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But PERFORMING VIOLENCE, DEVISING FUTURES? PERFORMANCE WITH AND BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN RWANDA AND UGANDA

Hope Azeda, Lillian Mbabazi and Bobby Smith

INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together two dialogues between the authors to reflect upon how performance made with and by young people relates to contexts of violence and hopes for the future. As we will show, performance created with and by young people can enable them to reflect on the past and construct new futures. This is particularly significant in contexts such as Rwanda and Uganda, where children and young people have been victims and perpetrators of violence. However, we will argue that there are a range of issues practitioners need to remain mindful of when creating such work. These are related to issues with how violence is being portrayed, the complexities of devising performance around sensitive, traumatic issues, and challenges regarding competing agendas, limited ownership and how this impacts young people's agency.

Our dialogues emerged out of a short research project undertaken by Bobby Smith, a researcher based at the University of Warwick, UK. In 2019 Bobby was funded by Warwick's Institute for Advanced Studies to explore the challenges faced by theatre practitioners involved in peacebuilding projects in Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya. The first dialogue is between Bobby and Hope Azeda, a Rwandan theatre director and founder of Mashirika Arts. Bobby and Hope met at the Ubumuntu Festival, which Hope founded in 2015, and have remained in contact since. This discussion mainly focuses on *Africa's Hope* – an ongoing theatre work in progress initially performed in 2004 which narrates the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi through the eyes of a child. The second is between Bobby and Lillian Mbabazi, a Ugandan applied theatre practitioner and lecturer at Makerere University, Kampala. Bobby and Lillian have known each other since 2011, when they studied for an MA in Theatre and Global Development together at Leeds University. During Bobby's research trip, Lillian invited him to watch performances staged at a school in Kampala as part of the annual, nation-wide, Schools Music, Dance and Drama Festival (SMDDF). Lillian has been involved in the festivals as a judge since 2006. The SMDDF provides a platform for young people to create and perform theatre exploring socio-political issues that affect the country. A recurrent sub-theme of the SMDDF has been the prevention of violence against children and young people. This ties into the broader aim of the festival to contribute towards Uganda's 'Vision 2040' - a development agenda which aims to transform the country and lead to upper middle-income status. Violence involving young people - whether as perpetrators or victims - is thus couched as impacting negatively on the country's prospects for growth.

While there is a growing body of literature around performance and violence in both Rwanda and Uganda, the voices and perspectives of those most close to such practices, whether participants or artists, are often peripheral - existing as short quotes from interviews and absent from analysis or interpretation. To address this issue, we have collaborated on writing the chapter and bringing together the dialogues to present Hope and Lillian's perspectives in a more complete manner and offer 'insider perspectives' on Mashirika's work and the SMDDF. Relatively little has been written about either, which is unfortunate given Mashirika's profile in Rwanda and the international work the organization has undertaken and the importance of the SMDDF to the Ugandan performing arts landscape. This may be due to the difficulties academics and researchers from these countries often experience in terms of publishing internationally, such as the lack of funding opportunities to undertake research, poor access to journals and other publications, and a lack of time to produce writing.

YOUNG PEOPLE, VIOLENCE AND PERFORMANCE IN UGANDA AND RWANDA

Before presenting our dialogues, we provide some context in terms of young people and violence in Rwanda and Uganda. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002) outlines a typology of violence in which three kinds of violence are described, each of which also offers slightly different conceptions of the roles and identities of victim and perpetrator. First, self-directed violence can include suicidal behaviour or self-abuse, perpetrated by - and against - the self. Thus, the individual is framed as both victim and perpetrator, though this definition seems lacking in its omission of the wider context in which such individuals live. For example, those who self-abuse or are suicidal have very often experienced other forms of abuse at the hands of perpetrators such as bullying or sexual abuse. Second, interpersonal violence describes acts perpetrated by one community member against another, or by an individual against their child, partner or an elderly member of the family. A third form, collective violence, describes social, political or economic violence and relates to 'the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as a group [...] against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives' (ibid.: 215). The manifestations of violence are broken down into four categories. These include physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as deprivation or neglect. The examples that we consider relate specifically to interpersonal and collective violence - Mashirika's work deals primarily with the collective violence that took place during the genocide in Rwanda and its lasting effects, whereas in Uganda the government has shaped successive years of the SMDDF to respond to high levels of interpersonal violence.

The Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi began on 6th April 1994, when the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down as it approached Kigali airport (Reyntjens 2004). It is unclear who is responsible, but at the time the interim Hutu-led government and Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines (RLTMC) – a radio station acknowledged as playing a key role in the genocide by inciting violence, playing anti-Tutsi songs and revealing the places in which Tutsis sought refuge (Grzyb and Freier 2017) – blamed their predominantly Tutsi opponents, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and Belgian peacekeepers. The following day soldiers, police officers and members of a large civilian militia known as the *Interahamwe* (roughly translating as ‘those who work together’ (Dona 2018)) began systematically murdering Tutsis, or those they perceived to be Tutsi, as well as pro-democracy and moderate Hutus and members of the minority Twa group. Over a period of 100 days around one million people were murdered and many more displaced (Reyntjens 2004). The violence was eventually brought to a halt when the RPF, led by Paul Kagame (who became Rwanda’s president in 2000 and in 2021 is still in office) captured Kigali on 4th July 1994. Jastine Barrett (2019) outlines numerous, shocking ways in which young people and children as young as 5 years old were used as perpetrators in the genocide, usually having received commands from the *Interahamwe* or authorities. She brings together reports on the genocide to show that young people were perpetrators of murder, rape, the destruction of property and also acted as informants, providing details of the hiding places of those trying to escape the violence. Following the genocide against the Tutsi, national debates raged around the criminal culpability of children and young people, and in a ruling in 2001 the age at which a young person could be held accountable for their actions was agreed at 14. Alongside children and young people being implicated as perpetrators of crimes they were also, of course, victims of genocide. Those who survived still live with trauma (see, for example: Banyanga et al. 2017) and, as a recent study demonstrates, some Rwandan young people aged 14-22 years old also reported symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) related to the genocide, despite not having been born until after 1994. This may particularly be the case as family relationships are affected by the violence children and young people’s care-givers experienced, and the severe ongoing mental health issues this has caused (Mutuyimana et al. 2019).

In Uganda, the activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and its leader, Joseph Kony, were brought to widespread global attention in 2012 by the film *KONY 12*. This documentary focuses on the threat to children and young people being kidnapped and forced to become soldiers who are drugged and brainwashed. The film shocked global publics, and many participated in its aim to ‘make Kony famous’ and pressure governments to intervene and attempt to bring him to justice. However, many have criticised the film as misrepresenting the issue, focusing efforts on the capture of Kony rather than supporting affected young people and communities. The film failed to reflect that the LRA

had by 2012 become greatly reduced in power and size. As Laura Edmondson (2012) highlights, this situation has proven ‘sexy’ to international audiences - it is neither ‘too extreme’ nor ‘too tame’ for them to consume. The result is that the documentary has skewed global perceptions of Uganda, projecting upon the country colonial obsessions with trauma that necessitates external intervention. However, current realities for children and young people are that they are more likely to experience violence at an interpersonal level, from family members, others in the community, or even from teachers, and not due to the kinds of collective violence experienced during the years the LRA was more active. As research by UNICEF (2020) shows, many children have experienced violence in Uganda – whether physical, sexual, emotional or domestic. In 2018 the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), together with UNICEF, published a report which drew upon findings from a national survey undertaken in 2015 (MGLSD and UNICEF 2018). The report analysed a total of 5,804 interviews undertaken with young people aged 13-24 years old and demonstrates high levels of sexual violence, particularly for girls. It showed that 1 in 4 girls aged 13-17 and 1 in 3 girls aged 18-24 had experienced this form of violence. For both boys and girls, it was reported that they most frequently experienced sexual violence at school, home or on a road. Many had also experienced physical violence, usually within their families or from adult members of their communities - particularly teachers. High levels of emotional violence from parents or step-parents was also reported.

Our dialogues demonstrate how performance interacts with these contexts. Mashirika Arts was founded by Hope in 1997 when she decided to create a performance about Rwanda following her graduation from Makerere University, Uganda. Mashirika’s approach draws on dance, spoken word, song and the company also runs Theatre for Development projects, including an ongoing radio drama project – *Iterero* (Mashirika Arts 2021). The performances devised by the company mostly focus on legacies of violence and the genocide against the Tutsi, particularly as these impact upon children and young people. Alongside *Africa’s Hope*, which was the focus of the discussion of Hope’s work for this chapter, other performances include *Bridge of Roses* (2014) and *Generation25* (2019). The former explores the lives of victims, survivors and perpetrators of genocide and pays particular attention to the ongoing guilt and trauma those who inflicted violence, particularly on children, experience. *Generation25* was created in 2019 and existed as three different iterations – a version created with a solely Rwandan cast, a second performance involving Rwandans and performers from the United States, and a third version which included British performers alongside the Rwandan cast. These were performed in 2019 at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival in Kigali, which is held annually in the grounds of the Kigali Genocide Memorial and brings together international artists and audiences to

explore a different theme each year. Every performer in the different versions of *Generation25* was born in 1994, and therefore at the cusp of transitioning to adulthood. Many of the Rwandan cast members also performed in *Africa's Hope*. Mashirika's work is often presented at the ceremonies that form *Kwibuka* – the annual period of genocide commemoration that takes place across the 100 days in which violence took place in 1994. *Africa's Hope* was first presented as *Rwanda my Hope* at the 2004 *Kwibuka* closing ceremony and involved a large cast of 600 children. Ariane Zaytzeff (2015) writes that the performance provoked an unusual reaction among audiences at the time (ibid.). Whereas performance was often met with silence, *Rwanda my Hope* was instead applauded as the cast positioned themselves, using their bodies, to spell out 'Never Again'.

