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The hard work of reparative futures: Exploring the potential of creative and convivial practices in post-conflict Uganda

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we empirically explore the ways in which young people were enroled in a multi-modal exhibition to creatively produce narratives of their past, presents and futures. We look at the different ways this work was framed, and how all memory work and, we argue, future work is relational, interactionally produced and situated in dynamic and unfolding social and political frameworks. We look at the ways young people described the work of producing accounts of their futures within that setting, and the different forms of labour involved in that process. We explore the encounters that fostered local, more humble, acts of care and repair, and how those everyday practices might help build towards reparative futures.

1. Introduction

Working towards 'reparative futures', as a set of critical orientations and practical methods, can be a generative basis for producing new ways of being, seeing and knowing in the world. This involves recognising and giving space to injustices in the pasts and their enduring material and affective legacies in the present, opening up ways of carefully addressing and critically thinking about historical narratives and accounts, and particularly those that have been silenced and suppressed, and facilitating moves towards repair and reconciliation by acting responsibly towards others in this shared world we live in. To achieve this, we must ask difficult questions about how we know and represent the past, and critically interrogate the ways that this shapes our knowledge-practices, material relations and societal structures in the present. As Sriprakash (2022: 2) describes 'The idea of reparations requires us to understand the interconnections between past, present and future in both the formation of injustice and its repair', and that 'being action-oriented, a reparative politics recognises the potential for transformation of existing systems, even if that involves dismantling or abolishing norms, practices or institutions. This work of orientating towards a future in ways that brings forth repair and reforms institutional,

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political and material relationships, necessitates the emergence of new ways of remembering, forgetting and understanding past injustices and relations, and reworking broader epistemic assumptions. In this paper, we empirically and critically explore the practical accomplishment of this work; looking to the processes and practices that fostered and cultivated spaces of listening and dialogue within communities grappling with contested and conflicted pasts.

We argue for the importance of attending to the local, careful accomplishments of repair within convivial spaces, and the work needed in the imagination, and realisation, of reparative futures. Working within encounters that are 'open, otherwise and potentially transformative', we describe the potential, and risks, involved in cultivating convivial community spaces and interactions, thinking about the temporal disruptions and heavy burden this involves for the people involved. We foreground the ways repair, understanding and care can be accomplished in the hard work of producing future imaginaries that accommodate multiple voices, perspectives, and histories, and support a global radical resurgence (Palmer et al., 2022) which can build transformative epistemic and ontological practices. 'Repair politics are relational, affective processes' (Sriprakash, 2022: 9), and of course can take many forms. As Paulson (forthcoming, 2023) sets out, the interventions and ways of engaging with repair cannot be prescriptive, bounded or 'complete', but instead must be conceptualised, and practiced, as open and contingent relations. And so, we focus on the ways in which these political and theoretical understandings of reparative futures are practically implemented and accomplished, and how communities might be 'made ready' for just, peaceful futures.

We explore how, theoretically and methodologically, a participatory research project attempted to encourage spaces to remember, create, explore, and discuss injustices faced by young people in Uganda. The exhibition sought to foster 'an ethics of listening and dialogue' to allow our participants to articulate, 'the histories, voices, and experiences of conflict that they feel are important to their everyday lives, and which underpin and inform their future imaginaries' (Sriprakash et al., 2020: 3). We describe how this space cultivated encounters and interactions where creative anticipatory practice could happen and enable 'working out' and 'being together' to begin, all the while considering the provocation Palmer (2014: 30) sets out: 'How do we identify the ragged pieces that emerge from difficult histories, and how do they connect with the imagining of alternative futures?' (Palmer, 2014: 30).

2. Embedding and embodied pasts and futures

In 2006, Uganda committed to the Juba Peace Talks and the country began a formal attempt to end decades of violent and destructive armed conflict that were underpinned by the enduring legacies of colonialism and empire. Nearly two-decades later, Ugandan society is still dealing with the legacies of conflict and how they can be remembered, acknowledged, and memorialised within broader complex social, political, and cultural relations. The repercussions of violence, and the social upheaval associated with it, have not been consigned to the past but are very much part of people's everyday lives and identities and exist alongside contemporary conflicts and struggles over meaning, memory, and memorialisation. Within this context, this paper pays attention to the ways 'reparation' can meaningfully be embedded in the complex, unfolding everyday lives of people, and how these processes can be accomplished and accommodated across and within diverse communities and experiences.

