening to the children’s stories the latter appears to be flawed in some cases: to some of the children there clearly can be spaces of peace even though some violence remains present. For example, if Donavine’s father would be advised to only hit her when she has done something wrong, she would apparently experience her home as a space of peace. The same goes for Grace who doesn’t want people to tell her what to do, but accepts being punished with physical violence, despite acknowledging that she would also listen if she would be advised to behave differently. From this, we can draw two contradictory conclusions: either the normalization of violence has become so pervasive that children accept its continuous presence which inhibits them to imagine beyond, even when it comes to spaces of peace. Or these children are so resilient that they are able to negotiate a plurality of meanings in different spaces and relations allowing them to even imagine a space of peace despite the presence of violence. Both strains of thought are equally accurate, yet my imagination prefers the latter.

In this chapter I have discussed children’s strategies when it comes to coping with violence and its impacts and I have also explored their resilience and attempts to create spaces of peace for themselves and others. I then discussed the stories of Donavine and Grace more in-depth. In the final chapter I will return to my main research question.

\[^{205}\] See page 21 of this thesis.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Relating the Story and Imagining Beyond

‘This is the only sense we can term objective – the sense not that our thinking or storytelling has attained a final or an eternal truth, but that it has connected with the thinking and storying of others, and thus made coexistence more possible in a plural world’

(Jackson 2012: 15).

In this chapter I relate my most important findings. In the first section I discuss findings related to my three sub-research questions. In the second section I then focus on my main research question and highlight issues that would warrant more academic attention. Lastly, the final section is devoted to the end of my story line, hopefully a starting point for many to come.

Relating this Story

This section consists of three sub-sections, each of which relates to one of my sub-research questions. I will formulate potential answers to them based on everything that I have narrated in the previous chapters. In the process I emphasize relationality and the ways in which ‘the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time’ (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 52).

Schools as Spaces of Peace?

I have attempted to find out in what ways primary schools attempt to create spaces of peace for children in Rumonge. I defined spaces of peace as spaces characterized by respect, tolerance and above all equity and inclusion and I even added that ‘violence has no place in them’ (Daley 2007: 19, 238). Based on the findings described above I now concede however that violence does have a place in schools, but that this does not automatically mean that schools are not (trying to be) or cannot be spaces of peace. At some moments in time to at least some of the pupils, they still are experienced as such. Acknowledging and appreciating this can assist in imagining beyond (structural) problems.

By focusing on, for example, the girls during the private lessons we can see that children can experience their school day as a little space of peace if they are not confronted with direct violence, without a justifiable reason. I conclude that schools do attempt to accommodate this wish, but

206 Which of course in no way should be taken to mean that these structural problems don’t need to be addressed!
teachers are often overpowered by structural violence, which in turn is sustained by cultural violence and hinders more inclusive ways of relating. Examples of this are the huge amount of pupils in one class that have to be controlled by insufficiently trained teachers but also the more general mistrust towards people with a different ethnic identity. Perhaps, by improving and increasing teacher training and teachers’ salaries their ways of relating might become more inclusive and serve as an example of non-violent togetherness. The creation of more classrooms would also assist in limiting expressions of direct violence in classrooms by reducing the number of pupils in one class and the number of pupils in one bench.

Un/Intentional Messages about Violence
Acknowledging that not everything that children learn is taught to them intentionally, I have attempted to find out what children unintentionally learn from the beliefs, attitudes, practices and power structures that they are exposed to in primary school. Intentional messages concerning direct violence were that it should be prevented, and that if there is a problem, a dialogue should be started and advice should be given. But, in practice, this is not what children experience. Teachers preach non-violence, yet use direct violence themselves. School management advocates dialogue, yet never engages in dialogue with pupils. During breaks, teachers see pupils fight but they do not intervene. Children thus appear to learn, contrary to what school is officially trying to teach them, that if you want someone to do something and s/he doesn’t, or does it wrong: violence can make them do it. This makes violence omnipresent in school space, but also in Rumonge community in general. Children choose per situation, depending on the space and relationships with the people in it, whether they respond to violence with more violence or retreat. When asked, they all contend that if they were given advice, they can change their behavior, yet they also hold it necessary to be beaten. This attitude is endorsed by parents, teachers and schools’ penal system.