The SMDDF in Uganda operates in a similar way to festivals in other African countries, including Kenya and Malawi. They involve schools entering an annual competition where short pieces are devised and performed by young people for their peers and competitors, overseen by a panel who decide upon regional and national winners each year. The festivals are a legacy of British colonialism, when they were introduced to force engagement with Western forms of performance, in English (Otieno 2011). However, since Uganda's independence the festivals have also become important spaces of cultural renewal – many theatre practitioners gain their first experiences of creating work during the festivals and hone their skills. Furthermore, various Ugandan forms of performance are drawn upon, offering a platform to share and engage with different approaches (Breitinger 2004). The SMDDF is coordinated and funded by the Ministry of Education and Sports with the support of a National Organizing Committee comprising ministry officials and head teachers from across the country. Funding is also offered by numerous partners, who bring with them their own objectives – in the past, the Bank of Uganda aimed to promote financial literacy, the President's Office to celebrate 50 years of Independence and the National Planning Authority has sought to popularise Vision 2040 which, as mentioned earlier, outlines a series of development priorities with aim to achieve 'a transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years (Government of Uganda 2021). The latter has become an overarching theme for the festivals since 2016. A sub-theme of the festival, supported by UNICEF, focuses on violence prevention and the elimination of violence against children in schools. Technical support and advice is provided by a team of experts including arts practitioners and academics and each year a syllabus is created. 'Training of Trainers' workshops, organised at a national level, disseminate the syllabus and prepare teachers and practitioners to create performances which respond to the chosen themes. Young people can devise work in various genres including plays/drama, poetry, Western choral singing, speech and creative dance. Writing about the schools' drama festivals that take place in Kenya each year, Christopher Odhiambo (2016) argues the festivals have an important role to play in terms of education

and social development. They enable young people to examine social issues such as gender equality, peace and violence and the importance of education more closely, through performance, and to present their thoughts and feelings on such issues to broader audiences. As the dialogue with Lillian will show, this is a characteristic shared by the festivals in Uganda - although the SMDDF is not without its limitations.

We now move on to present key aspects and interactions from our dialogues, demonstrating the possibilities and limitations of creating performance with and by young people in these contexts.

PERFORMANCE, HOPE AND PEACE

The sense that creating theatre with and by young people can enable hopeful, more peaceful futures linked our dialogues. This perspective is shared elsewhere in related literature. For example, Thompson et al (2009) consider Theatre Day Productions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and propose that their participatory work helps young people to ‘imagine hopeful futures for this conflict-affected region’ (27). Breed (2020) also reflects on Mobile Arts for Peace in Rwanda to suggest the potentially positive effect of casting young people in roles as change-makers. Shared in both these analyses are the view that, through performance, young people gain agency to build the kinds of futures they value and that such projects also offer a contrast to the participation of young people, enforced or otherwise, in violence. Such representations of young people chime with Jill Dolan’s (2005) understanding of the links between performance and utopia, which she argues occur due to the ‘affective and effective feelings and expressions of hope’ performance can generate. She goes on to argue that performance can provide an ‘abstracted notion of “community” or [...] an even more intangible idea of “humankind”’ (Dolan 2005: 2). Importantly, even art which represents the worst of humanity can achieve this form of utopia and community. Such performances provoke audiences and, we would argue, the young people involved in creating them, to look toward the future with a sense of hope and faith that things will get better and that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated.

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, it is our argument that there are a range of issues we need to bear in mind when creating work with young people, and which may impede the possibilities of performance. However, before presenting our more critical perspectives we outline some of the specific ways Mashirika Arts and the SMDDF hold possibilities for hopeful, more peaceful futures. In particular, the dialogues show that performance provides a mode of reflection on the past, a platform that can amplify young people’s voices and possibilities to connect young people nationally and internationally.

Bobby: How do you think *Africa's Hope* contributed to young people being able to shape the future for Rwanda? We've also spoken previously about your view that Rwandan young people can be part of shaping the future elsewhere, globally, too. So how might the young people you work with be able to be part of conversations globally? And are there obstacles to allowing this to happen?

