

The Case for Arts in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Africa

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Abstract

In the aftermath of a violent conflict, especially where there have been mass atrocities, violations of the rule of law and human rights abuses, the achievement of reconciliation and peacebuilding remains an immensely difficult challenge. Recently, arts-based approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding have been supported as an emerging area of research and practice. It is increasingly being seen as a central facet of peace-building and transitional justice. Despite this, arts-based approaches to peacebuilding as an area of study and practice remain under-researched. There remains a gap in understanding the impact community-devised arts projects can have on peace formation amongst diverse actors. This paper fills this gap by analysing the academic evidence to determine how arts can positively promote peacebuilding, healing, reconciliation, and social transformation in Africa. The paper highlights the role that arts and cultural programmes play as part of a spectrum of interventions linking culture, security, and development to sustainable peace. The findings show how arts can be utilised as a powerful means of communication. It suggests programmes that could serve as measures when locally led with an understanding founded in local cultural traditions. The research draws caution against the ability of arts to transform conflict-ridden areas where there is propaganda and underlying agendas. This paper identifies possible future agendas of research and practice that could create evidence based on the role that arts play in peacebuilding and policies to ensure sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Keywords: Arts and reconciliation; transitional justice; conflicts in Africa; peacebuilding; the role of arts and culture; violent conflict

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Introduction

Africa is a conflict-prone continent, and countries in Africa face considerable obstacles to attaining peace and stability. Twenty-eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa alone have a long history of conflict and remain a “volatile mix” of poverty, corruption, instability, and insecurity.¹ Many of these conflicts have not abated, and where there has been a ceasefire, there remains the constant threat of resurgence. Indeed, the recent re-emergence of armed hostilities, violence resulting from contested elections, ethnic violence, terrorism and radical extremism in various parts of Africa, including but not limited to the Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, the Horn of Africa,² and portions of the Mano River Basin suggests the ever-present threat of conflict and war.³ For example, the proliferation of violence from the Sahel to West Africa’s coastal countries is evinced by the revival of attacks adjacent to Burkina Faso in northern Cote d’Ivoire.⁴ There remains the constant fear of violent extremism spreading to other parts of the country and neighbouring states including Libya, Beinin-Togo, Ghana, Libya, South Sudan, Northern Mozambique and Ethiopia. Research has highlighted that Cameroon’s north-west and south-west regions are also not immune to conflict and remain susceptible to ongoing violence and conflict, whilst the Central African Republic (CAR), for several years now, has been entrapped in a persistent struggle.⁵ Specifically, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso have been at the mercy of sustained onslaughts.⁶

The conflicts in Africa can be attributed to colonial legacy, slavery and the struggle for one’s identity, which has left societies extremely divided.⁷ Furthermore, Africa’s prevalence of undemocratic and dictatorial regimes has translated to turbulent and often violent changes in power, gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial

1 Shah, A. 2014. “Conflicts in Africa.” *Global Issues*, September 27. Accessed 4 November 2023. <https://www.globalissues.org/issue/83/conflicts-in-africa>, p. 1.

2 Adam, N. and O. Moderan. 2021. “Many Strategies But Little Progress Securing the Sahel.” *ISS Today*, January, 26. Accessed 9 November 2023. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/many-strategies-but-little-progress-securing-the-sahel>.

3 The Economic, Social and Cultural Council. 2021. *Policy Booklet on African Union Theme of The Year 2021*. (ECOSOCC Resource Centre: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.)

4 US Department of State. 2021. “Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Côte d’Ivoire.” US Department of State. Accessed 4 November 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/cote-divoire>.

5 ISS PSC Report. 2021. “African Conflicts to Watch in 2022: Amid Ongoing War and Political Strife, Urgent Action is Needed to Avoid Disaster in Africa’s Worst-Affected Countries.” *PSC Insights*, December, 17. Accessed 5 November 2023. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/african-conflicts-to-watch-in-2022>.

6 Economic Commission for Africa. 2017. *Conflict in the Sahel Region and the Developmental Consequences*. (Economic Commission for Africa: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.)

7 ACCORD. 2015. “Informal Peacebuilding Initiatives in Africa: Removing the Table.” *ACCORD*, March, 9. Accessed 12 November 2023. <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/informal-peacebuilding-initiatives-in-africa/>.

executions.⁸ The various regimes exploited ethnic diversity and economic underdevelopment to retain control. The lack of accountability by governments, in turn, served to weaken states and create an environment for the civil wars that consumed and continue to engulf parts of Africa. It has been reported that violent extremism, terrorism and the constant threat thereof will continue for the foreseeable future, causing insecurity and a major humanitarian crisis.⁹ A fundamental explanation for the inability to resolve such conflicts can be attributed to the fact that such conflicts are most often motivated by cultural and identity issues together with a struggle over limited resources and economic and social grievances.¹⁰

If the African continent hopes to achieve its goal of a “*peaceful and secure Africa*” under Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063,¹¹ *there is an urgent need to utilise* traditional methods for peace and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict environments. Initiatives that are inclusive of non-confrontational approaches that encourage empathetic expressions and collaborations must be pursued. Such an approach to conflict prevention and resolution will assist in establishing a culture of security, sustainable peace and reconciliation. Consequently, there must be a continual search for solutions towards addressing protracted conflict and instabilities. To this end, the arts and culture merit investigation.¹²

In accordance thereof and by using and exploring the crucial connection of the arts to peacebuilding and social transformation, Africans across the continent are increasingly reimagining how Africa could become more successful and conflict-free and, in so doing, reclaim public space. This vision is echoed by the African Union (AU). In support thereof, the AU in 2021, has, for only the second time since its inception, prioritised art with the theme, “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the

8 African Union Panel of the Wise. 2013. *Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges in the Fight Against Impunity*. (The African Union Series, New York: International Peace Institute), 7.

9 Center for Preventive Action. 2023. “Violent Extremism in the Sahel.” Council on Foreign Relations, February, 14 . Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>., p 3.

10 Baily, A. 2019. *The Art of Peace*. (The British Council: UK).

11 African Union. 2019. “Agenda 2963: The Africa We Want.” African Union. Accessed 15 November 2023. <https://au.int/agenda2063/overview>.

12 Baily A (n. 10)

Africa We Want.”¹³ The arts have been touted¹⁴ as having considerable potential in reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives for social transformation not only in the conflict resolution field but also in post-conflict reconciliation.¹⁵ The idea is that channelling artistic expression not only creates the foundations necessary to deliver peace to war-torn and conflict-prone regions of the continent but can also assist in realising the goals of the AU’s Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹⁶

It is acknowledged that the arts were used as a weapon of war to incite, provoke, agitate and sustain an environment of hatred, intolerance and violence. However, it has also been used in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. This paper investigates how the arts, through their transformative and restorative potential, can support war-torn societies in reconciling and rehabilitating. This study will consequently examine how art and cultural activities can be a successful element in peace and reconciliation processes in multi-faceted post-war settings. This discussion flows from the main research question of how arts and culture can contribute to peace and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. The article concludes by providing strategies for utilising the available opportunities to support reconciliation and peacebuilding and an environment that promotes a culture of peace, tolerance, and human rights. Since arts-based methods can offer an inclusive, safe space favourable towards sustainable healing and peacebuilding, this paper will further advocate for a more focussed application and incorporation of arts and culture into peace-building efforts through the inclusion of arts and culture into formal policy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide evidence on how art and cultural activities have contributed to rebuilding trust and empathy and promoting tolerance and diversity in communities devastated by conflict. This paper considers the understanding of Arts and Culture in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. This article recommends that artists and organisations are key to peacebuilding initiatives in creating aesthetic, safe spaces that encourage social transformation, peace, and reconciliation. In providing a well-rounded

13 United States Institute of Peace. 2021. “Building a Peaceful Africa Through Arts, Culture and Heritage.” United States Institute of Peace, July, 26. Accessed 6 November 2023. <https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/07/building-peaceful-africa-through-arts-culture-and-heritage>. The theme ‘Contribution of Arts, Culture and Heritage to Peace’ accompanies the African Union Year 2021: ‘Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want’ which aligns with Aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063 and with 2021 International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development. See also, UNESCO. 2021. “Theme 1: Contribution of Arts, Culture and Heritage to Peace - Concept Note.” UNESCO. Accessed 28 October 2023. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/concept_note_1_-_the_contribution_of_arts_culture_and_heritage_to_sustainable_peace.pdf.