It is thus clear that un/intentional messages play an important role, despite the fact that it is sometimes hard to make the distinction between unintentionally and intentionally transmitted messages. Teachers’ attitudes towards direct violence severely impact the children: not only in their own choices of using direct violence to get what they want or make others do what they want, but also in terms of their enjoyment at school. It therefore remains important to remind ourselves that these un/intentional messages are created in relation and can thus also be changed (cf. Hosford 1980: 50).

207 I want to emphasize, again, that this part of my research was heavily influenced by the fact that it took place during the summer holidays.
A Relation between Resilience and (Re)Producing Violence

The above brings me to the following question: in what ways does the interaction between these un/intentional messages influence children’s behaviors concerning the (re)production of violence and the strengthening of their resilience? Clearly, (re)producing violence and strengthening one’s resilience are not opposite poles in Rumonge. By not responding to violence at all, children actually believe themselves to be exposed to it more, leading to greater risks of being targeted again in the future. Their resilience, which they construct in a plurality of meanings and negotiate in relation every time anew, clearly comes to the fore in the coping strategies that they develop to escape or combat violence – albeit sometimes with violence itself. These strategies take place in relation and also in relation to the different axes of social inequalities, or politics of relation, that profoundly shape children’s strategies: gender, social class, language and ethnicity. Each of these ‘trails’ can be traced into a line of becoming into the future. All of them are at work at once, interrelated, together sustaining the complicated and volatile social landscape within which children in Rumonge move, live and act.

Imagining Spaces of Peace and Imagining the Future

So then, how do children in Rumonge engage with un/intentional messages about violence from their primary schools and communities in the search for spaces of peace?

A piece of space can be experienced as a space of peace, even if that means that violence (whether direct, structural or cultural) is not totally absent from it. In these pieces of space, which are often transformed into imaginary spaces of peace, new ways of relating to one another can lead away from violence and to new understandings and appreciations of each other’s actions and lives no matter which divisive stories are (also) present. By emphasizing this I hope to have demonstrated that despite the fact that children in Rumonge are not resilient to violence in such a way that they don’t reproduce it as well, they are finding ways to minimize the use of violence and decrease the risks that they believe themselves to be exposed to. Reproducing violence can therefore sometimes, paradoxically, lead to resilience. This points to the violent relatedness of the poetics of relation and the politics of relation: the former includes the latter. By acknowledging this, I imagine us to be able to assist children in strengthening their resilience further and imagining together how the pieces of space that they want to be transformed into spaces of peace can be changed.

When I imagine how these stories can be continued, I imagine three story lines that could be useful for further research. First of all, despite the fact that ‘space’ came to the fore in my research I have not dealt with it in a ‘spatial’ way. I mainly focused on social space: the relationships that form

208 See also Galtung who argues for transdisciplinarity in peace studies and conflict resolution and emphasizes the relations between different ‘systems of knowledge’ that can trace different lines and thereby assist in achieving harmony (2010).
in localities and how these relationships can shape or potentially even transform the behaviors of the people involved. Attempts to further understand children’s perspectives and their behaviors in different spaces and comparing these, might provide more insights into children’s coping strategies. The second line of inquiry that seems interesting is explicitly discussing more political and historical issues with children. They are aware of far more than adults expect them to be aware of yet it remains largely unclear how they receive this information and especially how they subsequently evaluate and situate it. Gaining insights into this what I would call ‘intergenerational transmission of historical knowledge’ and its potential prospective political consequences could assist in the creation of more peaceful futures for Burundi. Thirdly, using research questions similar to the ones that have guided this research but then planning the fieldwork during the school year, would also create valuable data and allow us to further examine classroom interactions, intentional curricular messages and children’s response to them. Until then, I will keep imagining based on my findings and I am not the only one.