Hope: The main intention with *Africa's Hope* is to prevent crimes against humanity using our stories and testimonials, and when you come from the testimonial point of view, and it is your story being performed, then who are the audiences to argue with this? For example - me, Hope - I am alive and my story is my testimony. Everyone has a little bit of something to share. This is why testimonial is very powerful. When we represent those experiences, and other experiences of violence, people are made to question themselves. In this piece, one of our key questions is 'what kind of man would kill a baby?' and we are not only talking about a Rwandan man.

But you can never be sure of what impact a performance might have. You're planting a seed and walking away – you just hope it's a good seed and will grow good fruits! These performances maintain very difficult conversations and spark dialogues you may not easily have in your living room, or with your children. Young people are awakened, and they learn by doing. When you learn by doing you immediately start asking questions - 'how could this happen?' 'how could we prevent it?' 'how can we make sure my generation avoid this?' Violence and genocide are universal evils and the play reminds you that if you don't do anything - if your neighbour's house catches fire and you don't do anything - yours will be next. It is what we're seeing with COVID-19, right now. We are all interconnected and have common enemies. Genocide is a common enemy and when something like this happens you need to do something. There are three roles you can play - perpetrator, victim, or bystander. We want to ask the audience 'what role do you want to play?' There are people who just watch, those who actively help, and those who fuel the fire.

Alongside performances we hold workshops - this is what we did last time we were in the UK. They aim to help young people understand how to step into the skin of a bystander, survivor, perpetrator and they embody the story. Through different exercises, which are about balancing their own experiences with those of others, we try to enable discussions to take place and we often find that by the time we are finished, there is a special bond. I don't know of any workshop that we've done around the world that has not ended up in tears, laughter, playfulness, hugging, in creating this bond and connectedness.

As this section of the dialogue between Bobby and Hope indicates, for Mashirika Arts, utilizing testimonies is important. Not only do these testimonies offer insights into experiences performers have had of violence, they also have the effect of added authenticity and shut down viewpoints that might seek to undermine the impact of violence or even deny violence as having taken place. *Africa's Hope* has toured to many countries. As described earlier, some of the same performers have also been involved in devising work with American and British performers, forging potential networks for solidarity and global reach. Alongside these performances Hope and young people involved in

Mashirika Arts have also led workshops in countries including Sri Lanka, Uganda, the UK and USA. These workshops share Mashirika's approach, which utilizes dance and movement to engage emotions and which does not shy away from exploring emotions, experiences and vulnerabilities. As Hope explains above, participants in the workshops go through a range of emotional states including sadness, joy, crying and laughter and this helps to build connections between the team from Mashirika Arts and the participants they are working with. Typically, the workshops include movement-based warm-ups and culminate in exercises based on playback theatre techniques. Here, difficult experiences are enacted. A further exercise asks participants to write letters to various 'characters', and from a range of different perspectives, to further consider and understand the issues and experiences being explored. The roles that young people perform offstage in workshops, in establishing global links, and their agency in doing so is bolstered by greater global connectedness.

In the SMDDF, young people participate in more local and national networks, rather than the global links facilitated by Mashirika's work. However, a common between them link is clear in the way in which the issues represented onstage are connected with a need for collective action involving multiple individuals and organisations.

Lillian: Young people use performance to think about more peaceful futures - they represent violence and usually include a kind of 'call to action' at the end of the play. They might indicate a perpetrator of a violent action go through a punitive measure, such as imprisonment, while in other cases it might be a collective effort involving clan elders, a local court and members of the village or community cautioning the perpetrators. The various representations all tend to point to some sort of collective ability of the society and the innate power of partnership to amicably end violence. However, young people are presented in the plays as a group that is powerless, socially marginalized, excluded, exploited, and not given fair hearing in cases of misunderstanding.

Furthermore, a characteristic of the SMDDF is that multiple schools are brought together to watch each other's work, at first regionally and then nationally, for those that go on to compete at this level. Shared by *Africa's Hope* and the performances Lillian has seen at the SMDDF is the portrayal of young people as victims, with performance as a possible site where they can stress the impact violence has had on them and other young people. The kinds of futures committed to are free of violence and involve connecting young people to each other to take action, thus stressing the role for children and young people in building such futures.