14 Deane, T. 2021. “The Potential Role of Arts and Culture in the Reconciliation Process in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka.” *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 10 (6): 13–30.

15 The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (n 3)

16 United States Institute of Peace (n 13)

perspective, the discussion centres on using arts and culture for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Literature Review

Defining and Understanding Arts and Culture in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

At the outset, it is necessary to define the links between art, culture, and conflict to understand how the arts and culture can positively contribute to conflict-affected communities. The arts are often defined as “being first and foremost an expression of the culture” and heritage of individual communities or societies.¹⁷ Wabwire defines it as “defying all linguistic boundaries, art is considered a universal language that provides an avenue for ordinary citizens at all levels of society to engage in broader national civic participation”.¹⁸ The domain of “the arts” incorporates a broad spectrum of practices like performing arts, musical works, dance, theatre prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction, oral and written literary forms, solo and ensemble.¹⁹ This paper will accordingly centre upon “the arts” as a comprehensive term and will include varied cultural activities that utilise creative and artistic methods led by various stakeholders, including but not limited to cultural facilitators and artists.²⁰ The types of art that will be evaluated include *inter alia*; theatricals like forum theatre, playback and participatory theatre; radical and resistance arts; exhibitions; photography; therapeutic arts; singing groups festivals; arts and singing camps; youth arts projects; oral history and storytelling projects; participatory arts projects; musical and theatrical performances; murals and graffiti; drumming circles and choirs; painting and fine arts; traditional and indigenous arts; textile art, quilting and sewing; sculpture; digital media and blogging projects; film-making; poetry workshops and events and fiction writing.²¹

Where there is engagement with these various art forms, either as spectators or creators, it presents powerful pathways for reflection, experimentation, creativity and empathy. Research has indicated that the power of arts to present people with an aesthetic experience assists in building emotional connections. The power of arts in engaging people on both cognitive and visceral levels lies in their unique ability to rise above

17 Deane T (n 14)

18 Wabwire, J. I. 2023. “The Role of Community Arts in Promoting Peacebuilding: A Case Study from East Africa.” Documenting Peace, April, 1. Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://documentingpeace.org/the-role-of-community-arts-in-promoting-peacebuilding/>.

19 Farrar, J. 2023. “Peacebuilding and the Arts: An Introduction.” Shared Future News, September, 7. Accessed 16 November 2023. <https://sharedfuture.news/peacebuilding-and-the-arts-an-introduction/>.

20 Fairey, T. 2017. “The Arts in Peace-Building and Reconciliation: Mapping Practice.” Art & Reconciliation, July. Accessed 4 December 2023. https://artreconciliation.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/181/2019/07/Fairey_ArtsPeacebuilding.pdf, p. 5.

21 *ibid*

rational thought and language.²² John Paul Lederach, a leading conflict resolution scholar,²³ refers to this as the “wow factor”. He states that:²⁴

I would call this the wow factor. It can only be understood in parallel with the arts and the creative process, as opposed to sciences and the analytical process. Understanding in the sciences comes, for the most part, through cognitive processes of breaking phenomena down into parts that can be studied. We ‘see’ analytically by pieces. The artistic process, on the other hand, goes beyond the view seen through a parsimonious lens to capture the whole. It provides a way for us to ‘see’ — to discern and grasp — what is visible but not seen with the eyes. That is the capacity of a painting, poem, play or photograph. In its small wholeness, a deep truth about something is revealed and understood. When applied to peacebuilding, such a process is not set into motion by logical intent and cognitive design, but rather, as many artists would say, by intuition and an ‘I feel into it’ quality. It is the intervention of an energy that goes beyond cognitive understanding and penetrates to a new level of understanding, motivation, and action.

Whether or not you agree with Lederach in his somewhat harsh delineation between the creative process and the sciences, his acknowledgement that the arts can expose a “deep truth” beyond cognitive understanding and firmly situating the creative process as a “fulcrum of conflict resolution” which is certainly laudable.²⁵ These sentiments certainly expand on recent developments in cognitive psychology. The idea is that to improve reactive aggression in hostile relationships, much more than rational deliberations are required.²⁶ Lederach consequently and rightly asserts that emotional faculties that may have been stunted during periods of violence and oppression may be stimulated during aesthetic experiences. Consequently, if the work of reconciliation and peacebuilding relies on these emotional capacities to manoeuvre the painful complexities of healing, reconstruct damaged relationships, and facilitate a more refined understanding of conflicting narratives, the arts can certainly provide a valuable option.²⁷

22Sztompka, P. 2014. *Agency and Structure (RLE Social Theory): Reorienting Social Theory*. (Routledge).

23 Lederach, J. P. 2010. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. (New York: Oxford University Press); Lederach, J. P. and Lederach A. J. 2010. *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation*. (New York: Oxford University Press); Schirch, L. 2004. *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books).

24 Sampson, C., M.Abu-Nimer, C. Liebler, and D. Whitney (eds) (2009). *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding A Resource for Innovators*. (United States: Taos Institute Publications), pp. 121–2.

25 Lederach, J. P. (n 23)

26 Specifically, research conducted by psychologists Peter Brecke and William Longue found that, “in the context of post-war reconciliation, hot emotional patterns rather than cool rationality are the linchpin of transforming anger and aggression into empathy and a desire for affiliation”. See William, J. L. 2003. *War and Reconciliation Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution*. (Cambridge: Penguin Random House LLC).

27 Farrar J (n 19)

Other researchers like Craig Zelizer further argue that the capacity of arts to engage people on rational, cognitive and emotional levels holistically is a fundamental feature in arts-based initiatives for peacebuilding.²⁸ The seminal work by Cynthia Cohen further cements the theoretical foundations towards the value of arts-based approaches in peacebuilding.²⁹ She delineates seven ways that art and cultural initiatives can be designed to alleviate the aftermath of violence: empathising with each other's suffering; expressing remorse and forgiveness; telling, listening and revising stories; imagining and substantiating a new future; acknowledging and redressing injustices; appreciating common humanity and collectively or individually mourning losses. There is a wide range of arts-based methodologies that can achieve these ends, which will be discussed in the case studies below.