The power of the imagination has long since been discovered in Burundi.209 A practical example of this is the radio program “Imagine Burundi” which was on air from November 2010 until July 2013.210 This radio show focused on viewing ‘potentially volatile topics from new angles and speak[ing] about them with new voices’. They explicate the multiplicity of stories: the harshness of everyday life but also people’s creativity in dealing with this. They have created a digital archive of their transmissions in which they attempt to include ‘more people, more creativity and more voices that speak to a different perception of life here in Burundi’.211 And clearly, the imagination can be put into practice without denying lived reality: they are firmly and (often) even violently related. UNICEF acknowledges this on their website where we find the following heading: “Our Story – Imagine a world where the rights of every child are realized”.212 I imagine that imagining that world and working towards putting our imagination into practice, is a viable option for Burundi’s future.213

**Tracing Imagined Storylines into the Future**

In this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate how different storylines can be chosen when it comes to explaining and fostering an understanding of our lifeworlds and relationships. Some lines have led to violence and might continue to do so, while others appear more successful at stimulating and

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209 See also Ingelaere & Kohlhagen who argue that ‘social imaginaries’ should be ‘taken into account as sources and outcomes of (transitional) justice’ in Burundi (2012).
210 [http://imagineburundi.com/the-goal/](http://imagineburundi.com/the-goal/) (last accessed on 11-11-2014)
211 Also in academia the importance of imagining beyond lived reality and its structural barriers is coming to the fore. See for example Van Leeuwen’s article *Imagining the Great Lakes Region* (2008). In it he urges us to ask ‘how local people imagine (the possibilities of) their region’ (ibid.: 423). Subsequently, we can attempt to assist them in building on these imaginary ideas and solutions.
213 See also Galtung on ‘Imagining Global Democracy’ and the need to include multiple voices and stories (2004).
nourishing non-violent ways of relating. All these storylines are present and none are more true than others: they are all part of the complex poetics and politics of relation. This becomes clear not only in primary schools and children’s engagements with (un/intentional messages concerning) violence, but also in everyday life in the broader sense. After the violent attack that I narrated in the introduction of this thesis I spoke to many different people about what had happened. All of them had different and equally plausible explanations, which they gladly shared with me.

Claude himself was very quick in attempting to assure me that what had happened to him was nothing more than an unfortunate coincidence: a classic version of “wrong place, wrong time”. Due to the frequency of burglaries and violent attacks, this explanation did appear plausible. My new understanding of the risks involved in living in Rumonge and being out after dark therefore made me insist that he would no longer walk to his house alone. Something that Claude found utterly incomprehensible: ‘when you have a car accident once, does that mean that you will never get in a car ever again?’ he asked. One night when we had just had dinner with friends, Nadia overheard him say this to me just before he left. After he was gone she pulled me aside and made it clear that not everybody believed that Claude had just had bad luck. ‘I heard that he was attacked because people see him with you a lot of the time’, she said. ‘They must have believed that you are giving him money’. An assumption that many people had already confronted me with.

Yet another explanation was narrated to me by an important community leader. One day when I was talking to him about (local) politics he mentioned the attack that took place as an example of growing tensions between different parties. I was surprised, because Claude had always told me that he was neither active nor interested in politics. The community leader started laughing and told me that Claude’s father had been a regional UPRONA-leader: whether Claude wanted it or not, he was definitely implicated in politics. A few days later I asked Claude about this but he dismissed this explanation. Yes, his father had been into politics, but he wasn’t and no matter how many times they would keep asking him to join a political party, he would never do it. When I asked him whether he might have been attacked precisely because of his refusal to join, he became annoyed. He grabbed my shoulder and said ‘if that is what you need to think in order to understand what happened to me, I won’t stop you. I know that many people think like that, but I don’t believe it’. I remained silent and thought about what he had said until he suddenly added: ‘but I do know that those who did this to me were Hutu’. ‘How do you know?’ I asked. ‘I have seen their faces and I have smelled their sweat’. He took another sip of his drink and then started talking about the game of basketball he had played that day.

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214 This conversation took place on the 25th of August.
When I got home that night, I was still thinking about his last remark. It was the first time that I had heard Claude himself mention ethnicity with regard to what had happened, but many others had been alluding to this explanation ever since the attack took place. But then again, some of Claude’s basketball friends once told me during a training in the school yard that Claude was the best basketball player in Rumonge. Maybe the attack had been way more personal than many people thought; maybe, the attackers really had something against Claude. Not unimaginable because his basketball skills or his behavior before, during and after games sometimes did lead him into conflicts. Also, he was in a relationship with Amina, a Muslim girl from a well-known family. It was a public secret that both of their families were not happy about their relationship, because Claude is a Christian which – in this context and situation – means that the two cannot get married unless one of them changes their religion. So a religious conflict could also be a reason for the attack.