To think through these concerns, our focus goes beyond the simple binary of then and now. Instead, we bring together the past and present to explore how young people in Uganda imagine, represent, and attempt to bring into being more optimistic, just, and reparative models of society and interpersonal relations. We critically explore how a multi-modal touring art exhibition created by young people, and facilitated by a community heritage NGO, provided a space for the collective exploration of past injustices and their contemporary ramifications. We explore how this exhibition facilitated the coming together of different narratives and experiences of conflict that are embedded in different local environments, family experiences, local 'official' heritage and history discourses. We propose that the convivial encounters created through the exhibition offered the potential for the emergence of reparative futures; we situate this work within a broader landscape of heritage initiatives that create and promote particular sets of relations with the past and within the present (see for example Mwambari, 2021). Through the creation of convivial spaces, and the hard work on the part of all participants, we examine how reparative futures can be locally situated and collectively accomplished.

As we show, this exhibition helped foster listening, dialogue, the hearing of histories, voices, and experiences connected to conflict. In doing so, it highlighted how the past continues to occupy an important space in young people's material and affective lives while also structuring the futures they both imagine and desire. In theoretical and practical terms, this shows how the past, present and future can never be neatly separated out. We argue that looking at how the imagined futures of young people were produced through this exhibition's work is generative for considering how 'reparative futures' can be created, in ways that does not dilute historical wrong doings but instead fosters spaces where multiple representations of the past, present, and future are able to co-exist, intermingle and challenge each other. Specifically, we foregrounded young people in this work as significant for their positionality within Ugandan society; as the first generation living entirely in the emergent peace, as symbols and inhabitants of the future, and as a new generation encountering different ways of knowing and thinking about their past that are situated in the changing and unfolding challenges of their presents.

Of course, as with practices of remembering and forgetting, practices of future making are always embedded and embodied. Political, economic and social processes provide the available material, social, and symbolic resources for young people to draw on, and these are always situated in ongoing negotiations around meaning. Remembering and imagining futures are active social processes that are dynamic, progressively altered, and inherently revisionist. We understand this in relation to what Elizabeth Jelin describes as 'a non-linear approach to memory that takes into account the plurality of voices that give meaning to the past and incorporates the way in which these meanings can change according to their historical and cultural context or their ideological and political purpose' (Jelin, 2019: 103), and follow Mwambari (2021) in recognising the significance of indigenous, local ways of knowing the past that differ from, though sometimes intermingle with, 'Western' ways of knowing the past and, we suggest, the future. As such, to consider the work of

producing reparative futures, we must look to the ways it is accomplished interactively and relationally, rather than just considering a set of potential outcomes.

This paper is informed by a sociological attention to the processes, practices, and things that connect people, and so focuses on the ways the young people account for the labour of doing future work, of coming together in contexts of difference and division, and managing processes of dialogue and listening to foster shared accounts of the future. We recognise the roles of Mwambari's various gatekeepers of memory and the past in the creation of this exhibition and are critically aware that 'the memories produced by NGOs are highly selective and designed to cater to the NGOs' different needs (such as international funding) rather than telling the actual history of the massacres or stories of survivors' (Mwambari, 2021:81). This means we are acutely aware of the work of heritage discourses, and the ways exhibitions like the one we describe are situated in social and political structures of power, resource and memory claims. We are also cognisant of the colonial history of Uganda and the enduring legacies of slavery and empire, and the ways in which UK (United Kingdom) based researchers leading a project could reproduce colonial power relations, and extractionist type relationships within the communities and people we worked with. As we argue throughout, this paper has been written as part of an ongoing, unfolding dynamic process, situated in an ethics of care, which has sought to foreground accounts and participants in ways that challenge and disrupt established, colonial power and knowledge relations.

In the following section we set out some of the theoretical frameworks we have drawn on to explore these processes, as well as situating our work in relation to existing literature.

