



Expectations, fears and aspirations of parents from Finnish-African families

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Abstract

This article analyses expectations, fears, and aspirations of parents from Finnish-African families who raise their children in Finland. Focusing on parents' interviews narratives, we explore their ideas and expectations concerning their children's future. As parents in general, they have hopes and responsibilities connected with their children's future happiness and success. Because of the multiculturalism and multiple layers of difference of their families and of the fathers' (black men from sub-Saharan Africa) origins and skin colour of the children, they also have special fears in their parenthood. In the analysis orientations regarding happiness, life satisfaction and freedom of children are considered as parental duties of these adults. They want to play an important role in influencing their children's future. As opposite to their fears, they bring along an idea of their children representing a new cosmopolitan generation who have capabilities to act in a cosmopolitan future and change the society into that direction as well.

Keywords: Finnish-African families, parenthood, upbringing, parental dreams, parental fears

Introduction

The statistics show that intercultural marriages and families with children are a rising phenomenon in Finland. Only recently, there were 3718 families of Africa-born husbands and Finnish-born wives (Statistics Finland 2020). Although there were also more than 1000 families (including cohabiting couples) of Finnish-born husbands and Africa-born wives at the same time, the frequent constellation is Finnish-born woman and Africa-born man in marriages and parenting relationships. Yet there is only a little analysis of how parenting in these kinds of families is experienced and done. This article is about expectations, fears, and aspirations of parents from Finnish-African families for their children's lives and future in Finland. What is special for the families or parents of this analysis is that the informant mothers are originally Finnish and their spouses have come from

sub-Saharan Africa and are racialised in the Finnish context due to their dark skin colour. The aim of this study is to analyse if the multicultural/multiethnicity and the multiple layers of difference the family with a racialised connection bring some peculiar orientations, challenges and contents to parenthood of mothers and fathers, when they raise their children in contemporary Finland.

The analysis is based on an interview data that have been gathered by the first author among families with Finnish origin mothers and sub-Saharan origin fathers (total number of the informants was 69). Most of them were married and lived together, and some of them were divorced and lived apart. However, they all practice their parenting in a parenting combination where the raising adults come from two very different family cultures and societal gender orders. In Finland the authority of parents over their children is low and controlled by different family professionals (Ebot 2022; Ebot & Armila 2016) and women have a lot of informal power inside homes (Harinen & Koski 2008). In those sub-Saharan countries where the fathers of this article come from, parents have more authority over children and men usually have more to say in issues concerning big decisions within families (Ebot *ibid.*; Keller, Voelker and Yovsi 2005; Udegbe 2006). Another important speciality of the case of this article are those men who participated in interviews: their skin colour has made them targets for many kinds of racist treatment during their years in Finland. Their children also often have phenotype like them, which brings a lot of concern for parents about racism and discrimination their children can face. Despite the growing number of multi-ethnic and intercultural families, this dimension has, this far, received only a little attention in Finnish family studies (e.g. Ebot 2022).

In this context where racism is evident and parents' children are coloured, inside the family and in encounters with the Finnish public, these adults struggle to create safe growing environments and prospects for happy future for their children – amidst their fears and parental ambivalences. This article focuses on various ways they engage in their parenting, and how diverse ideas and experiences are constructed in their narratives with the interviewer when their family lives are under scrutiny. The data for this analysis contain a lot of discussion around expectations, fears, and aspirations, as well as expressions of supporting, imagining, and contemplating children's future. The analysis has been organised by means of thematic content analysis and strengthened with illustrative examples from wide-ranging narratives. The main aim has been to catch and thematise parents' diverse (and somehow contradictory) aspirations, as well as subjective expectations relating to their children's future. Within this, a notion of parental concern and responsibility can be recognised. In the following chapters a frame for the analysis is formed by presenting the clues of the discussion it is participating in. This framing is followed by a presentation of the methodological choices made for the analysis. The analysis has been divided into four themes inside which the concerns of the parents of this study are organised. Finally, the article comes to concluding remarks and further questions that have emerged during the analytical process.

Parenting, culture and interculture

The concept and phenomenon of parenting can be approached from many different angles. Parenthood is, for example, a societal and nationalistic position (e.g., Hoikkala 1993), a generational and gendered relationship (Yuval-Davis 1997), a generational task, an institutional role of responsibility, and an experience and emotionally loaded identity. There is no parenting without children, and it seems that most part of the existing literature on the topic links parenthood to education; children are often seen as an “educational problem” of parents. In Finland, education is a national and cultural task shared formally by families and school. Maybe this sharing that has a long history is one reason why child’s failure in school-going is easily connected with their family background (cf. Beach and Gordon and Lahelma 2003; Gordon & Lahelma 2002; Nivala 2006; Rajander & Lappalainen 2010).

Parenthood as a societal position has a gendered nature. Tommi Hoikkala (1993) has discussed about gendered responsibilities of parenthood: societal expectations towards motherhood are different than towards fatherhood (also Vuori 2009). Gender orders, however, are culturally constructed and internalising them is part of our gendered socialisation. In this sense, the target group of this analysis is interesting: parents of Finnish-African families of this study have grown up in two very different family cultures, gender orders, and models of mothering and fathering. Because living in Finland, the fathers have been obliged to many kinds of compromises and negotiations as upbringing fathers, as Mathias Ebot’s (2022) analysis of their fatherhood shows. Despite their quite high education the fathers have remained on the margins of labour market and thus felt failure as breadwinners of the family, for example. They have often also experienced marginality in their parenthood as men whose voice remains modest both inside the family and in society more widely (*ibid.*).