PORTRAYALS OF VIOLENCE AND TRUTH

Whereas feelings of hope and faith can be powerful and positive, in this section we share aspects of the dialogues which begin to complicate the potential of performance with and by young people in relation to violence. In both Mashirika's work and at the SMDDF, personal accounts of violence feed into performances. Work created by Mashirika Arts often involves testimonial, drawing heavily on the personal experiences of the casts involved. While the performances made for the SMDDF do not usually involve direct testimonials, very often the young people use their own experiences of violence – or those they know of that have happened within their communities – as a starting point for work. Therefore, we first outline some of the problems associated with seeking to portray 'true' accounts of violence, outlining how such attempts can be difficult for young people, as well as for audiences, to engage with. In terms of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, we also reflect on how, over time, it becomes possible to share different viewpoints and experiences of violence which may be productive, enabling young people to gain more nuanced understandings of how and why violence occurs and the different ways in which communities are affected. As outlined in the previous section, the performances young people are making in both contexts are charged with impacting on society and reducing the potential for future violence and conflict. We therefore move on to reflect on how solutions to violence are being portrayed by young people on stage. In particular, we draw attention to the didacticism encouraged in the SMDDF versus the less prescriptive and more open approach adopted by Mashirika. These considerations are taken forward throughout the remainder of the chapter, in which we continue to engage with the possibilities and pitfalls of young people's roles in performance related to violence.

To consider how performance making with young people addresses violence, we must remain mindful that certain narratives and ideologies inevitably shape what it is possible to achieve. In a critique of applied and documentary theatre projects that deal with violence, Will McGowan (2019) highlights that while projects that work directly with those who have experienced violence to tell their stories might encourage participation and ownership, fostering a sense of agency, these kinds of projects have a complicated relationship to 'truth'. As he writes:

Part of the claim that theatre can reveal 'hidden', generally meaning previously unheard (at least publicly) or not widely shared, stories is that the 'actors' telling their stories are uniquely positioned to offer real and authentic accounts. This is only half true. [...] Far from being a 'complete account', the very contexts in which such performances are practiced should be considered equally important facets of the account itself. We are no closer to 'getting at' a more 'authentic', 'complete', or 'truthful' account of actors' experiences if we disregard this point as secondary. (209)

When young people are devising and performing work that engages with violence with an explicit link to shaping the future, claims of representing the truth need to be reflected upon. Indeed, the wider context in which performances take place continually shift and change. As was expanded on by Hope in relation to the genocide against the Tutsi, different stories and perspectives can be told now, over 25 years later, than could be portrayed in previous years.

Bobby: *Africa's Hope* was presented as part of *Kwibuka* originally, but since then it has toured to the US, the UK, South Africa – how did you balance your responsibility in terms of truth and memory with all the different agendas and understandings that must be out there? How did you balance the piece with what the Rwandan government's agendas might have been in 2004? And critical perspectives on how we understand narratives of the genocide?

Hope: We are coming from a very raw angle and in *Africa's Hope* we ask the question 'what kind of man would kill a baby?'. That's my number one line in the piece, and it comes from a foreign perspective - the BBC journalist Fergal Keane¹. We use this often in the transitions between fragments - what kind of man would kill a baby? A man not born to hate, but one who has learnt to hate. In terms of the piece travelling to other parts of the world, it's important that question is not specific to Rwandan identity. It applies everywhere - we are all born with good and bad, but nobody is born evil. We learn to do these things, but must ask what kind of politics are there around us that teach people to hate? So as much as *Africa's Hope* is a Rwandan story, we make it very clear at the beginning that this applies globally. We acknowledge other genocides - those in Armenia, Cambodia, the genocide against the Hereros². We talk about the holocaust and then we show that, 50 years later, it happens again in Rwanda. After the holocaust people said it would never happen again, but 50 years later it does.

Bobby: As you were talking, you made me think of *Generation25* when a performer talks about being labelled a Hutu, and being the child of Hutu parents and how difficult it is to have not even had a role in the genocide but still be labelled as a perpetrator. It's interesting that you have now been able to branch out and talk about that situation. Would it have been difficult to talk about this in 2004?

Hope: Yes - my way of working is a bit like a crab - you feel and walk, feel and walk, and in 2004 there was more focus on survivors. We were trying to see how we can enable children and young people who were survivors to access trauma and counselling services, or food and medication. There was also a lot of focus on widows of the genocide, and on ensuring there was access to treatment for them for HIV/AIDS. All roads were focused on trying to help survivors get back on their feet because they lost everything - their people, their property, their mental state.

¹ Fergal Keane is an Irish author and correspondent for BBC News. His coverage of the Rwandan genocide earned him an Amnesty Award in 1994.

² The Herero are an ethnic group in Southwestern Africa who rebelled against colonialism. Alongside the Namaqua and San, they were among the approximately 80,000 victims of genocide perpetrated by the German Empire between 1904-08.

For *Africa's Hope* we partnered with the Kigali Genocide Memorial and the AEGIS Trust, who fund this. At that time, their focus was on survivors and they gave us the material we worked from, which guided us. At that time the wound was bleeding and overflowing with blood. And we needed to stop this blood fast, at least so that we could reach a stable point where we can talk about the situation. You know, where you can take off the dressing and let it face the world. It's like with a wound, when you leave it exposed to feel the sun, the wind, the rain, to clean it. This hurts, but eventually you can go over these scars and encounter it differently. You can see these different branches grow. There's a line in *Africa's Hope* that is repeated - 'the shadow walks with me, it is my history, I'll always live with it'. These scars, or shadows, stay with us but they are generational with different shades and shapes.