The term "culture", in its broadest sense, refers to one's race, ethnicity, dress, language, customs, sexuality, and gender that groups share.³⁰ Culture is how one defines oneself. It shapes perceptions, and it influences identity. It is consequently an expression of people's fundamental distinctiveness. Culture is ever-changing and constantly fluctuating, evolving, and adapting and is passed from generation through social memory processes. From the aspect of reconciliation and peacebuilding, arts, culture, and people's heritage have historically been associated with peace and security at both community and interpersonal levels. It has become evident that culture intersects with conflict for the fundamental reason that culture is linked to identity and shapes one's perception and significance of the world. While this association is certainly significant, what is equally notable is the use of arts and culture in conflict and insecurity. Whilst this association is certainly significant, what is equally notable is that it is often the case that conflicts manifest themselves through disagreements over cultures and cultural practices, leading to attacks on heritage systems and symbols and the ruination of artistic instruments and symbols.³¹ Africa's history is filled with examples³² of the use of oral history, prose, poetry, painting, drawing, music and sculpture to communicate, preserve and articulate communities' experiences of instability, violence, and conflict, together with social struggles and identity crises.

For centuries, several African artists have organised and documented their communities' lived realities through artistic expressions, which are vital not only for

28 Zelizer, C. M. 2004. "The Role of Artistic Processes in Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Peace and Conflict Studies* 10 (2).

29 Cohen, C. 2001. "Creative Approaches to Reconciliation." Internet Archive. Accessed 2 December 2023.
https://web.archive.org/web/20100530023805/http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Creative_Approaches.pdf.

30 Naidu-Silverman, E. 2015. *The Contribution of Art and Culture in Peace and Reconciliation Processes in Asia*. Copenhagen: CKU., p. 9.

31 The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (n 3)

32 Some examples include artists such as Chaibia Talal, Miriam Makeba, Nike Davies-Okundaye, Bibi Titi Mohammed, Roy Lewis and Wax Dey.

consolidating a historical memory database but it has been vital to post-conflict processes like accountability, truth, and reconciliation processes. For example, the use of cultural practices in countries like Mozambique (magamba spirits)³³ Rwanda (Gacaca courts)³⁴ and Uganda (Mato-Oput used by the Acholi in Northern Uganda)³⁵ is utilised as a mechanism to reintegrate societies after gross violations of human rights and to advance justice, truth-seeking and accountability. The use of the arts is also used in inter- and intra-community peacebuilding practices.³⁶ At first glance, it may not seem as if there is a direct link between peacebuilding and the arts, culture and heritage. However, on further reflection, one can ascertain that there is an established connection between arts and culture and peace and security. It has been stated that “although a painting can never stop a bullet, a painting can stop a bullet from being fired. Culture is a central component of conflicts between different groups and ethnicities. So, what could be more appropriate than using culture as a tool for conflict resolution?”³⁷

Looking at Africa’s long history of conflict and instability it begs the question of why, in post-conflict situations, investing in the arts is not a priority for governments. It is argued that “the arts remain marginalised within the field of peacebuilding because they are considered ‘soft’ approaches to the ‘hard’ concern of violent conflict”.³⁸ There is, however, a growing body of research situated within the broader framework of civil society-based approaches to peacebuilding that links the arts and conflict resolution. The following discussion will evidence some of this research.

Methodology and Scope of the Study

This study discusses the findings and data that were obtained during an initial scoping study and, subsequently, a literature review on the field of arts and peacebuilding. It draws on an interdisciplinary review of literature from the fields of human rights, art, culture, peacebuilding, and transitional justice. The distinctive approach of this paper is that it explores, through a few case studies, various forms of arts and cultural activities in peacebuilding within a wide range of conflict situations. It provides readers with a comprehensive viewpoint of the role of arts and culture in conflict-prevention processes, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. Whilst initiatives may be context-specific, as they

33 Thompson, K. G. 2016. “Indigenous Transitional Justice in Perspective: The Case of Mozambique.” *Small Wars Journal*, April, 7. Accessed 17 November 2023. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jml/art/indigenous-transitional-justice-in-perspective-the-case-of-mozambique>.

34 Le Mon, C. J. 2007. “Rwanda’s Troubled Gacaca Courts.” Dullah Omar Institute. Accessed 4 December 2023. <https://dullahomarinate.org.za/acjr/resource-centre/Gacaca.pdf>.

35 Mwaka, A. D., and W. O. Olango. 2023. “Reconciliation Among the Central Luo of Northern Uganda: The Ingredients and Process of Mato Oput.” *Cogent Social Sciences* 9: 1.

36 The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (n 3)

37 EUNIC. 2013. *Culture Report: Yearbook 2012/2013 Vol 5: Challenges for Europe's foreign policy*. (Robert Bosch Foundation: Stuttgart).

38 Shank, M., and L. Schirch 2008. “Strategic Arts-Based Peace-Building.” *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peach Research* 33 (2). <https://www.michaelshank.tv/strategic-arts-based-peacebuilding/>, p. 3.

should be, to a country, what is important is the message of the universal appeal of arts and culture to connect, heal and provide platforms for open dialogues in countries experiencing conflict. Importantly, it can be applied flexibly to facilitate understanding.³⁹ There is a plethora of arts and cultural initiatives that have occurred within Africa. Many independent and *ad hoc* organisations have been involved in driving initiatives at the local level to build peace. This is done by addressing specific issues like *inter alia* reconciliation, capacity building, ethnic violence, vulnerable people - like women and children - in conflict-ridden zones, reintegration of veterans and peace education. Due to the obvious limitations of a research paper of this kind, the focus will be on only a few initiatives within a few countries, including Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The discussion will further, but in brief, reference initiatives in Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya. The countries were chosen as the author aimed to provide examples of the positive role of arts and culture on reconciliation and peacebuilding across a range of conflict situations. The idea is that by referencing a few of the positive initiatives, other countries on the continent can learn from these successful experiences and adapt programmes to achieve peace, reconciliation, and development. Despite the growing evidence base, the link between the arts and peacebuilding remains a largely unexplored area of practice and scholarship. This paper aims to fill this gap and contribute to the growing evidence base for the case of arts in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Findings - Case Studies

Research has been steadily increasing wherein it is advocated that the arts and culture are beneficial for conflict resolution, conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peace.

Uganda

For approximately two decades, greater Northern Uganda had faced prolonged fighting between the Government of Uganda and different insurgent groups, most infamously the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).⁴⁰ During 1994 and 2002, northern Uganda was characterised by periods of instability where the LRA rebels' violent revolution displaced nearly two million people in the country.⁴¹ Following the aftermath of conflict, local artists developed a multiplicity of contemporary and indigenous forms of arts and cultural initiatives aimed at creative expression.⁴² These initiatives were then

39 McHenry, J. A. 2011. "Rural Empowerment Through the Arts: The Role of the Arts in Civic and Social Participation in the Mid-West Region of Western Australia." *Journal of Rural Studies* 27 (3): 245–253.