In Finland, child education and parenting are targets for a huge socio-cultural and controlling moralism (Harinen & Koski 2008; Peltola 2016; Vuori 2009). This control is both formal and informal: different family professionals (in social security offices, for example) monitor parenting values and practices concretely in their work (Ebot & Armila 2016). Besides that, societal discussion, every now and then, focuses on questions like “disappearance of parenthood”, and so on. Because of this moralistic pressure, people are usually reflecting their parenting in a quite cautious way. Ways to talk about own family lives are also controlled and culturally scripted. This is the case also within intercultural family constellations. In Finland there are analyses that show how parents of intercultural families produce discursive ideas and characterisations of raising decent citizens, as well as middle-classed and professional discourses on assertive parenthood (Berg & Peltola 2015; Peltola *ibid.*). Kirimi’s (2020) ethnography of how a less-studied group of working-class parents with Iranian background living in Finland experience respectability has also contributed to this discussion. Though noting the initial contributions such research has made, there has still been a distinct vacuum in research relating specifically to the reflections of parents with experiences of hard racism. This analysis is one attempt to address this gap and to extend the existing Finnish studies. Taking parents

from Finnish-African families as a case does not mean only accounting for racialised interpretations and other specialities but also tackling their over-exclusion in Finnish-based family research, as well as recognising cultural and gendered or religious tendencies. The parents of this analysis have children of a very young age, which suggests that the issues affecting them now will become relevant also in the future.

Parenthood is not only everyday practices, thoughts, emotions, and discussions about values or manners; it is about bodies and concern over phenotypes as well, for example. Parents of this analysis highlight these themes that relate to racialised identification and marginalisation and their effects on child rearing and educating. Everyday concern in their families are not only mundane but can also be implicit to the beliefs and practices families live by (cf. Daly 2003). These mothers and fathers live in Finland and have children whom they parent with some culturally and normatively general parenting ideals: teaching good manners and behaviour to children, as well as trying to help them become happy and “decently” socialised adults (Ebot 2022). As parents, they, however, also feel a special kind of anxiousness because of their speciality as family constellations where different origins, parenting cultures, and skin colours are present. As parents, they cannot guard their children from wider social impacts, which in their case often have been toned by a negative pressure of discrimination and exclusion.

Data and methods

The parents of this analysis form parenting relationships (27 couples) between white (ethnic) Finns and black Africans. The analysis also contains 15 narratives from single parent families where children have fathers from African origins. The total amount of informants is thus 69 and they all lived in eight of the biggest Finnish cities.

This study employs qualitative methods to document and understand the complexity that underpins parental expectations, fears, and aspirations in families where mothers are Finnish and fathers come from different sub-Saharan countries. The analysis was based on tracing parenting beliefs and orientations in relation to their parenthood and on an inquiry into their expectations, fears, commitments, and motivations for moral and cultural education provided to children. Qualitative data collection methods included joint couples’ and individual interviews, observations, and photographic cues. These data were supplemented by research diaries and field notes. A variety of methods to find respondents was employed, including phone calls, personal or informal communications within the community circles, which progressed also to snowballing and self-selecting (cf. Ebot 2022). Even though the African fathers of the study came from different countries, they all were heterosexual parents, and often highly educated (having a university degree). Many of them were religious Christians and “caught” for the study in church surroundings. The average number of children in these families was 2.12, and it was also often the case that they were young children, typically of preschool or primary school ages – with only a few in secondary or high school.

By using open-ended questions, parents were asked about their aspirations and educational expectations relating to their children's future. There was a lot of discussion about how they thought their children would fare in schools, their development and representation, their orientations and motivations towards education, expectations about the future, and the socio-cultural place for their children in Finland. The parents talked about personal emotions, shared concerns, coping patterns and concrete happenings around upbringing. Cultural and discursive resources of "decent parenting" (e.g., Hoikkala 1993) were also benefitted when such things as educational programs or educational hobbies (music, art lessons), sporty activities were brought into discussion (cf. Furedi 2001, 82).

During the data collection, the first author had a possibility to observe some family relationship occasions. Children playing in the house was a frequent sight, and they also seemed to speak multiple languages within the family interaction. Occasionally, their ball, toy, or gadget bounced to the living room or could be on display from where the first author often sat on a chair. They could come to their parents to ask about something, many were involved in after-school activities. These gatherings made it possible to freely discuss about those children's involvement and to bring into discussion benefits of such here-and-now involvement – to learn and to do well also later in life (cf. Irwin 2009; Park and Phillips and Johnson 2004). These interview and observational techniques elicited rich and multidimensional data that reached some inside sight to the day-to-day family life, interactions, and dynamics. While the exploration of such dynamics takes us closer to parental orientations and motivations, the degree of candidness differed among families and between parents. In this article, however, it is not possible to pay exact attention to all tensions or meaningful silences between interviewed couples, even though the intercultural composition of the constellation could offer interesting material also for that (see Bjørnholt & Farstad 2014; Morgan & Krueger 1993).

The focus of data analysis here is in tracing parental orientations of these adults when upbringing of their children is under reflection. The stance that 'there is a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences' though not fully transparent was leading the data reading (Hollway & Jefferson 2000, 3). In this, hermeneutic "promise" of interpretation (Gadamer 1979) formed the base: expressions that were interpreted as expressions of parental orientation were picked from the data to be organised thematically and then presented within the four main themes of the analysis. The analysis was inductive and only after the data-driven thematisation other studies and conceptualisations from previous research were brought along, into a dialogue with the themes and their interpretations (see Koski 2011). As a result, a composition of themes was constructed where rotating and ambivalently hopeful and fearful orientations are presented – as well as an orientation of dreaming that aims at "winning" the fearful sights of future.

The intention of the analysis is to understand the ways in which parental orientations are both maintained and challenged in the context of these kinds of special household compositions. How the repeated themes of happiness, success, autonomy, and self-confidence – for example – are related with the other repeated themes of racism, discrimination, and fear? How parental responsibilities are defined in families where children

represent people of colour in a society that still considers them strange? The next chapter draws on the empirical data first to indicate the hopes and values attributed to formal education and informal freedom, before moving to more problematic and special fears of these parents. The fourth theme of the analysis talks about a dream in which the parents see their children as skilful solvers of these problems and fears.