At this point, my mind just started to overflow with all the possible explanations for what had happened. Some of them are not mutually exclusive, whereas others contradict each other. In this sense, the problem is that we will never be able to know for sure why things happened the way they did. As frustrating as this might be, it is at the same time also liberating. ‘Thankfully, life confounds and overflows the definitions we impose upon it in the name of reason or administrative control, and it is this excess of meaning, this tendency of life to deny our attempts to bind it with words and ideas, that redeems us’ (Jackson 2013: 22). This also means that we are all provided with the possibility to make choices with regard to what we believe to be true and what we subsequently act upon in which fashion: choosing how we relate to the world. Claude’s statement that he simply didn’t believe one of the explanations that was frequently given, clearly points at our capability to imagine multiplicity and build on storylines that we see fit. Especially in volatile and violent situations, in a context of mistrust and the always becoming, uncertain future, imagining spaces of peace relies on this capability. Fortunately, a capability that we all share.
Imagine

Imagine there's no heaven
   It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
   It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
   And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
   But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
   I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
   A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
   But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

(John Lennon, 1971)
Figure 12: A boy has ‘pimped’ his school uniform
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Ingelaere, Bert & Kohlhagen, Dominik


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Jackson, Tony


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Krotz, Larry


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Petit Futé
18 juin 2014

Réf. : BRD/EDU/2014-020 /CD/

Monsieur Remy Ndayikengurukiye
Directeur Provincial de l’Enseignement
Bururi

Objet : Information relative à la conduite d’une recherche sur la construction de la paix et la résilience dans les écoles de Rumonge.

Monsieur le Directeur Provincial,

Par la présente, j’ai le plaisir de vous informer de la conduite d’une recherche par l’étudiante Tanja Hendriks sur le thème "A Story about the Past and Possible Present(s) of Burundi". Cette étude qui se déroulera de mi-juin à début septembre 2014, se situe dans le cadre du programme « Consolidation de la Paix, Education et Plaidoyer » conduit par l’UNICEF et le Gouvernement du Burundi.

Je vous saurai gré de bien vouloir faciliter leur introduction dans les écoles ciblées et le bon déroulement de leurs activités de recherche en informant les directeurs et responsables de ces écoles.

Sachant compter sur votre collaboration habituelle, veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Directeur Provincial, l’expression de ma profonde gratitude.

Mamadou Wade
Représentant a.i.
Appendix B: Anonymized List of Respondents

Adults and children that were spoken to informally are not included in this list.

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Appendix C: Focus Group Propositions

These propositions were used in the focus group during which 21 pupils participated on July 18th 2014, Rumonge.

Pupils stood up if they agreed (+) and remained seated if they disagreed (-). After each proposition, a discussion followed in order to explore how they understood the question and why their opinions differed. These discussion were more informative than the actual answers given. The propositions below are therefore just to give an example of the kinds of questions I used to start these discussions.

1) J’aime aller à l’école.
   (I like going to school: + 21, – 0)

2) J’aime les leçon mathématique.
   (I like mathematics: + 1, – 20)

3) Je me sens bien à l’école.
   (I feel good in school : + 21, – 0)

4) Parfois, l’enseignant m’a frappé.
   (Sometimes, the teacher hit me: + 18, – 3)

5) Si je ne vais pas bien à l’école, mes parents me frappe.
   (If I don’t do well in school, my parents hit me: + 21, – 0)

6) Parfois je vais à l’école sans manger.
   (Sometimes I go to school without eating: + 18, – 3)

7) Après être à l’école, j’ai assez temps pour étudier à la maison.
   (After having been at school, I have enough time to study at home : +6, – 15)

8) Dans l’avenir, je veux devenir un(e) enseignant.
   (In the future, I want to become a teacher : +1, – 20)

9) Les filles et les garçons sont au même niveau.
   (Girls and boys are at the same level : +8 – 13)

10) Quand mes parents m’interdit quelque chose, je ne fais pas ça.
    (When my parents forbid me something, I do not do that : +20, -1)

11) Je dois faire beaucoup de travaille à la maison.
    (I have to do a lot of work at home : +3, – 18)

12) Si mon ami me frappe, je frappe lui aussi.
    (If my friend hits me, I hit him too : +5, – 16)

13) J’ai peur des policiers.
    (I am afraid of the police: +2, – 19)