40 Finnström, S. 2008. *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. (Durham: Duke University Press).

41 Wabwire, J. I. (n 18)

42 McClain, L. 2012. "Artistic Suggestions for Peaceful Transition in Northern Uganda: What Youth Are Saying." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 2 (1): 152–163.

disseminated among conflict-ridden communities.⁴³ These communities, often articulated through civil society, required local participation in finding solutions to complicated issues regarding transitional justice, accountability for war-time rights violations and reconciliation. They called specifically for the establishment of community-centred transitional justice.⁴⁴ Indeed, the arts, especially drama and music, have provided a platform for grassroots people to show their displeasure with a lack of government progress and to provide specialised recommendations to policymakers.⁴⁵

The rebels themselves were a key part of the reconciliation process and peace talks. Accordingly, communities that use performing arts such as drama, dance, and music appeal to them to return home and accept amnesty. The high costs associated with visual art-making materials meant that the performing arts, rather than “plastic arts”, like sculpting or painting, are preferred. In addition, it is preferred because of the cultural relevance and prevalence of native rituals of oral storytelling through dance and music.⁴⁶ For example, the peoples of northern Uganda, especially the *Acholi*, have, as part of their historical folklore, embraced song and drama as two forms of storytelling. This allows for traditional stories to be documented and passed down through generations. These initiatives have contributed to ceasefires and the end of hostilities.

In Nigeria too, studies have lent credence to how music has the powerful potential to dispel ethnic tensions and relay inspirational messages of nationalism, unity, and civic responsibility.⁴⁷ In Uganda, local artist groups, like Music for Peace,⁴⁸ were especially strategic and captured popular sentiments through their artistic expressions. This meant that every person in the conflict listened to these sentiments posited by Music for Peace, most importantly even those who were abducted by the LRA and forced to work as sex slaves, porters, or soldiers,⁴⁹ as well as rebels in the bush, displaced persons and government forces, all paid attention. To utilise music as an instrument for peacebuilding, Music for Peace organises cultural immersion programmes by musicians and artists from across the continent, workshops, peace music parades and the annual

43 Opiyo, L. M. 2013. “Community Peacebuilding and Performing Arts in Northern Uganda: Reflections From the Field.” *Beyond Intractability*, March. Accessed 3 November 2023. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/opiyo-arts>.

44 McClain, L. and K. Anyeko. 2012. *Who Forgives Whom? Northern Uganda's Grassroots Views on the Amnesty Act*. Policy Brief. Gulu, Uganda: Justice and Reconciliation Project, p. 2.

45 Justice and Reconciliation Project. 2014. “About the Justice and Reconciliation Project Video.” Justice and Reconciliation Project, January, 20. Accessed 4 November 2023. <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/media/video/>.

46 McClain, L. 2010. “The Art of Creative Conflict Resolution: A Critical Evaluation of Approaches to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Northern Uganda.” *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee* 1 (1): 89–101.

47 Naidu-Silverman, E. (n 30)

48 See for example <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/music-for-peace/?location=uganda&theme>.

49 McClain, L. (n 42)

“Peace Music Competitions”. This organization has provided the necessary space for the recording of peace songs to promote and positive social change.

These initiatives allowed the arts to become “depositories for popular memory of past conflicts”.⁵⁰ It acted to preserve local narratives of lived events and provided interpretations of meaning. The arts also serve to generate intergenerational dialogue⁵¹ on social problems. It further offers recommendations for change.⁵² For example, the conflict saw the breaking down of many traditional standards and norms within the region. The killings of elders during the conflict and the disruptions experienced during displacements meant that many indigenous practices like *wango’o* (evening fireplace) became restricted or eroded.⁵³ Despite this erosion, the arts have provided a critical platform to various stakeholders in the communities with the opportunity to speak and be heard by not only their peers but for future generations as well. In Uganda, the arts have assisted in creating a vibrant dialogue on the ramifications of the struggles of, specifically, the vulnerable in society like the elderly, women and youth. It goes further, though, and provides an important intersection for discussions and arguments on how to advance as a united society. These experiences have further highlighted how creative processes can potentially overcome the inherent barriers to oral communication, thereby allowing for communicating and reaching dormant feelings in a way that the daily vernacular cannot.

The use of arts as an instrument of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Uganda has led to the ‘vernacularisation’ of international human rights instruments. This assisted in fostering a greater understanding of these international norms among the general population. The concept of ‘vernacularisation’ refers to how local actors inculcate international human rights standards and instruments “in the vernacular” or in ways that are contextually relevant to local communities.⁵⁴ A typical example can be found in the

50 Ibid, p. 3.

51 The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), a Ugandan non-governmental organisation (NGO), creates a culture for intergenerational dialogue around transitional justice issues, which includes accountability, forgiveness amnesty, truth-telling, memorialisation and reparations. For example, in 2011, the JRP developed a pilot community theatre project in four communities in northern Uganda. One initiative included partnering with school pupils in Abia, a community in the Lango sub-region in northern Uganda that experienced a massacre by the LRA around 2004. Pupils underwent two months of training facilitated by their teachers, and the pupils then developed and performed a forum-theater-style drama for their community.

52 McClain, L. 2012. “JRP Abia Community Theatre Performance 28 Sept 2011.” Justice and Reconciliation Project. Accessed 4 December 2023. <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2012/05/jrp-abia-community-theatre-performance-28sept2011/>.

53 Baines, E.2005. *Roco Wat i Acoli: Restoring Relationships in Acholi-land: Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reintegration*. Vancouver: Liu Institute for Global Issues, p. 20.

54 Merry, S. E. 2006. “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle.” *American Anthropologist* 108 (1): 38–51.

song by local artist Jeff Korondo, called “Wan Lutino (We are the Children)”. According to one verse:⁵⁵

Every day when they talk about children's rights, many people think they spoil the children, but I really think that is not true.
These are basic needs for the little child.
Basic needs are these:
Letting your child grow with happiness,
Giving your child a chance to play,
Listening to the ideas and problems of the child,
Fulfilling the basic needs for appropriate growth.
When we provide these basic needs, then that is what we call children's rights!
The children, too, have their roles that they have to play.
Taking goats for pasture — Your role!
Sweeping the compound — Your role!
Washing dishes — Your role!
Fetching some water — Your role!
But the most important is to study hard, study hard our children!

To allow the song to resonate with the people, the music was composed in a contemporary Afrobeat style. It was specifically commissioned by Save the Children (2006) in response to a children’s manifesto campaign in the prelude to the 2006 national elections. In line with the 1989 *International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, the song highlights the basic rights of children,⁵⁶ such as the right to develop to one's fullest potential and education.⁵⁷ What is important to note here is that the song takes cognisance of the fears held by local communities that such international concepts are “foreign” and will lead to rebellion in children and, consequently, a breakdown of the traditional values system, specifically children’s respect for their elders. The song, therefore, goes on to advocate for a “balanced supportive role of children within Ugandan society”. The vernacularisation of this *Convention* shows how the arts can express opposing views in a way that is relevant and relatable to the local context. The use of arts in Uganda has created vital platforms for having important dialogues and opening conversations on concerns afflicting post-war communities. It is acknowledged that there remains a need to carefully investigate the explicit effect that the arts have on the peacebuilding processes. However, these examples provide clear illustrations of the “rich context of conflict and recovery” that exists in the various approaches inherent in creative expression. The sustained attempts by Ugandan artists should challenge governments, scholars, practitioners, and organisations to become more aware of the effect that the arts have on societies in the aftermath of conflict and human rights atrocities.