Results

In this chapter we present the results of the analysis which we have divided into to four main themes. The first theme discusses the meaning of formal education in the parental discourse of these special adults who raise up their children in the Finnish learning society. Especially the African fathers of this study highlight a hope for a better future for their children as their own experiences as black immigrants have been toned by many kinds of marginalisation. The second theme concentrates on the parents' expectations towards mental well-being and general happiness of their children. The third theme is about special fears of parents and the fourth one introduces an idea of cosmopolitan dreams: parents' visions about cosmopolitan youth and future adults they are bringing up. All the names mentioned in the analysis are pseudonyms, and quotations from the data are distinguished from the main text with italics or indentations.

To become merited in a learning society

Finland has been characterised as a learning society where participation and success in formal education, to get a degree, is a discursive imperative: a quick look at the statistics show that exclusion from formal education is the heaviest predictor of life-course problems (Antikainen, Rinne & Koski 2013; Armila, Käyhkö & Pöysä 2018). This discursive context is recognised also by the interviewed parents of this study who echoed the value of education and maintained that educational achievement would be vital in ensuring their children's merits in society. There is some other evidence as well that this educational "call" is registered even more intensively among migrant parents who often might have high aspirations regarding the career performances for their children. Behind this, there exist not just wishes of raising up "decent citizens" with upward mobility but also aims at reaching sociocultural respectability after migration (see Berg & Peltola 2015; Kirimi 2020, 2019; Skeggs 1997). In the families of this analysis, this emphasis is relatively heavy also because of the visible phenotypical difference/background of their children which makes them more socially vulnerable than other children.

There were also differences between interviewed parents about the ideas of how their children's future life would be. Many of the Finnish mothers of this analysis saw themselves as supporting in transferring cultural resources to their children – somehow balancing the "interculture" because of their being culturally Finns. Despite relying on and believing in themselves as educators, they were also positive about the important role of formal education can play in children's future and noted education as an investment

deemed necessary in any society. These mothers had cultural resources and competence to find and benefit enrichment extracurricular activities for their children. A Finnish mother *Anja* mentioned that *because of the good education system in Finland* her children could develop their talents and intellectual prowess. Likewise, *Soili* and *Kristiina* frequently mentioned arranging extracurricular educational activities as their parental duties, as well as of being overall supportive to their children. For them, organised and adult guided education and their children's future were inextricably linked. Even though talking about small children, mothers emphasised how their children can benefit early solid education later in life:

Soili: I hope for good education and if I could choose, I will want that all of them go to the university but it's not up to me but to them. They have to decide what they want. We can talk and advise but it's up to them.

Kristiina: For her to be able to live in any place, she needs an education. So, I want her to get a "sound education", study hard whatever she wants i.e. not to make her have fancy profession like doctor, lawyer but I want her to have a "good job". Take good care of herself.

A common feature for these mothers was not to spell out any specific occupational aspiration for their children in the future. This approach was following the current cultural family discourse in Finland where parenthood has been defined as supporting and facilitating but not forcing and "naming". "Child's own decision" (if a "proper" one) is often emphasised as a parental choice in Finland (e.g., Terävä & Bök 2019) and reflected actively especially in the talk of the Finnish mothers of this analysis.

Chigoze is one the African fathers who also placed a high value on good education. Considering his conviction during the interview about the available educational possibilities in Finland, it makes sense that his account below hints of a preferred career for his children. The father does not want to say what his children should become – but they, however, need to become "something":

Education Yes, it's very good. It doesn't matter if you want to be a lawyer or not, it helps a lot. If they want to be lawyers, I'll love that. But if they also want to be sports persons or musicians – fine also. That's why we are letting them to participate in so many things in school i.e. piano lessons, ice-skating etc.

In Berg's and Peltola's (2015) study on raising decent citizens in Finland, organised activities for children were taken up by well-off parents who wanted their children to commit to self-discipline and a healthy lifestyle through, for example, sport activities. For *Chigoze* investing in hobbies was not seen as being rich or well-off – for him hobbies had a value that realises itself within his children's life-courses and in different later-life choices. As his talk suggests, wide scale education and proper training is seen as a typical route to a professional career or linked to a good future with a career job, something that was also in

line with *Chigoze's* dreams for his children when discussed elsewhere. Like many other African fathers in Finland, *Chigoze* suggests not only the dreams of his children achieving the benefits of a learning society but also their citizenship representation in this regard (also Kelly 2017; Kirimi 2020). Enrichment activities are often seen as middle-classed forms of cultural investment but in the data of this analysis they can be recognised to have an instrumental value in parental attempts to resist “fears of failing” by developing early strategies of future success for their children (Vincent & Ball 2007: 1062).

African fathers with quite bitter experiences of exclusion expressed a strong hope for a better future – not for themselves but for their children. In this theme, the future of children is often reflected against their own present and in many ways marginalised situation so that the hope for the children constantly lies in the open future (Ebot & Armila 2016). In the field notes of this study, two fathers (*Tapupi* and *Abin*) had taken-up expressions of both *high-grade education* and *big-name education* as measures on their children's future educational success. Throughout the interviews, both fathers had a clear vision of a *better life* through education, with an emphasis of parents' guidance and support for their children to achieve high quality education. *Tapupi* added to his hopes attributes that are indicative of fulfilment and self-esteem:

You know having life is first of all having a good education – from good education you are therefore exposed to the world and when you are exposed to the world that is how life becomes easier to you. I also think it is important to guide the kid because kid sometimes when they are young, they don't really think long-term. Because they might be taken by peer pressure, like because my friends are doing this I'm going to do same. But I'll put my effort on what I really do – which is making sure that the kid has a high-grade education. Because that's something people respect, and also a combination of self-respect and self-worth.