3. Convivial thinking

To consider the practical accomplishment of reparative futures, we look at how remembering and imagining the future is done collectively – and use the idea of conviviality (particularly following Gilroy, 2004) to consider the ways in which people, together, can be part of messy and unstable local acts of cohabitation, resilience, and ultimately, perhaps, repair (Neal et al., 2019). Conviviality has been used to think about how multicultural urban societies can negotiate difference and diversity, but we adapt it here to bring into focus the processes of 'how we work things out between ourselves' (Neal et al., 2019: 73). In Uganda his 'working out' takes place in a society that has a long history of conflict that begins with colonialism and has resulted in enduring epistemic and material injustices which manifest in local and specific ways, while also resonating with injustices, relations and experiences in our shared global present. For Sarah Neal, the tension-transformative dynamic of conviviality, the 'working out' processes, are always done in the context of social harm, inequalities, tension, and strain. From this we take the potentially transformative nature of these interactions, rejecting the idea that these acts should 'reconcile' in limiting ways, but instead looking at how they can open up creative possibilities for generative knowledge, recover silenced and oppressed histories, and offer spaces for learning and unlearning the past and present in new and careful ways. Following Byala (2013) we sought to produce living spaces for communities where collective and individual scenes could intertwine and intercommunicate, where solidarities and understandings emerge not through the closing down of difficult encounters but through their emergence and acceptance. Sharon Todd (2021), in Sriprakash (2022) has explored the tensions of guilt and responsibility in pedagogic encounters dealing with traumatic histories of injustice: 'Rather than dismissing the feeling of guilt as petty and as not leading to moral action, Todd explores such affective responses within pedagogic interactions as 'symptoms of emotional struggle to learn across differences' (p.363). It is precisely this capacity of pedagogy to open up new relations, understandings, and moral orientations that signal its reparative possibilities'. (Sriprakash, 2022: 9).

The exhibition that the young people produced became a material space for thinking-through and not necessarily a space for claiming or making claims, shaped as it was by a multitude of voices as detailed below. It became a space of problem finding, rather than problem solving; a space where heterotopic futures and pluriverses (Escobar, 2018) became a possibility, and where realities were understood as plural and in the making. It offered the spaces where people could 'see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is' (Castoriadis, 1987: 127). This connects to what Sriprakash et al. (2020: 7) have argued are some of the necessary conditions for achieving reparative justice and futures:

> 'opening up opportunities to have both different pasts and different visions of the future understood. Educative cultures of listening, dialogue and reflection are thus key. Indeed, reparative futures can only be 'co-produced': they involve collective practices that are committed to learning about multiple pasts, to people seeking to tell their stories and make their histories, but also to critically engaging with received histories.'

Rather than seeing reparative processes or reparative futures as the subject of abstract theoretical or normative debates, we suggest that they raise deeply practical and methodological questions about researching historical injustices that continue to shape contemporary societies and people's future imaginaries. Throughout this paper, we make visible the labour of this work, and the affective, material, and epistemic disruptions it can bring about. As Ravn (2022) describes, this work enrols young people in particular forms of affective and temporal labour and places a 'burden' on them through encounters that call on them to produce hopeful futures. She carefully articulates the ways young people are enroled into the work, the burden of being hopeful subjects: 'cultivating a sense of hope and remaining hopeful under current conditions, especially when already positioned on the margins, requires significant efforts; (Ravn, 2022: no page). In Uganda, as elsewhere of course, the young people are constantly living with the history, geography, and power politics that reproduce systems of inequality, injustice and disenfranchisement (Baines & Camile, 2020).

4. Methods for future imaginaries

The enduring inequalities and injustices produced through colonialism and imperialism, and the practices of racialisation and hierarchy it produced, have manifested in violent conflicts over resources and positions of power in Uganda. Since 1985, Uganda has been ruled by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) led by Yoweri Museveni, whose main constituency is the Bantu-dominated South. Since taking over power, Museveni's government has been implicated in ongoing conflicts involving significant accusations of aggressions and atrocities committed against different groups within Uganda, especially in the 'Acholi land' region (in North Uganda) near the border of Sudan, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was active until 2006, and in the South, close to the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the insurgency led by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) was active until 2004. Young people have been heavily affected by these conflicts, most notably as child soldiers but also as abductees, returnees and children 'born of war' and disconnected from their families and homelands. In a society where elders are afforded great significance, the voices of young people are often not given space or time to contribute to debates about reparation, justice and possible ways of remembering the past and building the future.