55 Korondo, J. 2005. *Wan Lutino*. Kampala, Uganda: Save the Children in Uganda.

56 CRC Article 29.

57 CRC Article 19.

South Africa

The arts can motivate people to re-imagine alternative visions for a peaceful future. It serves to mediate expression and allows for freedom of expression. In South Africa, for example, arts and culture played an integral role in resisting apartheid. During the apartheid era, which was characterised by extreme violence and discrimination, oppressed South Africans used music and dance to voice their anger, resentment, rejection, and disapproval of apartheid policies. The black population found their voice in the arts at a time “when all other avenues of political expression were closed to them”.⁵⁸ Following the end of apartheid, Albie Sachs, a former freedom fighter and Judge of the South African Constitutional Court, wrote that “it is works of art that hold the promise of new ways of being in post-colonial Africa”.⁵⁹ He argued for taking the potential of art seriously and for giving it a suitable place in the public discourse. In recognising the potential of arts for reconciliation, he advocated for it as a key factor for social transformation in the new South Africa. The former judge saw arts as no longer being a weapon in the struggle, as the African National Congress (ANC) would have it during apartheid. For it to be effective, arts should be seen in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa as a tool that overcomes politics and produces a genesis “by performing the ambiguity and contradiction of historical events in a way that tribunals and truth commissions” simply cannot. The arts, he further contends, will be able to consider the ambiguities and incongruities associated with the complexities of politics since it has the potential to “yield truths that do not easily fit political or social mandates”. He concluded that “without the support for the arts in those spaces that experienced the force of apartheid most acutely, our ability to sustain the humanity and sense of freedom that underwrote South Africa’s transition would be jeopardized”.

Rwanda

Rwanda’s long history of identity and ethnicity-based conflict has seen it culminate in a genocide of mass proportions in 1994. This genocide saw approximately 800 000 people, mainly from the Tutsi minority,⁶⁰ killed in systematic massacres over three months.⁶¹ It is estimated that approximately 150 000 to 250 000 women were also raped.⁶² What was particularly significant is how the genocide that started in the capital

58 Naidu-Silverman, E. (n 30), p. 4.

59 Sachs delivered a lecture at the Centre of Humanities Research of the University of the Western Cape. See Sunday Argus. 2010. “Apartheid’s ‘Sterile Spaces’ Need Arts.” *Sunday Argus* 17 October (5); Sunday Independent. 2010. “Support the Arts in Places Apartheid Tried to Make Sterile – Sachs.” *Sunday Independent* 17 October (7).

60 The perception that the ruling Belgians, during Rwanda’s colonial period, favoured the minority Tutsis over the Hutus, exacerbated feelings of oppression and favouritism, eventually creating a legacy of tension. These tensions, however, culminated in conflict even before Rwanda gained its independence.

61 Human Rights Watch. 1999. “Rwanda Genocide.” Human Rights Watch, May, 17. Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno1-3-04.htm>.

62 United Nations. 1995. “Rwanda: A Brief History of the Country.” United Nations. Accessed 3 November 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>.

of Kigali and initiated by the Hutu nationalists spread with such speed and brutality throughout the country. The Hutu Power government and local officials themselves incited ordinary citizens to go to war against their neighbours. Popular music in radio broadcasts was specifically designed to escalate and promote ethnic violence.⁶³ Research indicates that these broadcasts played a significant role in the active involvement of killings by not only militia groups but ordinary civilians as well.⁶⁴ It is estimated that approximately 10 per cent of the overall violence, or 51 000 perpetrators, was as a result of the radio station.⁶⁵ The broadcasts not only directly influenced behaviour within villages that had radio reception, but they also indirectly did so by increasing involvement in neighbouring villages. The negative impact of the spillovers is estimated to have accelerated more militia violence than the direct effects itself.⁶⁶ In early July of 1994, the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front eventually gained control of the country through a military offensive. By this time, thousands of Rwandans were already dead, and approximately 2 million refugees – mainly from the Hutus- fled Rwanda. This refugee crisis exacerbated what had already turned into a full-blown humanitarian crisis.⁶⁷

Following the genocide, there have been significant investments in reconciliatory activities, in particular, initiatives relating to memorialisation, democracy education, and activities that draw upon a shared cultural heritage and national identity. These government efforts focusing on cultural programmes that are founded on shared cultural heritage and national identity have been fundamental to the creation of a unified Rwandan. The citizens and government of Rwanda have been reported as “successfully using [ing] music and dance to establish peace, reconciliation, harmony, unity, collective identity, and social solidarity among the different ethnic groups in the country despite their religious and political affiliations. Because it has worked in Rwanda, it can work elsewhere”.⁶⁸

Research has acknowledged the government’s reconciliatory activities, that has encouraged future generations to “abandon old ethnocentric views and to embrace a proud national identity and a commitment to carrying forward the government’s agenda

63 Yanagizawa-Drott, D. 2014. “Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (4): 1947–1994.

64 Kimani, M. 2007. “RTL: the Medium that Became a Tool for Mass Murder.” In Thompson, A. and K. A. Annan (ed). 2007. *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. London: Pluto Press.

65 Yanagizawa-Drott, D. (n 63)

66 Katz, E. and P. F. Lazarsfeld. 1995. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication*. New York, NY: Free Press.

67 History.com. 2023. “Rwandan Genocide.” History.com, May, 19. Accessed 15 November 2023. <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>.

68 Amanze, J. 2016. “The Role of Music and Dance in Peacemaking and Reconciliation: The Case of Rwanda after the 1994 Genocide.” In Kim, S, P Kollontai and S Yore. 2015. *Mediating Peace: Reconciliation Through Visual Art, Music and Film*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 230.

of unity, reconciliation and development”.⁶⁹ Referencing the 17th-century institution of *Iitorero*, which is focused on community service and national programmes for 18–35-year-olds and led by the government, it draws on Rwanda’s cultural history and provides a civic ‘school’ for Rwandans. Focusing on teachings around the government’s vision of unity and ‘national reconciliation’ has contributed to the changing of attitudes by Rwandans.⁷⁰ These schools have been successful in promoting integrity, hard work and self-reliance, fostering a common sense of ‘Rwandanness’ rather than “divisive ethnic affiliations”.⁷¹

In addition, there is investment in film and theatre. One notable example includes a peacebuilding and social justice NGO, Never Again Rwanda.⁷² This NGO assists communities affected by the genocide through utilising film and theatre to encourage “creative, active and critical thinking” in citizens. The sessions are headed by members of the community who have a unique understanding of the local context within which they operate. Some of the activities include storytelling, group theatre, poetry and drama and draw upon Rwandan values and culture. This approach to learning is aimed at critical thinking and encouraging the youth to rethink their understanding of their ‘values, rights, democratic principles, and responsibilities’. It also aims to shed light on the dangers of conflict and the benefits of coexisting peacefully. Some reported benefits include a positive impact on participants’ recovery from trauma.⁷³

Other initiatives include remembrance and commemoration ceremonies. Commemoration has played a central role in Rwanda’s efforts to recover. Each year in April, the country begins ‘*Kwibuka*, three months of events commemorating the genocide. A key focus is the Flame of Remembrance. The Flame of Remembrance is taken on a “tour” of the country in much the same way as the Olympic Flame is toured. Communities then mark their arrival through community performances of music, poetry, and theatre.⁷⁴ These commemorations form part of the Rwandan government’s strategy (inclusive of civic education, socioeconomic development and reconciliation through justice) to prevent a return to violence and heal a divided nation. These efforts provide examples of evidence for the role that arts and cultural programmes can play as

69 Bentrovato, D. 2015. “Rwanda, Twenty Years On: Assessing the RPF’s Legacy Through the Views of the Great Lakes.” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 55 (218): 231–254. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesaficaines.18095>

70 Melvin, J. 2013. “Correcting History: Mandatory Education in Rwanda.” *Journal of Human Rights in the Commonwealth*. <https://doi.org/10.14296/jhrc.v1i2.1715>

71 Nzahabwanayo, S., K. Horsthemke, and T. P. Mathebula. 2017. “Identification and Critique of the Citizenship Notion Informing the Iitorero Training Scheme for High School Leavers in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31 (2): 226–250.