Abin: I want her to make a big-name in education to have a “better life” and also influence her society in the best way she can. And I want her to be a role model to herself and to others. And I think that she has the potential if only she would discipline herself.

Abin's reflections stressed the importance of being a role model, what he then clarified as being a role model also for other Africans in Finland, not only for his child. In this, his aim seems to be in creating a more visible and valid position, as well as “big name” possibilities of racialised people in Finland. In Finland, big name can be received only via the formal – often strategically chosen – routes of education.

Echoing Peltola (2014, 140–143), this sort of attitude is consistent among immigrant parents who often emphasise the importance of their children becoming “somebodies” in the Finnish society. Many of the informants of this study have bitter experiences of being “nobody”; the African fathers, for example, have had difficulties in finding work that equates their high education – and this is something they do not want to see as their children's destinies. In their parenthood discourse, they produce an internalised under-

standing of how the society works and what is the culturally normative way to “push” children to a successful life. The interview data consist no discussion around challenges that going for these normative ideals of decent adulthood often faces. For example, the Finnish educational system is not so open and equal as presented or believed, and some demographically based exclusion can be recognised among immigrant youth especially (e.g., Lahelma 2005; Souto 2020).

The data of this article reproduces expectations towards education laced with neoliberal views: following the ideals of individual pursuing and taken-for-granted meritocracy. Across the diverse family contexts parents entertained the idea of education as important and that their children could continue in the direction of academic success mostly on grounds that their individual talents must be maximised. This approach appeared even more strongly in African fathers’ than Finnish mothers’ accounts, perhaps as a well-balanced repertoire to turn to when needed. Talk regarding the value of formal education was described by the parents of this study as a normal, overall part of family conversation: *learning to learn* as a taught skill was emphasised in many ways (see Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009).

The talk about education and skills was not only between parents: they also encouraged their children to think possibilities for university education and assumed that their children would access university to follow a professional career (see also Irwin & Elley 2013). Within the discourse of education as an investment, which relates to the shift to neoliberal educational discourse (Gordon and Lahelma and Beach 2003; Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola 2002), they reflected the endorsement on individual opportunity, enrichment activities, self-fulfilment and accepted citizenship (cf., *ibid.*; Gordon et al. *ibid.*; Rajander & Lappalainen 2010). Even though these kinds of reflections are often associated with western middle-class parents, it can be recognised also in manifestations of individuals/parents in diverse families. Behind all these expectations and educational “pushing” we can recognise aspirations that reach for civic acceptance, material success and socio-economic wellbeing for the children of the interviewed parents. In the following chapter the analytical focus is in more mental issues: children’s happiness and internalized freedom as targets for parental concern.

Internalised harmony and experience of happiness

Besides formal education and degrees as a guarantee of safe future, the parents of this study highlighted also securing mental wellbeing of their children as their parental responsibility. Hopes for future happiness for children were recurrent during the interviews, as well as in other fieldnotes for this study. In this theme of mental and internal harmony references to individuality, autonomy, community and transcendence were used as a mixture for happy future. While children’s identity socialisation is widely acknowledged as an area of negotiation and conflict in multi- and intercultural families (Caballero, Edwards & Smith 2008; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Luke & Luke 1998; Root 2001), the data for this analysis shows different. On the contrary, a wide consensus about an autonomous and self-trusting future adult was recognised as a parental wish throughout the data.

When discussing the topic, the parents expressed general discursive values and personality driven understanding of happiness and freedom. They hoped their children would *just live their own dreams, be safe and satisfied, be thankful and respectful in life, and have their internal needs or desires met*. However, when probed more about how these general and abstract ideas and aims could be realised, more specific ideals and values were found that these parents thought as crucial in facilitating children. In this, connections to the former theme of meritocracy could also be interpreted. Along with the possibility of a promising career and meaningful life that good education produces, achieving happiness was conveyed in the hope that children would be able to make decisions concerning their lives themselves. When fulfilling some formal merits and as “decent citizens” a certain kind of autonomy can be reached. Future happiness has then much to do with a possibility to choose. Many Finnish mothers, for example, expressed this in terms of *doing interesting things, becoming strong and independent, with the freedom to marry whom they choose*. In this, an educational discourse of parents as facilitators can be recognised (Hoikkala 1993). Within this theme, some differences between parental values were also manifested.

***Mari:** I want good things for my kids, but I'll want them to be able to choose for themselves. I wouldn't push them that you must have a good education as much as him [pointing at husband]. If I see that the kid is interested in singing and has a talent/or to become a dancer. I will want the kid to follow his passion. To be happy in their lives, whatever they do, have family and safety networks.*

***Kata:** The most important thing is that I want her to be happy and just live her dreams. She can just choose to do whatever she wants to do, be able to enjoy life and to be “independent and strong woman”. Very important also, she needs to be thankful, respect people and to value what she has.*

***Susanna:** I want them to find a meaningful life for themselves, enjoy life and to get married someday so that they can have their own families. Of course, they should be free to marry whom they choose.*

The mothers cited above illuminate ways in which choice can be a resource, urging children's individual agency and subjectivity in the pursuit of their parental dreams. Related to this is the hope that children would find happiness in their own future family relationships later in life. **Susanna** was adamant about this during the interview, and further considered parenthood as a potentially joyous and meaningful experience because of this duty of transforming life-course happiness. Her words *freedom to marry whom they choose*, however, can also be a disconnection and distinction to cultures where parental authority is so strong that it penetrates to children's lives in many crucial ways (cf. Becher 2008; Kolar & Solar 2000).