As indicated in Hope's response, retelling and portraying violence on stage is painful and difficult. From Lillian's perspective, performance linked to experiences of violence for the SMDDF can also be problematic in terms of how this might impact on young people.

Lillian: Primarily I have seen performances based on stories and memories of experiences of young people, either in terms of experiencing violence from teachers in school or from other family members in their homes. The performances tend to depict the tragic experiences and outcomes of these violent occurrences while others relate these experiences to legislation that outlaw such practices and glorify success stories of young people who live their lives free of violence. The performances are very memorable, often drawing attention to the frightening levels of violence adults subject young people to and the multitude of reasons and justifications for this behaviour, in some cases resulting in unplanned fatalities, maiming of young people and disruption to their future livelihoods. The passion with which the young people dramatise this violence is memorable as it is something that is personal to them, having experienced it in person or witnessed it upon their peers.

Gestured towards in Lillian's reflection is the issue of drawing on personal experiences in order to portray violence, and the difficulties and questions that arise from such work, particularly in terms of trauma. Such issues pervade in Mashirika's work.

Hope: Of course, we also realised that if this can prick us - the performers - it's going to prick the audience as well. But, if the audience get affected, are we going to stop or carry on? As painful as it was, we realised that the truth has to be told. You can't half tell the truth.

Here, telling the truth is understood as being more problematic in terms of the impact of presenting real experiences, testimonies and the full horrors of violence on stage can have on performers and audiences than in terms of the potential political questions McGowan (2019) raises regarding authenticity and the completeness of accounts of violence. Regarding instances where notions of truth

are more political, this is particularly relevant to the situation in Rwanda - although it is outside the scope of this chapter to offer a rigorous engagement with varying narratives of genocide, their opponents, and counter-narratives. What Hope has come up against, however, are those who deny genocide took place at all.

Hope: There are times when you find yourself in disagreement with others, especially with genocide denial. Whenever people get into these kinds of conversations we tell them we are just artists, we are not engaging in political alliances, we are just sharing the truth. But as we grow, like in 2019 when we performed *Generation25* the story evolves. Back then we were talking about kids in Rwanda 10 years after the genocide, and now we are talking about 25 years on. Our focus is not on Rwandan kids alone. Our focus is on an entire generation. Of course, there are times when you find yourself in disagreements. But you end up on the hopes and dreams of these young people - they are not interested in having anything else other than peace. They are looking for peace, or food to eat. They appreciate the value of peace.

Through *Africa's Hope*, it is hoped that the use of testimonies educates audiences and can connect with global contexts of violence, both in the past and ongoing, to prevent future violence. No clear solution is offered, other than the need for individuals to assess their own relationships to violence and their agency to contribute to change - a key aim that is picked up on in the accompanying workshops. Whereas audiences of Mashirika's work have sometimes questioned the truthfulness of accounts, or where the wider sociopolitical context has made it difficult to portray other experiences of the impact of the genocide, we should also consider that in the SMDDF audiences can include teachers and adults in the community. In light of the figures cited earlier in the chapter regarding violence by such members of a community against children and young people, it is plausible that some teachers and adults watching performances created by young people are perpetrators of violence. As Ugandan practitioner Baron Oron has noted in relation to devising theatre in schools, practitioners must be sensitive to the potential ramifications of children speaking truth to power (Mangeni 1998).

Our dialogues highlight the different approaches taken by Mashirika and young people at the SMDDF. *Africa's Hope* offers no concrete solutions or steps to take after the performance. Rather, it is hoped that through engaging with the testimonies, awareness can be raised and attitudes shifted. Contrastingly, many performances Lillian has seen while judging the SMDDF offer solutions to violence in a rather didactic and, at times, simplistic manner.

Lillian: At times, the performances offer simplistic or potentially ineffective solutions to violence. For instance, in one performance a teacher beat students for failing a test, despite many of them suffering with malaria. The teacher thought the

students were faking it but the young people worked together to prove they were telling the truth, eventually chasing the teacher away and leading to school reform. Given the very real power inequalities and marginalization young people experience, whether this could work is questionable.

Earlier in the chapter, Lillian reflected that young people are often being represented in performances at the SMDDF as marginalized, at risk of violence and lacking the power to transform their realities. At the SMDDF, then, there is the potential for performance to reframe young people as agents of change. However, the portrayal of solutions to violence which are overly simplistic maintains young people's marginalization, since whether these will work remains dubious. Here, truth and authenticity is not only limited to how violence has been experienced – the solutions or interventions suggested and portrayed must also feel authentic and plausible.