72 McPherson, G., S. Mamattah, A. Moore, G. Cifuentes, and Y. Moualla. 2018. *A Review of the Contribution of Arts & Culture to Global Security & Stability*. University of the West Scotland.

73 Executive Director of *Never Again Rwanda*, quoted McPherson, G. et al. (n 72)

74 Kazibwe, A. I. 2017. “Theatre, Music, Film to Mark Kwibuka.” *The East African*, April, 1. Accessed 17 November 2023. <https://bit.ly/2KnhW7P>.

part of a wide range of initiatives aimed at linking therapy, culture, development, security, peacebuilding, reconciliation and strengthening of civil society.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is Africa's second-largest country, and for decades, it has experienced several devastating wars. It continues to be embroiled in one of the world's longest-running conflicts. Of the most devastating of these conflicts is the 1996/1997 First Congo War, which began in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Rwanda and Uganda invaded the eastern DRC to root out the remaining perpetrators of the genocide. Since 1996, the conflict has caused the deaths of approximately six million people.⁷⁵ In 1998, the Second Congo War broke out, with nine countries fighting each other on Congolese soil. While estimates vary greatly⁷⁶, the death toll of the Second Congo War, which officially ended in 2003, and the associated humanitarian disaster may have reached over three million people by 2004.⁷⁷

Both wars involved multiple neighbouring African states⁷⁸ (most significantly Uganda, but also Zimbabwe, Angola, and Burundi) and several militia groups inside the DRC. The signing of peace agreements brought an end to some of these wars,⁷⁹ However, in eastern Congo, peace talks continue to be fragile.⁸⁰ Despite moving on from the 1990s national conflict, the country is currently embroiled in more localised conflicts within specific regions, which are centred on power, resources, and land. The DRC remains a

75 Parens, R. 2022. "Conflict in Eastern Congo." Foreign Policy Research Institute, September, 8. Accessed 4 November 2023. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/09/conflict-in-eastern-congo-a-spark-away-from-a-regional-conflagration/#:~:text=The%20ongoing%20conflict%20in%20the,armed%20groups%20fuel%20the%20fighting.>

76 Center for Preventive Action. 2023. "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo" Council on Foreign Relations, June, 20. Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo.>

77 Reyntjens, F. 2020. "The Congo Wars." *African History*.

78 Reyntjens, F. 2009. *The 'War of Liberation'. In The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

79 Examples include the following agreements: United Nations Peacemaker Lusaka Peace Agreement of 1999. At <https://peacemaker.un.org/drc-lusaka-agreement99>; The United Nations Peacemaker Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda on the withdrawal of Rwandan troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the dismantling of the former FAR and Interahamwe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) of 2002. At <https://peacemaker.un.org/drcrwanda-agreementwithdrawal2002>; Luanda Agreement of 6 September 2002 on the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cooperation and harmonization of relations between the two countries. At <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/236>; Comprehensive and Inclusive Agreement of 17 December 2002 on Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, signed on 17 December 2002 (Pretoria II Agreement). At <https://peacemaker.un.org/drc-agreementontransition2002>.

80 Usanov, A., M. de Ridder, W. L. Auping, and S. Lingemann. 2013. "The Democratic Republic of Congo." In *Coltan, Congo & Conflict: Polinares Case Study*. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12571.6>.

complex and challenging humanitarian situation because of erratic fighting throughout the country, together with the persistent threats of violence. In the latter months of 2023, the DRC was confronted with an increase in violence and conflict. The clashes involved militant groups like M23 around issues related to natural resources, territory, political violence, extrajudicial killings by security forces and increasing hostilities with neighbouring countries, which contributed to high rates of civilian casualties and displacements.⁸¹ As the conflict dynamics rapidly change, violence in the resource-rich eastern provinces of Congo has also shown no signs of abating.⁸² In addition to reports of increasing civilian casualties, the UN reports that approximately 6.9 million people have been internally displaced.⁸³

In eastern DRC, the protracted armed conflict has left the majority traumatised and marginalised.⁸⁴ Despite attempting various solutions to the protracted conflict, it has seemingly negatively impacted the possibility of peace. The failure of these solutions has been attributed to the conflicts being almost entirely addressed at the international level, where international organisations are said to design peacebuilding strategies and then impose them on the country for implementation.⁸⁵ This causes resentment among the Congolese people as the management of the Congolese crises is then seen to fall beyond their control predominantly.⁸⁶ Achieving peace and substituting what had become known as a ‘culture of violence’ will require concerted reconciliation and national healing initiatives. The *Goma Amani Festival*⁸⁷ is a notable local initiative that was carried out “in response to the escalating conflicts and instability caused

81 Princewill, N. 2022. “DRC: Anti UN Protest.” CNN, August, 4. Accessed 7 November 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/04/africa/drc-anti-un-protest-explainer-intl/index.html>.

82 Africa News. 2023. “Eastern DRC Fighting Again.” Africa News, October, 23. Accessed 15 November 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/10/23/eastern-drc-fighting-again-shifts-the-balance-in-north-kivu/>.

83 News Wires. 2023. “Record 6.9 Internally Displaced in DRC Congo.” France 24, October, 30. Accessed 14 November 2023. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20231030-record-6-9-million-internally-displaced-in-dr-congo-un-says>.

84 Melchade, K. 2023. “Positive Peace Stories: Youth Participation in the Peace and Security Process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” United Network of Young Peace Builders, July, 19. Accessed 16 November 2023. <https://unoy.org/positive-peace-stories-youth-participation-in-the-peace-and-security-process-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

85 Adeyemi Olayiwola Kayode Dipeolu, and United Nations. Economic Commission For Africa. 2015. *Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo : Causes, Impact and Implications for the Great Lakes Region*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations, Economic Commission For Africa.

86 Some examples include the Kivu Peace Conference (2008); the 2009 STAREC (Programme for the Stabilization and Reconstruction of Areas Emerging from Armed Conflicts); the May 2021 State of Siege declared by the DRC President in North Kivu and the Ituri Adeyemi Olayiwola Kayode Dipeolu, and United Nations. Economic Commission For Africa. (n 85)

87 Amani Festival. 2023. “Amani Festival 2023.” Amani Festival. Accessed 3 November 2023. https://amanifestival-com.translate.google.fr/en-images?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=wapp.

by M23⁸⁸ and other insurgents located within the eastern parts of the DRC. This *Amani* (meaning “peace” in Swahili) festival is a flagship music and dance event for persons wanting peace and seeking to end violence. It acts to discourage young people from joining rebel groups and seeks to promote peace and culture. This annual festival is comprised of masterclasses with influential peace activists, dialogues, concerts, and artistic performances. The initiative is spearheaded by members of the Goma Cultural Centre to ensure the peaceful co-existence of citizens, specifically in the Great Lakes region.