Within this theme of harmony and happiness, family is presumed to be a strong support system for children, equipping them with tools and readiness for the challenges in

life-course. A mentally strong and autonomous adult is seen as an educated individual and an indication of parental success.

An illustration of what is entailed in this support framework, in addition to good relationships or interactions between parents and children, is provided in the quotations of African fathers below. Avoiding conflicts with others during the life-course, as a general “human skill”, seems to be one apparent parental wish.

Tapupi: *Everything about my upbringing is showing now in my home/my adult life i.e. in terms of how I handle cleanliness or how you are able to handle your own stress/problems at home because the thing is that “life is full of test”. I show these things to the children that you need to have this in-built solidness. And I think that the time to do that is when the kids are growing up so it becomes some kind of “self-reliant and readiness”.*

Mendo: *I want him to be happy, I want him to be open and tolerate other people, have common sense and awareness of how life functions. He sees things through our interactions as a family, like to know good from bad and also the things to do and those not to do.*

Kisomu: *Most important is love between us. That is what we are trying to show. It is important that they see this kind of happiness from their parents. For example, I grew up seeing my mom and dad together and they are still happily together until today. They had ups and downs of course but they were not showing those in front of us, the children.*

Combined with the idea that children’s future happiness lies in their current family relationships, intergenerational transmission and strong family bonds may also have connotations to these fathers’ notions of happiness and can be constructed as a viable option to achieving this priority. In their talk, ideas of love, care, respect, and resilience can be entrenched within the overall family life – even though children’s lives are not restricted inside homes, of course. The “educational message” here is that parents who themselves have pro-happiness values, conducts, and practices also explicitly articulate them in the presence of children, rather than just rely on quiet modelling. All this seems to be a promise of active social and community participation in their children’s future life (cf. Headey, Muffels & Wagner 2014).

For the African fathers of this study, expectations on happiness lie within a general expression of *veneration*. They seem to see happiness also as an idea of self-transcendence and principally concerned with welfare of others:

Samolo: *I’m very religious. So, yes, religion helps a lot and it guides. It’s the source of happiness. They are so many things happening and people are doing those things because they are not religious. If they were religious they will have “the fear of the lord” but they don’t just have that.*

Mbune: *Firstly, I will like for them [children] to have not only a religious identity but also to have “the fear of the lord”. They should know that there*

is a supreme power/being.. Inner peace and happiness come when you have the fear of the lord. I want my children to hold a strong opinion about God and that they can pass it down to their own children.

One notable dimension on how parents conveyed their desire to facilitate harmonious life satisfaction for their children was expressed in the profound belief of religion and expressed by an overwhelming majority of parents of this study. The field notes and research diaries are also full of observations of issues related to parents' intent on socialising their children based on Bible teachings, informal religious discussions with children, and participation in church services. These religious values and practices were typically described as the *foundation of the family* (also Ebot, forthcoming) and offered a crucial framework for happiness in family life. The parents' Christian tradition rooted in monotheistic beliefs was the framework of reference in these cases.

The next quotations of **Maija** and **Kisomba** refer to raising children according to the Christian faith and viewing Christianity as relevant in all aspects of life. In these accounts a deep desire to contribute to the good of humanity and society is vocal, including their eagerness and hope for their children to continue in this path, adhering to Christian values – which, then, fades away the idea of “different original cultures” from their intercultural family identity. These faith-inspired parents (Ebot 2022) had special hopes for their children:

Maija: *My wish is that they follow the way we are raising them because as my husband said Christianity is in our everyday lives. We can just say let's go and meet other people and help them. There is joy and satisfaction in helping people and we also try to take them [children] with us where ever we go, especially to church.*

Kisomba: *Firstly, I will I think it will be fantastic if they [children] have the Christian Identity, it's neither Finnish nor African. And actually, the Christian faith too – to be friendly with others and to see every human being as same, as everyone's life is valuable. Not to separate that one is better than the other. It shouldn't matter from where one comes from or what he has done in life. But rather to think that God has given his/her life and that is of huge value and importance.*

Following **Kisomba's** reflection that their children would be better off with a *Christian identity*, **Samolo** and **Mbune** talked about the *fear of the Lord* as a general skill and guarantee for mental wellbeing. Unlike many of the mothers in this study, these fathers' references are divergent from the frequently articulated cultural norms of individualistic investment in middle-class Finnish families. Religious values often juxtapose the idea that a human being as an autonomous individual is the most important target to secure, and in talks about religion as a parental resource a contradiction with the previously mentioned *whatever the child wants* can be recognised.

Many of the interviewed parents talked a lot about how keen they were that their children should aspire to a given level of religiosity, echoing the hopes of happiness and life satisfaction the parents hold on this basis. With this religious framework, happiness becomes a way of life, not a destiny. In this, links with many social scientific studies can be found about the relationship between parenting and inspired religiousness, as having positive outcomes in children and adolescents (e.g., Becher 2008; Degni, Pöntinen & Mölsä 2006) – including happiness and life satisfaction. However, the thoughts of parents were not only positively toned: many special parental fears were also reported which will be analysed next.

Special parental fears

The families of this study are peculiar and because of the prevailing racist features of the Finnish society also vulnerable in many ways. Fathers and their children who both represent people of colour, have been targets of racist and racialised treatment (Ebot 2022; Ebot & Armila 2016), and much of the parental concern is intertwined with this fact and experience. Racism is something they would like to protect their children from. However, the task is demanding.

The most frequently mentioned parental fear regarding their children's future was related to their skin colour. Fears of being a target of racism was real, experienced, and ranged from name calling to physical attacks. After moving from Northern Finland to Southern Finland with her children, *Minttu* was stressed about her children's safety and security. Despite the hopeful and promising ideas of supporting parenthood in child rearing analysed in the previous chapters, concrete-life happenings bring cautiousness and insecurity into her family life and family relations:

I'm afraid they will not be able to build their self-confidence in the way that they can resist/stand up to racism and bullying. With self-confidence, they will be strong to fight against the bad comments directed at them. One of my daughters had a problem at school that she didn't go to school for two months because of the racism and bullying.