The aim of the project was to find ways to enrol young people in practices that would offer the space to critically engage with their past, particularly in relation to conflict, reflect on its legacies in their everyday lives and identify ways in which a more positive, peaceful future can be shared. Guided by a youth advisory board situated in Kitgum, northern Uganda the project brought together a community heritage NGO and researchers based at Gulu University to plan an exhibition that would travel to four regions of Uganda, each with different histories of conflicts and diverse ways of framing these histories within contemporary heritage discourses and accounts. Based on previous work with young people to produce exhibitions, our youth advisory board, researchers and partners understood the potentials and constraints this form of engagement could produce. Researchers worked with young people in youth groups and schools, developing on existing relationships and previous collaborations to promote engagement and understanding of what commitment would involve. This project happened during the COVID pandemic, and so faced significant challenges that we outline elsewhere (Nono et al., in press). In each region, young people would add to and curate the exhibition, working with researchers to construct a narrative using the objects and artefacts from their own location and from locations that the exhibition had previously visited. In this way the exhibition was iterative, unfolding and evolving. The team encouraged young people in each region to produce artwork, audio recordings, essays, objects, and to use any other method that allowed them to articulate aspirations, expectations and significant narratives of their pasts and which was locally significant in terms of knowledge practices and social or religious symbolism. The exhibition had Youth Futures as its guiding theme and described the aim to the participants as producing a shared resource and event to help us think about how to 'build peaceful, just futures together in Uganda'.

Each field site displayed the travelling exhibition for two days in a public space, allowing different groups to visit, and having different people speak publicly at the openings and workshops. In each exhibition event, over 200 young people and 40 teachers were able to access the exhibitions. It was also an opportunity for the project researchers to have conversations with the young people exhibiting and those that had come to be part of the events; they collected ethnographic notes, recordings and photographs of these visits. The researchers also conducted online focus groups (because of Covid) with young people, teachers and youth workers who had visited the exhibition. All data was collected by a researchers based at Gulu University, and was transcribed, translated and anonymised. This project gained ethical approval from both Gulu University and Cardiff University.

It must be noted here that the four geographical areas of the exhibition were significantly different in their relationships to past conflict, to contemporary political power, and in terms of their social capital and access to economic and material assets. These are primarily due to enduring legacies of colonialism. Two of our sites, Mucwini and Adjumani, are in Northern Uganda and were significant locations in the conflict that resulted from the counterinsurgency against the LRA. Here, there continues to be tensions between different constituencies – ex-combatants, survivors, children 'born of war', displaced families and refugees. Acholi knowledge systems around land, lineage and attachment are significant in the ways people think about their relationships to past ancestors, and places, and within contemporary relations. The conflicts disrupted these lineages, and traditional ways of reparation and community in ways that are ongoing (Baines & Camile, 2020). Our other sites were on the East and West of Uganda; Obalanga in the Teso sub region, Eastern Uganda, and Mpondwe in the Kasese District of South Western Uganda. These sites had different histories of conflict, though the Teso district was involved in the LRA fighting, and the Arrow movement came from this region and resisted the LRA. Kasese is situated in the Rwenzori Sub Region which has a history of resistance and conflict that dates back to the time of colonial rule (Khisa & Rwengabo, 2022). Within both sites, there are different political and cultural traditions and affiliations, which are woven through the accounts of the young people there.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the project team, on the exhibition, and on the communities we sought to work in. The original plan for the exhibition was for it to be displayed in schools and community centres, but as restrictions on inside meetings persevered, the exhibitions moved into outdoor spaces. This movement of the exhibition from more formal educational environments to outside community spaces, shaped the emergent narratives offered by the young people and the scope of engagement possible, to include wider community members and promote intergenerational interactions around the exhibitions. This framed the nature of the encounters and invited a broader set of engagements than we had imagined, opening up spaces of dialogue, listening, discussion and disagreement around the peripheries as people moved around. Here we point to the ways the materiality of the exhibition and the more 'open' spaces and dialogues it enabled creates opportunities, but also risks, for those participating. Enabling these sorts of encounters allows being together to promote 'being ready' for what Gilroy (2004) describes as the capacity for diverse populations to be 'at ease'; with each other, with historical narratives and with contemporary accounts of self and community. To move towards this, we had to facilitate these encounters carefully and ethically working with participants to ensure they had space to debrief, to discuss anything that had arisen or to move away from the action. We followed up with the young

participants after the exhibitions, through their schools and youth groups, to ensure they had space to talk and resources to navigate anything that had arisen. This is a practical example of application of ideas of conviviality, work and care we develop further below.