In addition, an NGO, Search for Common Ground,⁸⁹ aims to strengthen transformation and promote unity and culture through ‘artistic practice and production’. The NGO has extensively utilised the arts to showcase its initiatives towards conflict transformation in countries including South Sudan, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Burundi, and the DRC.⁹⁰ Specifically, participatory theatre for social change involves actors interacting with communities to understand their realities, listen to problems and collect stories to present this information back to them in the form of drama. The objective is to encourage people to think and look at conflict through the lens of non-violence and to find alternate and peaceful responses to the conflicts. Audience members are then invited to participate as performers and mimic possibilities that can challenge the narrative around the conflicts. Discussions around the issues raised or identified in the performance are then considered. In addition, Search for Common Ground effectively utilised participatory theatre in the DRC by involving soldiers-at-arms and their spouses to educate and deter them from using rape as a weapon of war. Estimates indicate that 78 per cent of audience members in the DRC felt considerably enlightened enough to deal non-violently with conflict.⁹¹

At both national and local levels, such initiatives are opening dialogues on fundamental issues relating to conflicts and their effects, and it looks to be succeeding in establishing a sense of community. This is a key tool for peace-building. In this context, other African countries can serve as a source of inspiration for the DRC to develop positive

88 Africa VOA News. 2022. “What’s Behind the Rising Conflict in Eastern DRC.” VOA, July, 22. Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/explainer-what-s-behind-the-rising-conflict-in-eastern-drc-/6670314.html>.

89 See Search For Common Ground’s website for a full account of their work <https://www.sfcg.org/what-we-do/>.

90 Herrington, R. 2016. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Participatory Theatre for Change*. 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground. https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/Monitoring_Participatory_Theatre_for_Change_PTCM_EModule_071816.pdf.

91 Slachmuisjlder, L. 2012. “Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation. Training Manual.” The Communication Initiative Network, March, 21. Accessed 31 October 2023. <https://www.comminet.com/edutain-africa/content/participatory-theatre-conflict-transformation-training-manual>.

strategies. This will allow the DRC to learn, as appropriate, from the implementation of successful national dialogues on conflicts.⁹²

Burundi

In Burundi, during the height of its civil war⁹³ in 1997, a radio programme was introduced by Search for Common Ground that comprised several sketches called *Umubanyi niwe muryango* (Our Neighbours Are Our Family). The radio programme was initiated under the auspices of Studio *Ijambo*, the country's first humanitarian radio station.⁹⁴ The radio dramas or sketches incorporated "recorded dialogues in serial form" and were aimed at encouraging reconciliation between warring parties.⁹⁵ This long-running production of radio drama serials was considered to be extremely productive and successful.⁹⁶ The story centred on two neighbouring families, one a Hutu and the other a Tutsi, who eventually develop strong bonds with each other. However, the audience is unaware of who is whom. This is an intended omission to allow the audience to "transcend ethnic divisions and surpass prejudices".⁹⁷ This family-saga, soap-opera kind of presentation of quintessential star-crossed lovers mimicked Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, characters who were divided and united by struggles. The production was then disseminated to Congo in 2006 and became very popular. It is currently disseminated under the Swahili name *Jirani ni ndugu* (Your Neighbour Is Your Brother).⁹⁸ The interconnected nature of the conflicts in the entire region since the 1990s has persistently threatened human rights. *Jirani ni ndugu* has consequently been understood to relate to any alternative dispute resolution dramas in the Great Lakes region.

The success of the popular drama-serial format of *Jirani ni ndugu* has seen it widely accepted and broadcast in the Great Lakes region. Its development and characters are quite codified, but the storyline adapts and interweaves variants in different towns. It remains centred around the idea of an "impossible union" and aims at advancing peace

92 Adeyemi Olayiwola Kayode Dipeolu, and United Nations. Economic Commission For Africa. (n 85)

93 Between 1993 and 2006, a civil war between Burundi's ethnic Hutu rebels and the Tutsi-dominated army resulted in 1.2 million Burundians being displaced and 300 000 being killed. The difference between the fighting in Burundi and the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda is that in Burundi, whilst civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict, the conflict was between organised armed groups, not civilians. See UMass Amherst. 2006. "Conflict Profile: Burundi (1993 – 2006)." Political Economy Research Institute. Accessed 5 November 2023. http://peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/dpe/modern_conflicts/burundi.pdf.

94 Le Lay, M. 2021. "Performing for Peace and Social Change in Africa's Great Lakes Region." *Theatre Research International* 46 (1): 23–38.

95 Le Lay, M. 2016. "Literary and Theatrical Circulations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, from the Belgian Colonial Empire to the Africa of the Great Lakes." *Artl@s Bulletin* 5 (2): Article 5.

96 In early April 2015 the troupe was up to episode 909, airing two episodes a week.

97 Le Lay, M. (n 94) pp. 4-5.

98 Le Lay, M. (n 95)

and harmony. Provided that the issues between the neighbours have indeed been central to the conflicts, the “underlying idea of once-warring neighbours” uniting “in basic human ways” is a relatable concept.⁹⁹

Kenya

Unlike its neighbours, Kenya has experienced relative stability over the years. Whilst Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda have all at some time experienced violent disputes and warfare, it was Kenya’s post-election violence of January 2008 which changed the *status quo* of what had only been termed a fragile but peaceful environment. The post-election violence led to an escalation in sexual violence, approximately 2,000 refugees and 1 133 casualties, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, the destruction of 117 216 private properties and 491 government-owned properties, including offices, vehicles, schools, and health centres and the least 350 000 persons becoming internally displaced.¹⁰⁰ Like so many ethnic conflicts before it, the 2008 post-election conflict also played itself along the lines of ethnicity. These ethnic tensions still find a significant place in Kenyan political life as they remain fuelled by resentment over inequalities, privilege, and land issues.¹⁰¹

In response to the violence, the Amani People’s Theatre (APT) was founded in 1994 to unite volunteer artists in theatre and drama. It aims to disseminate stories about peace and reconciliation within communities.¹⁰² Directly related to peacebuilding initiatives, the APT’s work deals with periodical violence and strife that proceed every election. It uses a medley of communications methodologies but favours participatory theatre. These communication methodologies are not only heavily rooted in African Traditional models of communication but are founded on the theories and works of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal.¹⁰³ The APT offers a collaborative and creative forum allowing people to use these platforms to communicate on issues concerning them in a reconciliatory manner effectively. These initiatives are designed to help communities realise solutions to their problems and help bring hope and restore dignity.

99 Le Lay, M. (n 94). *Performing for Peace and Social Change*, p. 5.

100 Centre for Strategic and International Studies. 2009. “Post-Election Violence in Kenya and Its Aftermath.” CSIS, August, 11. Accessed 2 November 2023. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/smart-global-health/post-election-violence-kenya-and-its-aftermath>.

101 Cooke, J. 2009. “Background on the Post-Election Crisis in Kenya.” CSIS, August, 6. Accessed 2 December 2023. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/smart-global-health/background-post-election-crisis-kenya>.

102 See <https://aptkenya.org/> for a full description of their initiatives.

103 As indicated on their site <https://aptkenya.org/>. It states that: “Oppressed by Brazilian educators Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal immensely inspire the work of the organization. APT makes a difference by weaving together the performance Arts, Peace education, Reconciliation and African traditional forms of performance and rituals in order to increase the peoples’ knowledge and sensitivity, expand their awareness and creativity, sharpen their understanding and caring-all with the conviction that the cultural enlightenment and community involvement in fashioning stories of peace, can help lead a more civil society.”