14) Quand j’ai un problème, j’essaye garder ça comme un secret.
    (When I have a problem, I try to keep it as a secret : +1, – 20)

15) Quand je dis quelque chose, les adultes m’écoutent.
    (When I say something, adults listen to me : +15, – 6)
Appendix D: Writing Exercise

On July 30th and August 12th I asked two different groups of pupils that were taking part in the private lessons to write down three things they like about school and three things they don’t like. These were their responses:

July 30th:

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<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>20 Disturbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanja</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils who pay attention</td>
<td>13 Uniform (Khaki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher who explains well</td>
<td>6 A teacher who doesn’t explain well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other pupils</td>
<td>6 Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Subjects</td>
<td>6 Insulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting the teacher</td>
<td>4 French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td>3 Pupils who disturb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressing nicely</td>
<td>2 Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thou (milion)</td>
<td>1 I Hoist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher who listens to us</td>
<td>4 Noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher who beats me when I’ve made a mistake</td>
<td>3 Pupils who disturb the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher who makes jokes</td>
<td>3 I Thieves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 Hate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious pupils</td>
<td>2 Punishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>2 Children who don’t play nicely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents</td>
<td>1 Arrogant Gene anne pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils without discipline</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the teacher tells you to bring your parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting up early</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>A teacher who doesn’t make jokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to school without eating at school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strict teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bringing shame to my parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaving school without getting a diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers who don’t give advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers who scare you</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A white elephant</td>
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**August 12th:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects (mainly English)</td>
<td>22 Disturbing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22 Beating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanja</td>
<td>15 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>12 Bad teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>7 Pupils who are late</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils</td>
<td>3 Arrogant pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils who are on time</td>
<td>1 Teachers who are late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>1 The stick (imkon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing football</td>
<td>1 Insulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils who play in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others who don't respect family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils that don't work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils that don't pray</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pupils that are impolite</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils that injure others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils who fight in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils</td>
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</table>
4. TANJA HENDRIKS: IMAGINING PIECES OF SPACE AS SPACES OF PEACE. A story about primary school-aged children in Rumonge, Burundi, concerning the (re)production of violence and strengthening of resilience.

Burundi has been experiencing cyclical violence ever since its independence in 1962 due to the infamous Hutu-Tutsi strife which culminated in genocide both in 1972 and 1994. The country then spiraled into a civil war which lasted until 2005. Nowadays, ethnic tensions are rising again not in the least because of the general elections scheduled for 2015. Unfortunately there is limited knowledge on how this intergenerational transmission of (ethnic) violence takes place, especially at the community level. Seeing that schools are an important site of intergenerational transmissions, I have focused on messages concerning violence that primary school-aged children pick up. Not all messages that children engage with are sent to them intentionally and what they pick up unintentionally can contradict, undermine or reinforce and exacerbate that which is intentionally taught. So how do they engage with un/intentional messages from their schools and their communities at large in the search for spaces of peace?

I chose to conduct my three months of fieldwork in Rumonge, a small town on Lake Tanganyika’s shore where the ethnic violence in 1972 began. Up until this day the region is plagued by violent incidents and many of these are linked to the continuous influx of returning Burundian refugees. By doing classroom observations, participant observation, focus groups and interviews with children, educators and other community members I have attempted to trace the messages that children engage with and also how they do so and subsequently negotiate their responses to them. I have found that despite the normalization of the use of (extreme) violence, primary school-aged children in Rumonge are managing to be resilient to violence in multiple and contradictory ways. The most extreme example of this would be the use of violence in order to protect one from it.

Both the children’s exposure to violence and their potential ways of engaging with it appear to be heavily dependent on the space that they find themselves in, the people that are present and how they relate to each other. Children stressed that they react differently to violence in different spaces. This clearly shows that children actively strategize their responses within the complex and contradictory dynamics of what Glissant calls ‘the poetics of relation’. Tracing the ways in which children are able to relate to others in multiple ways demonstrates that different ways of relating can sometimes lead away from violence and towards a peaceful coexistence. This implies that by recognizing that people and their relations are always in a state of becoming, non-violent ways of relating can more easily be discovered and nourished. In some instances, primary school-aged children lead the way as they show us how to potentially convert mere pieces of space into spaces of peace.
Keywords: violence, resilience, un/intentional messages, human becoming, poetics of relation.