Notably, the generosity of the researchers on the project, our participants and advisory board, and the communities that hosted the exhibition allowed it to happen, underpinned by the guiding principles of reciprocity, dialogue and respect, and the cultivation of non-hierarchical relationships. As Mwambari et al. (2022) argue in relation to the potential the physical distance created by Covid restrictions had for foreshadowing openings and decolonial potentials, there were both opportunities and lost chances that emerged from the new ways we found ourselves having to work. Our project, funded by the GCRF (Global Challenges Research Fund), always had the potential to reproduce colonial power relations through the particular distribution of funding and the necessity for a UK academic to be the 'lead', and from the onset we worked hard to disrupt a North-South power dynamic that would reproduce colonial assumptions, working dynamics and leadership. Our team included Ugandan researchers, practitioners and academics who made this project happen, produced local, situated solutions to problems that arose, and who led on the conceptualisation of the exhibition and its operation. When Covid meant that UK based researchers were unable to travel to Uganda as anticipated, the Ugandan team took on responsibilities and management responsibilities that had originally been situated in the UK. This meant a greater allocation of control, power, and resources to the country-based team, and produced data that was very much co-produced through their engagements with the communities. The team worked based on their capacities and capabilities, as situated in broader entanglements of personal and academic life. Of course, the decolonisation of research is a complex and, crucially, not just metaphorical process and one which we return to continually in our work.

5. Creativity and lived futures

Creativity is recognised as an important component in processes of reparation, with Paulson (forthcoming, 2023) identifying the key aspects of reparative pedagogy as: dignity, truth-telling, multiplicity, responsibility, and creativity. In identifying the important work creativity does in fostering relationality, affective and caring approaches, she places it at the centre of her flower of reparative approaches, holding the other petals in place. As Neal et al. (2019: 80) describe, 'the proximities and interdependencies of bodies in a shared space engaged in shared activities give rise to a wider 'being together' as well as the ways in which, 'contrary to the assumption that beliefs drive actions [.] actions often lead to new beliefs' (Singh, 2013: 190).' And so, we argue, working together creatively on the multiple and sometimes conflicting narratives about the past and present, has the potential to be generative in terms of the ways it allowed for beliefs, values, and understandings of multiplicity, conflict, and flux. This approach was one designed to promote and cultivate interaction between geographical spaces, historical biographies, and contemporary identities through the exhibition that brought together different artworks, narratives, and understandings. As Sriprakash et al (2020: 7) describe: 'A first step in opening a space to listen to other pasts is to admit that the present, the contemporary, is not a unified, synchronic moment', which was visible at each site of the exhibition, and through the coming together of positionalities that differed.

We found the shared creative practices, the 'working it out together', happened through shared moments of creativity, and in the spaces around these shared actions where people were able to discuss and share histories, narratives, experiences, and expectations. Those moments of coming together, still strange post-covid, of sitting on grass, or on pulled together chairs and of sharing artistic resources and ideas, offered moments that fostered reciprocity, interdependence, and sharing. This was promoted through the forms of interactions we asked for through the project, but also how these were accomplished materially and in practice. Young people made spaces to work together, clustering into groups and sharing resources, ideas, and stories. From these encounters rose the potential for relationships, which could allow new norms, relations, and institutions to be made. Young people talked to each other as they created, listened to each other as they talked, and questioned and challenged each other on points of disagreement or contention.