DEALING WITH TRAUMA

As the previous section introduced, portraying violence on stage can be painful and complicated – particularly when those devising and performing have direct experiences of the kinds of violence being represented. Scholars have considered how creating performances or using drama-based workshops with young people who have experienced violence and trauma may be ethically problematic. Viv Aitken (2009) analyses the *Everyday Theatre* project, run by Peter and Briar O'Connor in New Zealand which explores violence against children and young people within families. She suggests framing drama activities safely to interrogate power dynamics, rather than dealing directly with violence, is effective. However, in both the examples we discuss, young people are involved in explicitly portraying and addressing examples of violence. This can be both productive and problematic.

Lillian: There are problems with young people making performance about violence. A number of young people have gone through one form of violence and continue to live through such memories of trauma as well as newer experiences of violence without the benefit of counselling. They have grown to bury these emotions within themselves and learnt to live with them. Reenacting these experiences tends to bring out painful memories and/ or trauma for which they might just not be able to deal with or manage either in school or at home. These experiences are then gone over each time they stage the performances and the scope of torture that this memory leaves on the young person goes unmeasured, unchecked, and unmanaged.

The issues Lillian identifies are exacerbated in the SMDDF by the way in which the performances are usually intensively devised, rehearsed and then performed in a competitive environment. In this kind of context, there is little time to approach the stories with care and sensitivity. Furthermore, the competitive aspect of the festival means that, when schools have access to funds, external theatre practitioners are often brought in to work with the young people. The result can be that there is not

the necessary time or inclination to develop a relationship with the young people. This contrasts with the relationship Hope has with young people that she has worked with on *Africa's Hope* for approaching 17 years. As she reflected, working with the performers in 2004, then just children, and since, has enabled a methodology to emerge in terms of navigating sensitive issues.

Hope: *Africa's Hope* offered a methodology in terms of how we write, how we perform and how we want to portray these stories. And also in terms of how we create music or how encourage certain moments in the performance. It was also via *Africa's Hope* that we gained skills in creating safe spaces in rehearsals. In our rehearsals where every minute is highly respected, like the story has some kind of superpower. With this story, there is a wave of silence that comes in and takes artists to some place. It is from that place where we all align, and this must be concerned with truth, ownership, memory, hope.

So we found a new methodology to move between these fragments - through dance, song, games - which you see in the performance - and which helped to recover. These helped us to stand back up on our feet and to start an encounter with the next fragment, or testimony. That physical gesture of rising on your feet from a broken physical position, with the music, and the chant, and the actions of picking each other back up hugging, patting each other on the shoulder - that became the reality of what we needed to do. We couldn't create something fictional, I just had to go with the natural way of them responding and rising on their feet to have an encounter with another story.

This approach to devising and rehearsing makes its way on to the stage to provide a buffer between different 'fragments', or testimonies, used in the piece. As was highlighted earlier in the chapter, it is not only potentially risky for the performers in these examples to create work about violence, but also poses risk for audiences. Here, artists are faced with complex choices in terms of representing such experiences. Not representing them could result in a silencing of these experiences and resulting perspectives, yet these performances can also be traumatic. For example, there have been reports of audience members experiencing flashbacks during performances that have formed part of genocide commemorations (for example: BBC 2014). What both Hope and Lillian reflect on, from their own experiences, is the need for a caring approach to creating performance, although in terms of the SMDDF this may be lacking at times due to the kinds of relationships practitioners have to young people and the context of a competitive festival.

OWNERSHIP, AGENCY, AGENDAS

Finally, during our dialogues we also touched upon the competing agendas that impede the extent to which young people can claim ownership over the work created, or exercise their agency to shape their futures according to their views. Regarding the SMDDF, the previous section has already shown that the competitive nature of the festival presents challenges in terms of the focus of the work. Rather

than slow, careful co-explorations of peace and violence with young people, the pressure to create high quality work and prioritise performance skills in order to score highly with judges limits young people's ownership of the work. Lillian expanded on this further:

Lillian: Students rarely have real ownership over the basic building blocks of the plays, or of the flow of the events that unfold. The writers are, in many cases external people who determine the way violence is represented in the stories. The top-down process from the setting of the themes, through to how these are interpreted, and the resulting performances limits the space for co-intentional learning and for promoting young people's creativity. Instead, they simply become mere receivers of pre-determined objectives which counters the very purpose of the festival. The young people become objects to simply transfer messages to, and a simplistic assumption is made that the plays created can create such change. In fact, because the level of engagement from young people is quite superficial, I sometimes think young people end up just repeating, or relaying, the messages and slogans they have heard rather than really understanding or committing to them.