Many interviewed parents made comments along the above lines and spoke about the anxieties they have internalised regarding how their children can be at risk of traumatic episodes, as well as other indefinable feelings of alienation deriving from their skin colour. For *Soili*, a Finnish teacher by profession with early-teenaged visible phenotypically different children, the sentiment of fear was associated with her family's experiences of racism, what she described at length as often very painful:

Some people were commenting, shouting at me, quite horrible things and to the children also. I was very much afraid because they were strong men and I was alone with the children. That's why I wish also that they [children] should be strong enough to always say their own mind. They need to be

stronger than normal Finns. Especially when the skin colour is different. I remember many times we have gone to some children's program somewhere and there are children screaming somewhere, it's okay but then, when our children are screaming then "more eyes are coming". I hope it's just an unconscious thing, I hope that nobody is doing it on purpose. There are different feelings depending on the day. Sometimes, I don't mind and other times, it's very very hard.

During the interview, **Soili's** voice moved through different emotional registers. At the beginning, when she identified her attackers as strong Finnish men, she felt shocked and expressed this emotion also later in the interview. Although she hoped for her children to be stronger and not allow themselves to be robbed of their rights, she ended her story with a sad tone – so her fears may have already led to an inner dissipation.

Soili's story confirms an idea of the free-floating dynamic of fear illustrated also by other parents with terms of *commenting, shouting quite horrible things*, and so on. The awareness of racialisation is thus acknowledged also among the white parents of this study, who identify the *gaze* that is often directed at their children. **Soili's** husband **Koffi** (originally from Ghana) repeated during the interview that she was even chased around the shop and shouted at by *those racist men*. Soon after she had tried to negotiate with them to stop their abuses, since her children were both petrified and crying. While it may be significant that she did not mention this incident by herself, she, nevertheless, described her fears as quite horrible and identified the gender of her family's attackers.

A Finnish woman **Anne** who is married to a Tanzanian man noted that it was very difficult for her family to be in non-racist peace while living in their former neighbourhood. She put the issue of men that threatened her family on the agenda and anticipated bad outcomes after being engaged with uncertainty through the prism of fear:

I used to be very afraid when we lived in [name]. We moved here just a couple of months ago. In [name], we lived in the city apartments and there were like lots of alcoholics around and people were shouting at us on and calling us names. Some kind of used words like "go home" to my husband. I was very scared that what if someone will try to come to our apartment and try to get in.

These moments of feeling like your family is at risk and victimised and threatened were common across the narratives of the parents of this article. What they were eluding to, is the act of fearing as a threat itself, including a sense of fatalism that continuously made them to reflect safety and ponder different means for coping. So, while **Minttu** wished her children to build up their self-confidence to cope, and while **Soili** felt that her children needed to be stronger than normal Finns, **Anne** thought that moving-out was best for her family. All they still expressed hope for safety and different strategies they had taken in managing and securing a hoped-for-future for the children (cf. Devine 2004). However, **Minttu's** wish for self-confidence, **Soili's** silence, and **Anne's** moving-out strategy are also indicating emotional undercurrents and investments evoked by racist encounters.

These parents were not only clear about being frightened, but they were also recognising their worries as an indication of fear, as well as being aware of the violent and physical potential of racism.

The data from fathers expressed similar sentiments in this vein of fear as well. However, the kinds of anxieties and fears that were mentioned most often, were related to their children's identity. African fathers were the ones who worried most about racism-related issues in this study. They worried their children are vulnerable in front of negative forms of racialisation because of the colour of their skin and could be marginalised or face denied opportunities. This was the window through which many fathers saw the need to be very fearful about their children's future in Finland. *Ifekwa*, a Nigerian father of a daughter of primary school age, put this fear in his words:

I'm afraid of the things that are putting these kids [children of Finnish-African parents] off-balance. Because in most cases they are growing up and they start to realise that they are more familiar with Finland than Africa. And they are confused when other Finns/people say to them that they are not Finns. When people don't accept them. This could lead to identity crisis.

Abin from Cameroonian also pointed this identity issue and specifically, in relation to the narration of self, his child's racialised identity. In this he is reminding us about the complexity and significance of the construction of identities in these kinds of ethno-culturally mixed families (cf. Luke & Luke 1998, 748). While fathers' blackness is said to have a significant impact on their children's ethnic and national identification (Brunsmä 2005), it is also the case that the appearance and phenotype of these children can play a significant role in shaping their identity and personal experiences. The "authenticity" of their identities become often questioned by the communities around which can destroy easily the idea of internalised harmony and happiness emphasised elsewhere in their parental discourse (cf. Song 2010). By adopting an autobiographical transformation, they put themselves into their children's shoes to relate psychologically to racism that might be directed at them (cf. Twine 2000).

Abin: On a personal note, I'm really pessimistic than optimistic for the mixed children in this country. If I want to be honest with you I would say. I don't think my child will be different. Because I think that they are very ashamed of their black Identity and they have not had any kind of role-model. First of all, they are ashamed of their identity and especially from their African roots. It reflects in their cycle of friends and their interactions. They have a way they avoid anything that has to do with their African roots as much as possible.

For another Cameroonian (single) father whose partner was away and hospitalised, "culturally incomplete" identity of his child was also a carefully scrutinised issue, but in another thematic context. *Abunaw's* fear is formative of the dominant practise on manhood in his culture and the next extract describes the situation:

The only thing my son is lacking now is circumcision. If he was in Africa, I could have circumcised him. He was not circumcised when he was born because it's the Finnish culture not to and I fear he will not be circumcised. I had known of the sex of my son even before he was born. I tried to talk with my ex-wife but she asked me if I am Jewish. Where I come from, once you're born they circumcise you before you leave hospital.