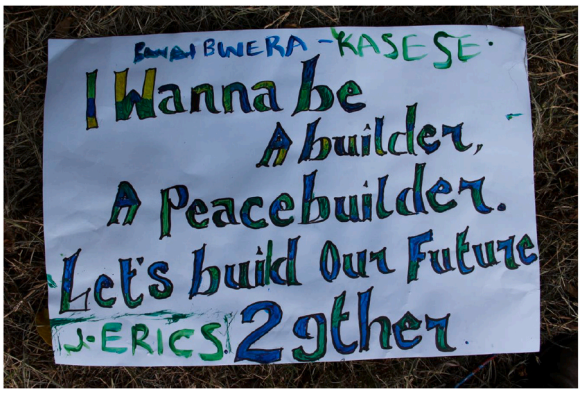
Creativity was the approach we adopted to facilitate careful, dynamic exchanges about the future. This also tied in with our approach to the past, remembering (and forgetting), and the ways this project related to more official heritage discourses and initiatives. Instead of trying to present a formalised, linear, even coherent, narrative of the past through the exhibition, we encourage creative interpretations of stories that the young people used to make sense of their present and explain to us what was important for them in the now. As Sandford (2019: 77) notes 'these borrowings need not be from periods sequentially related to the present'. Instead, the young people drew on all kinds of qualitatively different mnemonic resources to inform their artwork: stories from family, indigenous ways of knowing and being, lessons in school, work in peace clubs they attended, heritage and memorialisation going on where they live, lived experience, rumours, local myths and folklore, and a myriad of other potential encounters that would frame their interactions with the past, present, and by extension, the future. The memory work they took part in was embedded within the context of their lived lives, intertwined with the concerns, understandings, rules, and norms that they encounter and enacted every day. We did not restrict the content of the artwork or provide guidance on what they should produce, but these young people were working within the norms and expectations of the social spheres and encounters that they were in, which brought in political and cultural understandings of the past. The creation of the artwork was most significant for the moments of coming together and how those forms of interaction opened up ways of being together that were both restrictive and productive, slow and unfolding and offered the chance for alternative accounts of the content and its meaning depending on the observer. As Groves (2017, p.35) describes, the relationship between different past futures and the work of making sense of the past through futures is based on relationships that are complex, 'spiral and fractal, rather than linear'.

This was evident in the artworks that were produced, and the variety in terms of content, form, and narrative that was created. Ambiguity of meaning, multiple interpretations, and different timelines of past conflicts brought insight, raised questions and allowed the opening up of dialogue and discussions.

6. Convivial curatorial encounters

The acts of producing, arranging, and appraising each other's art – produced both locally and from geographical distances – allowed the young people to bear witness to what alternative narratives of conflict and injustice were produced, and thus could begin to consider what its repair might entail. This 'being together' is the start of what has been thought of as 'making ready' (Sriprakash et al., 2022) - bringing together groups and diverse understandings in ways that allow the emergence of dialogue around the artwork, the curatorship, and the local settings they were displayed in. Using the idea of conviviality to draw attention to the ways in which broader structural and political injustices and inequalities endure and frame these public encounters within the exhibition, opening up spaces to encounter difference rather than deny it. Through producing alternative, often messy and unruly, public spaces, we see how differences are accommodated and can be celebrated. As de Noronha (2022:160) describes, 'conviviality only proves generative, conceptually and politically, because it points to the messy, contingent, and often unremarked ways in which people live together and care about one another against the odds, in societies structured by racial division and hierarchy'.

Within the exhibition, the ways in which the young people represented historical conflict reflected both contemporary and historical structural and political determinants (see Sseremba, 2020). It sought to foster spaces where these differences continued to be given space but did not provoke negative responses or perpetuate silences and erasures. As de Noronha (2022: 173) explains: 'Differences don't disappear altogether – although this might be the utopian horizon – but they no longer become the site of danger, suspicion and withdrawal'. Drawing on Rowse's (2009) work, we understand this through ideas of relationality and collectivism, beyond this ideal of differences being accommodated, there is a recognition, and celebration, of different ways of knowing and being together and a belief that a shared future of a peaceful Uganda could be achieved. The encounters the exhibition facilitated didn't seek to deny hybridity or reify categories, but instead acknowledged the fluidity and adaptive nature of cultural identity and expression – through the display of multiple epistemic and temporal frameworks, mnemonic resources, and media. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes, 'the transformative impetus of Indigenous intelligence systems centred around a diversity of individuals acting in a way that promotes and brings about more life, and more creation' (in Tuck & Yang, 2016: 23). This was how the research team described their interactions with the young participants: more creation, more ways of knowing, a celebration of diversity.



While we undoubtedly celebrate the potential of these encounters of conviviality and creativity and recognise the incredible labour and unsettling potential involved in the production of the exhibition, the spaces of dialogue, and the imagination of new social possibilities they provoked. As Nayak remarks, 'it is important not to. overlook the friction that accompanies what are often unsettling encounters' (Nayak, 2017, p. 290). As such, we must ensure that we do not reduce the idea of conviviality to 'happy togetherness' in this account of the exhibition and the work it was doing. Instead, we must continue to attend to the structural framings, the broader political and cultural tensions, this work was being undertaken in.