More widely, we can also link this lack of ownership to the way in which development programmes operate. Poppy Spowage (2019), reflecting on her role as co-founder and producer of arts initiatives across Eastern Africa, is critical of the way in which development agendas pervade across all aspects of society and limit what art can be about. The result is that the creation of art is all too often skewed towards development agendas, as is the case with the SMDDF and its links to Uganda's Vision 2040 agenda. These agendas can lead to the creation of work that only engages with the themes set by governments or donors, rather than based on what people actually *want* to make work about, resulting in the incorporation and repetition of slogans, and that limits the kinds of conversations and young people-led processes that can increase their agency. As Lillian explains:

Lillian: In my view, too much attention is paid to didacticism, with a focus on the government's development agenda rather than the creation of a space for conversation and discussion in which the concerns, fears, aspirations and experiences of young people in relation to peace and violence can be aired.

The creation of a space for conversation can be linked to increased ownerships and agency, and here Hope reflected on her own process involving working with children and young people. She considered how she has had to reassess her role in projects to provide this space:

Hope: To achieve ownership and agency, I had to step out of the skin of the writer and director. I realised that before us were fragments of memory - testimonies. These fragments needed care and clarity to stitch them together. Back in 2004, when

Africa's Hope was first performed, we were dealing with testimonies of young people and their experience of genocide. We focused on the hopes and dreams of those people, those survivors. But to return to these memories was a great challenge and comes with emotions. This could not be the kind of traditional rehearsal space where you go and rehearse lines - every word, every moment, is a thorn that grew from, or pricked, some memory and emotion in rehearsal. This was my first experience of working with testimonial performance. In the rehearsal there were a lot of emotional breakdowns. Of course, you could not say 'hurry up, cry, now do this'. You had to pause and wait for someone, and wait for the cast to support each other.

Here, we should also consider that many of the performances Mashirika Arts produces are for events such as *Kwibuka*, and therefore State-endorsed. The realities of creating work with young people in the contexts we have explored mean that artists are very often juggling multiple agendas and demands. While this can be limiting and conflicting, such spaces at least offer some scope for the creation of work that young people can shape - the key here is how the individual practitioner manages and navigates these different discourses, creating space for ownership and agency within imperfect systems.

DEVISING PEACEFUL FUTURES?

Through devising performances about past instances of violence, or about the risks of participating in current contexts of violence, young people not only engage in questions of the 'then' and 'now', but are also part of conceptualizing futures. However, as the dialogues show, there are obstacles that stand in the way of building young people's agency to claim and shape their futures in relation to peace and violence. These concerns can be grouped together as having a relationship to time and to external agendas. 'Truth' and what can be portrayed through performance develops and changes over time, as can be seen with Mashirika's work. What began as a very nationally-focused performance has grown to engage with audiences globally. Moreover, new work is being created by the organisation that considers other perspectives on the genocide against the Tutsi that would have been difficult previously. In order to work with young people to create such work, time is needed to build ownership and approach sensitive topics with care. It has been suggested that, at times, this is missing during the SMDDF given the pressure to create competitive work that relates to the agendas of government ministries and other donors.

Finally, while performance created with and by young people that engages with violence might have the potential to build their roles as creators of more peaceful futures, such uses of the arts also have a relationship to instances of youth participation in acts of violence. That is to say, the desire to create work for, with and by young people is not only predicated on their capacity to become agents for

peace, but also because young people are viewed as potential aggressors. As Thompson et al. (2009: 36) state:

A simplistic vision of passivity or perpetual victimhood fails to recognize the complex and active parts played by young people in times and places of war. A recognition of this diversity ensures that arts projects in these settings are not only framed as ‘gifts’ for ‘suffering’ children, but also processes that are engaged with by young people who have divergent reactions and responsibilities within these settings.

We would suggest two key, inter-related, issues for further reflection. First, through attempting to portray young people on stage as non-violent agents of change, we must acknowledge that young people are not only framed as potential victims of violence but also as perpetrators. This is significant in contexts where young people have participated in violence, often as manipulated and brainwashed members of militias. Hanging over this work, then, is the implication that young people can become violent and that engaging them in programmes that explore violent pasts and equip them to become advocates of peace might mitigate or prevent this. While it is positive that such platforms provide possibilities for young people to claim agency, or to present alternatives to the shocking images of young people participating in violence, we would suggest that the points set out through our dialogues can offer insights into creating more effective projects in the future. It is important to continue to share approaches and practices to find ways of navigating traumatic experiences, and to reflect critically on the solutions and interventions set out by performance projects. It is also vital to remain engaged with who and what the root causes of violence are. Placing the weight of solving violence onto young people seems, to an extent, a deflection from those in older generations or political and social elites with whom power and responsibility so often lies.

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