As the quotations above show, fears of these fathers often rested within the complex issue of identity that interculturality of their family raises. Beside the general attitude of parental hope, fathers expressed also depressing fatality when describing issues regarding their children's identity. This fatality came out sometimes as an issue that cannot be solved in families and by parenting. For them it was sometimes difficult to articulate expectations and aspirations because of these looming fears. A thread running through the broad tapestry of fear narratives was that the fathers equated their fear with children's vulnerability. Although they spoke of family socialisation during family events, with in-laws, in churches, and within cycles of friends, their family lives cannot always provide sophisticated and useful guides for these children to negotiate the unexpected questions of appearance and colour. The parents orientated often emotionally when discussing that their children may still be racialised and assigned as blacks by the public when they grow older.

Cosmopolitan dreams

One special parental orientation of these parents can be called as cosmopolitan dreams, where they aim at fading away their fears and make, again, place for more hopeful visions of their children's future lives. If their descendants could adapt a cosmopolitan identity with no ethno-cultural and coloured restrictions, they could really be those autonomous and free agents of their own destinies – and fulfillers of their personal dreams. This is an orientation that constructs their children's future towards a moral ideal of being citizens of the world, not just of one closed nation-state. This reflects their visions of global socio-cultural condition and social force (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Delanty 2006) that can shape lives of individuals differently than now. Because of the children's cultural speciality, the parents' believe that their children can be *representative of a new generation* and should be (and are) educated as such. These children meant for their parents a generation in Finland with transnational opportunity structures, special kinds of new freedoms, and with manifold cultural spaces of action available. This cosmopolitanism as an option was drawn from the importance that they attached to their own diverse backgrounds in preparing children for the future. In this, the parents considered themselves as assets and were confident that in these kinds of families, children can adapt special kinds of knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and value orientations. This is a mode of orientation to the world whereby parents want their children to be interested in engaging with especially people from other cultures than just from the one they live within.

Susanna and *Akanfe*, for example, who had been married for a long time with three children indicated the advantages their children have and the cultural resources they are

receiving that could give them a head start in future. This was echoed also elsewhere and throughout the interviews and could be pinned down to cultural backgrounds – and has been noted also in several analyses of multi- and intercultural families (e.g., Harinen 2000). In this, also, Zygmunt Bauman's (1999) ideas of fluid competences of the "liquid" modern society can be recognised as an internalised discursive understanding:

Susanna: Yes, they are totally "new generation" because they have got very good language skills, speaking four languages. Good knowledge of both cultures because my husband has been very active in transmitting the Ghanaian culture in them. So they know a lot about it and feel positive about it. And they are exposed to the official languages of Finland.. Living in where there are so many immigrants, I think they have got skills that are going to be needed in this society.

Akanfe: To begin with, it is their multicultural background – where you have a father who is Ghanaian and mother who is a [Swedish] Finn. Also, the fact that this phenomenon is quite new here in Finland. Also, the language factor, the kids are growing up in a family where they are using several languages. There couldn't be anything more new generation than that.

New generation that these parents refer to is formed by children who are raised in multicultural families who are exposed to a culture of openness and can act fluently in many kinds of cultural and linguistic environments. The parents of this study see that these skills and competences are going to be needed in the contemporary Finnish society – and are issues that cannot be reached via formal education that was emphasised elsewhere in their talk. Living in their kinds of family contexts teaches about differences, as well as the importance of compromising and having an open mind. This is a general, cosmopolitan disposition these parents are keen on transferring to their children. The view of cosmopolitanism is seen as a set of competences and understood as a form of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Weenink 2007, 2008). In Pierre Bourdieu's (2004, 18–19) terms, this kind of transmission starts "without delay, without wasted time" and involves both "a labour of inculcation and assimilation". In this theme, one can recognise an effort to make a distinction to the life-course experiences of especially African fathers who still have not managed to make all their dreams true in the middle of the racialised social orders of Finland. A big mission for them was that the situation of their children in the future would be different, and that there would be real space for a new generation here (cf. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009).

The characterisation of a *new generation* is equally an impulse of hope. The interviews figured ambitious parents of children who have an all-important key (in terms of background assets) including both education and learning society, multicultural skills, and a globalising environment to engage with and develop. The phrase cosmopolitan dreams, therefore, is an interpretation to frame not only parents' utterances of hope in their children's future but also to acknowledge their parental disposition and vision of the world they think is reachable to their children. For the interviewed parents the idea

of cosmopolitan dreams conveyed their ambitions, but also a clear note on the new standards that should be set and how things should change. In referring to this, they expressed expectations for their children to fight for their place in society and to change things, in spite of the fearing feelings analysed above. **Satu** and **Ifekwa** summed up the changes that are occurring in the following ways:

***Satu:** Yes, because they [children] are changing the things. Because before Finnish people have thought that if you look like this [pointing at her child], you are a foreigner and now they have to get used to the fact that there are Finns who look like this. And they are many of them these days... Increasing and very soon they will take their right places in the society.*

***Ifekwa:** She [his child] is born of different race and culture. Because obviously, she has a mixed background of both Nigerian and Finnish. She is also a “mixed-race child” with her skin colour. And then also the trend of things in Finland, there are many of these mixed children nowadays and especially between Africans and Finns. Mixed children are becoming more and more common.*

This parental orientation provides children with certain dispositions and sociocultural competences that can be regarded necessary for the future. For parents like **Helena** and **Amaben** cited below, children already had a bridge function towards a change in ways of life, norms, and demands. In this, parents echoed the importance to forge positive relationships with people from a range of backgrounds (see Alibhai-Brown 2001; Olumide 2002). They often placed an emphasis on the unique role of children such as theirs in questioning the notion of Finnishness, as well as in the widening of its representation:

***Helena:** I can say, yes. All these mixed kids are the new generation because their generation is going to be so different to the generation when I was 10 years old for example. They are already different from us and will change this country, they really will.*

***Amaben:** The fact that she is a mixed child, she already embodies something new in terms of the future. And she is half Finnish and Cameroonian. Also, the fact that she looks a bit different that does not make her less of a Finn, black and white Finn. I think this is the generation that would make people understand that it takes more to be a Finn than just being a white person. That is, to be a Finn there are more important variables you have to have to take into consideration.*

Two interpretations can be constructed from these and similar examples from the data. First, the idea of new generation is configured in terms of multiple identities and illustrates how parents’ evolving expectations and aspirations are inseparable from the sociocultural and national contexts in which they are being forged. Second, the gender

pattern in the data with regards to expectations and aspirations mostly remained aligned, glued together by parental ambitions and their views on the importance of providing and preparing children to more open social arenas. Beyond those there is a paradoxical simultaneity to be discovered here. While the parents of this study are reflexive about the possibility for their children to face discrimination and racism due to their phenotypical difference, they are also relatively ambitious in encouraging their offspring towards an upward social connections and social mobility, as Weenink (2008) also found in his study. A key point for parents seems to be that children must at least maintain their mixed-heritage and self-identity in ways that reinforce fluidity and openness in interactions – consistent with a wider range of “healthy” identities and freedom of expression (e.g. Caballero et al. 2008; Root 2002; Song 2003; Song & Gutierrez 2016).

Concluding and discussion

This analysis can be concluded with an umbrella term of pro-activism. Pro-activism in parenthood means concerned action and emotionally based influencing in children’s today and future and is formed by both learned moral discourses and lived experiences (Barn & Harman 2006: 1316; Gutman & Akerman 2008; Furlong & Biggart 1999). Pro-activism is also emerged when especially migrant parents consistently construct themselves as respectable and as raising decent citizens (Berg & Peltola 2015; Kirimi 2020). In the case of Finnish-African couples, this pro-activism is exacerbated due to the likelihood of them experiencing forms of conflicts, racism, stereotypical bias, or negative societal assumptions regarding their relationships. Everyday concerns of racism and discrimination have been shown to be a problem for several decades across Finland (Heikkilä 2005; Puuronen 2011; Rastas 2005), and the recognition of racialising discourses and practices in the present orientation of these parents is an important strand in this nexus.

We have thematised the analysis within a narrative structure: as a continuum from discourse level aspirations for success and happiness to parental fears of racism and aims to win it. The unbalance of parental sights of hopes and fears tries to find a good solution in dreams of a more cosmopolitan future – and in seeing their children as a new generation that both creates it and is capable to respond to its demands. This analytical structure has aimed at understanding the special contradictions the interviewed adults campaigned with in their societal and emotional task as parents. The positive side of the scale gets it weight from possibilities that the Finnish learning society promises to its youth: if they become (and are pushed to become) merited within its structures and norms, there is a promise of success for them. Beside this strategic orientation, there is also a more mental one: if the kids learn (and are taught) to trust in themselves and to live in peace with others, their mental wellbeing and happiness are probably guaranteed.

All this can be turned as a pro-activist responsibility of parents, as the analysis here shows. However, the “pushing” task of these parents is heavier than for the “usual” ones: experiences of racism and discrimination in their lives have been real which makes them anxious when aiming at protecting their children. The dynamic of fear was frequently present in expressions of the interviewed parents: What if the children must face all the

discrimination and bad behaviour that the parents had faced? Fear for their children's future has become an increasing part of the everyday experience for parents.

Some parents – especially fathers – of this study are religious Christians for whom religious values were smoothing their parental ambivalence described above. A true belief that guides their children's life-courses is the most valued “lesson” that they offer and that can go beyond everything else. In social scientific studies of parenthood religious values and practices of families are often overlooked, and this dimension seems to earn a more interested sight also according to this analysis (cf. Berg & Peltola 2015; Irwin & Elley 2013; Lahelma & Gordon 2008; Rajander & Lappalainen 2010; Vincent & Ball 2007).

A wider vision for a better future of the parents of this study was called as a cosmopolitan dream in the analysis. The term refers to an idea of seeing their children as representatives of a totally new kind of generation living in Finland. To go for this, the parents outlined their upbringing orientations with expressions of educating multi- and intercultural, multilingual, culturally open-minded, resilient, and flexible future adults to become citizens in a new kind of non-racist society. A key skill to be taught here is social and cultural open-mindedness – described, for example, by Ulf Hannerz (1996, 103) as entailing “an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other”. This new generation is not a prisoner of one culture and nationalistic nation-state, no way. In the context of this article, cosmopolitan dream refers to resources that parents think would allow their children to have a competitive edge when making their way within diverse cultures and countries. This includes, as suggested elsewhere, cosmopolitan socialisation (Ebot 2022), where parents expect their children to not only integrate different cultural backgrounds into their idea of self but also to be ready to have their voices heard and and advance change in the Finnish society.

Parents' inclination to provide their children with cultural resources from diverse origins and homelands also reflects their own ambitions and cosmopolitan aspirations that have faced resistance, this far. The phenotype of their children has an impact on their parents' reflections of not only emotional support but also on their emphasis on school-going, future education, and academic achievement. An important question for them has been: what is required for their children to succeed without being excluded or discriminated?

In future analyses, there is a need to broaden the scope for children's voices, which are missing here. Children and young people are no passive recipients of their parents' initiatives, expectations, fears, and aspirations but negotiate and create life-directions of their own. While it is clear that research on Finnish-African couples and their families is still in its infancy in Finland and much work needs to be conducted to expand our understanding of these groups, hopefully this article and the research project on which it is based, has contributed to the development of this area.

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