These case studies and consequent discussions have highlighted that the arts and culture can play a vital role in breaking social barriers and bridging socially constructed differences. In the aftermath of war, there remains a constant struggle to restore one's individual and national identity. The arts and culture have the potential to create the foundations necessary to be inclusive and end a culture of violence, develop a sense of national unity, and inspire a future based on peace and understanding. Ethnicity, resentment, and division are at the heart of some of the ongoing tensions in the continent. The case studies have highlighted how activities that focus on a shared heritage can be used towards the peace-building process.¹⁰⁴ However, art and cultural activities, whilst they can be used to facilitate and build peace and reconciliation processes, could also fuel hatred, violence, and conflict.

Art as Propaganda

A typical example would include the fact that some of the most well-known propaganda artists were of Nazi Germany in World War II.¹⁰⁵ Stephenson and Zanotti highlight that “the latent power of the arts and aesthetics surely may also be mobilized on behalf of specifically partisan interests in conflicts, as it was certainly employed in Northern Ireland by both parties during the Troubles or even to proselytize for evil, as German film director Leni Riefenstahl did so effectively on behalf of the Third Reich”.¹⁰⁶ It was also argued by Myria Christophini that “animation can act as a tool to enable people to visualize future possibilities and can show transformation and a metamorphosis which is used for both and inciting hatred and in promoting peace”.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Michael Minch illustrates the story behind how A former US Army member, Wade Michael Page, murdered six people in a Sikh Temple in August 2012.¹⁰⁸ Wade worked as a musician in two “white power” bands, namely End Empathy and Define Hate. The bands aimed to garner support for a white nationalist agenda and to incite anger, violence, and support. When used as propaganda, dictators and violent regimes control a violent narrative for their agenda.

Looking at the African continent, Amanze illustrates how art was used deliberately to incite hatred in Rwanda.¹⁰⁹ The Rwandan genocide was particularly horrific as it used music as a weapon to antagonise, alienate, divide, and spread hatred of the Tutsi minority or any Hutus associated with the Tutsi's. As discussed above, extremist songs were played in a continuous loop over the radio and served to incite more violence,

104 UNESCO (n 13)

105 Deane, T. (n 14)

106 Stephenson, M., and L Zanotti. 2016. “Exploring the Intersection of Theory and Practice of Arts for Peacebuilding.” *Global Society* 31 (3): 336–352.

107 Christophini, M. 2017. “Into the Choppy Waters of Peace: An Inquiry into Peace- and Antiviolence Animation.” *Animation* 12 (2): 174–190.

108 Minch, M. 2016. “Art, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Will Formation and Consequence.” In Kim, S., P. Kollontai and S. Yore. 2015. *Mediating Peace: Reconciliation through Visual Art, Music and Film*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

109 Amanze, J. (n 68)

intolerance, and hatred of the Tutsi's. A popular voice of the people at the time was Simon Bikindi. He was a much-loved folk singer who sang songs explicitly calling for the killing of Tutsi's by Hutus and encouraged bringing back serfdom and ethnic slavery. He even promoted the slaughter of any Hutu who was against stopping the killings of the Tutsi's. Bikindi was later charged with "conspiracy to commit genocide, genocide or complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, murder and persecution as crimes against humanity".¹¹⁰ It therefore becomes important to take note of the power of arts and culture to discriminate, divide and incite. Therefore, the "usefulness of creative arts, music in particular, in resolving conflict must be contrasted with the power of music to be used to spread hate and build and consolidate solidarity between members of violent groups".¹¹¹ Artists and stakeholders must prioritise quelling the tide of propagandist violent art in initiatives aimed at peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Art as a tool for reconciliation and peacebuilding holds much promise. It provides possibilities beyond those available in traditional peacebuilding techniques. The various case studies highlight that it can be a vital tool to bring peace, help connect with people, show and feel empathy, provide hope, and achieve reconciliation. While the academic interest and evidence for the case of arts and culture in peacebuilding and reconciliation is growing, there is a need to be more resolute in including it in policy and policy development. Arts and cultural programmes, on their own, cannot resolve conflict or prevent violence, but they can serve as a 'soft power' strategy for conflict transformation. It is consequently important to note that the use of arts and culture as a sole medium to establish peace is not supportable and that, like any tool, it can be manipulated for harmful purposes and to incite violence and tensions rather than eliminate it. However, the benefits of arts and culture for defusing violent extremism or ethnic tensions and for their unique capability of appealing to people's sensitivities in a way that resonates with their civic duties and communities are acknowledged in the growing body of academic evidence. Arts, when used responsibly, is, therefore, a precious resource for peacebuilders and needs to be presented in a manner that allows for healing and remembering as a pursuit of truth and justice, enabling open dialogues and embedding peaceful values in its patrons. To take advantage of it as a powerful asset

110 International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Trial Chamber III), Tanzania 2008 The Prosecutor v. Simon Bikindi. Accessed 14 November 2023. <https://internationalcrimesdatabase.org/Case/130/Bikindi/>.

111 Kent, G. 2008. "Unpeaceful Music." In Urbain, O. (ed). 2008. *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geo-politics*. The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, p. 115.

towards peacebuilding and reconciliation, it is essential to integrate it into a more national and formalised peacebuilding strategy.¹¹²

It is recommended that for the African continent to achieve its vision and SDGs, art and culture form part of a spectrum of the broader peace and reconciliation strategies. It must be given the same importance as human rights interventions, traditional peacebuilding techniques, post-conflict peace-building practices, and psychological and development interventions. It, therefore, becomes crucial for Africa to harness the potential of arts and culture through regional and national policies. Such policies will build strong institutions that can assist in guaranteeing that artists, and cultural performers will benefit from and be rewarded for their competencies and capabilities. This strategy can successfully translate to the advancement and consolidation of peace, unity, security, and reconciliation.

It is acknowledged that art and cultural activities can be replicated. It is, however, recommended that such activities be adapted to ensure that they are context-specific and meet the needs of the target audience. Due to diversity inherent in ethnicity, religion, culture, and even social norms, what may be appropriate to one community may not be to another. It is, therefore, crucial for peacebuilders to be aware of the differences when they seek to engage in different communities. In this regard, utilising a community's art is also key to understanding each society's unique needs. Such an understanding will go a long way towards designing effective initiatives without alienating the intended beneficiaries. Accordingly, global initiatives must also pay close attention to the countries or community's heritage, arts and culture and be alive to the unique associations therein.

Artists and proponents of arts and culture must utilise traditions and customs to allow the intended audience to understand and empathise with the forms of performances that they are being exposed to. It is therefore recommended that a grassroots approach must be nurtured. Such an approach must include honest collaboration, being mindful of the importance and function of local actors, and being respectful. Artistic and cultural initiatives that are rooted in traditional and local flavours will have the inherent ability to inspire interest in achieving peace and reconciliation. A commitment to the local forms of artistic expression of creativity can help promote a peace process and provide the foundation for perseverance towards peace and unity, which is more sustainable for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

112 Chambelland, C. 2018. "Art, A Miracle Remedy for Peace? Peace Insight, August, 31. Accessed 31 October 2023. <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/art-miracle-remedy-peace/?location=&theme=culture-media-advocacy>.

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