> People from Rwenzori lived in war starting from British time for example Batoro attacked us the Bakonzo during those days and it's like history is repeating itself because we saw mass killing at the palace in the 1960′s in Kampala and again in 2016 we saw another palace attack here in Kasese and therefore as young people we have to be vigilant, learn from the past and avoid conflict.
>
> (Christine, Kasese)

For example, at the time when the exhibition moved to the Rwenzori site, there were heightened tensions because of combinations of historical and contemporary factors and conflicts. Rwenzori has had a series of conflicts, stemming from colonial power relations and allocation of resources to independence struggles and liberation fights (Khisa & Rwengabo, 2022). Kasese District has been at the centre of all the conflicts in the region and Bwera Town Council has been deeply affected given its geographical positioning as a highly mountainous area and its status as a border town with the Democratic Republic of Congo. This location was selected with this in mind, and to involve young Congolese refugees and other young people living at the border in the project, to bring into the exhibition a transitory population who had grown up in a different country. However, unlike the other locations, where gaining access and setting up the exhibition was less complicated, we encountered difficulty gaining access to and setting up the exhibition in Kasese. This is partly because at the time we were planning to engage young people in Kasese, there were several bomb explosions happening in the country especially in Kampala Capital City. This meant that security and intelligence services were heightened in Kasese and other Congo bordering Districts. Security clearance was time-consuming as they questioned all aspects of the project until eventually we were allowed to proceed. But this clearance involved the exhibition being accompanied by security personnel, to do a thorough check of the venue to rule out any bomb scares or threats but also to monitor and then report on the activity. This overshadowed the exhibition and the young people's involvement in it and was a very real reminder of the politics of memory that framed this project and our participants engagement with it.

In the next two sections we look at the work of bringing forth future imaginaries as a burden we asked our young participants to undertake, and the weight of expectation they held within challenging contemporary political and social climates. We also look to the

temporal and spatial framings of the future the young people conceptualised, and how our requests to imagine the future were often disruptive for the young people and provoked difficult emotional and self-work.

7. The burden of tomorrow

> "What you will do today will determined your future tomorrow, so please take this as a very important chance because God has heard you, please understand every detail, amplify your voices and seek to transform your aspirations into reality".

The weight of the expectation, aspiration, and hope that falls onto young people as representations, symbols, and vehicles for change is demonstrated in this quote from the town's Mayor's opening remarks at the exhibition in Obalanga. The young people present were being afforded an important role in the work of determining their future, giving them the power to produce it and to transform their aspirations into reality. Drawing on Threadgold's (2020) work, Ravn (2022) describes how young people not only bring us hope *for* the future, but they become a symbol *of* the future. Through her work with young Australian women, she outlines how young people must endure the burden of expectation and the burden of the work of being a 'hopeful subject', particularly when faced with what Berlant (2011) calls the 'fraying fantasies' of neoliberal futures. For our young people this work of acting as hopeful subjects, was situated in everyday lives that were characterised by ongoing conflicts and insecurities, along with competing historical narratives and ways of knowing and remembering the past (Mwambari, 2021). The threat of violence and uncertainty about what the next day might bring made being hopeful and imagining futures that were not shrouded in conflict and violence challenging. The burden of being hopeful, of being a symbol of hope, was too heavy for some of our young participants to carry. Below, Leonard describes a solidarity with other young people who might not find hope in looking to the future:

> It really gets me as if I am also them. There is just that feeling of being insecure anytime, you feel that the world has just left you where you are living. And it has affected most of the youths some time. They boldly think that there is no more tomorrow because everything seems like everything has ended today. You find they barely plan for tomorrow. When you tell them Madam, you can you start planning for your future tomorrow? Do you know that you will reach tomorrow?
>
> (Leonard, Amuria)

Also in Amuria, when we asked Jacob to think about his life to come, and to consider paths towards a peaceful future, the contemporary and historical frameworks influenced not just his future imaginaries, but his capacity to do the work of future imagining at all:

> 'The way I feel about the future…is not yet clear because the same problem that cause the other war I see that still prevailing so the future anytime the future can still go back to war and some people can still suffer the same so the future is not clear; either it can be bright or it can be dark because the same factor that put the war are still prevailing if you look at our country properly it is still prevailing just look at the previous election there was a lot of violence and you know during that violence period of time it went grouping cliques can be developed and then the war can still be realised so therefore I am not seeing a very clear future in a next few year looking at how the situation is at hand as a youth leader. That is the way I look at the future of Uganda.'
>
> (Jacob, Amuria)

We do not suggest that these young people were unable to imagine a future, or that they did not have aspirations and expectations. Instead what we want to use our data to point to is the *hard work* involved in imagining the future, and how that is demonstratable of the different, competing and complex ways of thinking about it in relation to knowledge forms the young people have access to, alongside the complex expectations of the production of such narratives and the challenges in living in a post-conflict society. Ravn (2022) identifies three forms of labour that future imagining entails: emotion, self, and timework. We can see the hard emotional work here; the young people trying to remain hopeful despite historically enduring challenges and inequalities and contemporary conflicts and atrocities. Faced with pervasive and compelling reasons to doubt the advent of change, many young people struggled to invoke future imaginaries that departed from the repeated patterns that framed their accounts of their pasts and presents.

> We had a bad experience of war which really disturbed my mind and all the time I was always grown up I had the feeling that one time I need to change this nation, but I was asking myself about how can I change the nation?"
>
> (Samson, Amuria)

This quote from Samson stresses a fatigue about changing a system that continues to inflict so much damage on the lives of young people, and perhaps a fatigue at being asked the question at all (Mwambari, 2021 describes a considerable fatigue amongst certain Ugandan constituencies at being called on to account for their experiences of trauma and war, which is another framing to contend with in this research and its aims). With these ongoing realities, this young participant describes the enduring traumas of war and how they disrupt his capacity to account for a programme of change.

Here we can see how the 'efforts to know what lies ahead have to be distinguished from knowledge practices that make daily life less precarious.' (Adam & Groves, 2007: 6). The latter practices are less concerned with knowing and anticipating destiny, and more

with 'providing structural security for the daily and seasonal rounds of social life' (Adam & Groves, 2007: 6). For our young participants, we must recognise that the work of future imagining is a great deal of emotional labour and has the potential to disrupt structural and ontological security in their daily lives. And while the resources made available through convivial encounters can offer a potential resource and set of solidarities in the work of imagining a different future and so provide some insulation from the structural insecurity of this work, within approaches that necessarily enrol people into the programme it is important to be cognisant of this extra burden we require and expect them to carry and the fatigue it can produce.

8. Temporal disruptions and local horizons

The multiple available visions of the future, for our young participants, were always embedded in broader narratives about the past. Through the performance of these histories, the young people showed how they are entwined in ongoing power relations, uncertainties, and relationships that can disrupt peace and reintroduce violence into their lives. Here, we look to the third of Ravn's 'labours': timework. This offers us a particular way of attending to the work of future imaginaries and the production of hopeful future imaginaries through paying attention to how time and temporality are part of these processes. In Ravn's (2022) research, the timework undertaken by her participants sometimes involved separating difficult presents from the future, which allowed for the preservation of the future as a space of optimism and happiness. For other participants, it involved extending the timeline across multiple generations, to imagine a distant future time of happiness, perhaps for their own children. This timework often involved rejecting more linear, chronological accounts of the future and instead producing future multiple temporalities. This work points to the 'complexity and limitations involved in chronological perceptions of time and of futures as unfolding straight ahead' (Ravn, 2022: np).

In the accounts of our young participants, the timework often did not unfold straightforwardly ahead, and the distance it stretched into the future was often truncated. Our participants often offered accounts that described the *loss* of their futures, and a lack of potentials available to them:

> War killed our parents and relatives and because of war, life is very difficult now, a lot of family or domestic violence happening and this is already destroying our future, it's hard to achieve our dreams as young people.
>
> (Acayo, Kitgum)

In this account, past and ongoing violence and conflict meant that the young participant could not call forth a future in that moment and that dreams of freedom, justice and a lack of violence, were 'hard to achieve'. In terms of reparative futures, this indicates the ways in which we enrol young people in future orientated work must also be cognisant of the challenges they can face in doing that work. These young people's accounts of their futures are embedded in local and situated ways of knowing their pasts and their selves, and so it is important to recognise future narratives that build on the available local resources and are aware of the narratives and broader heritage and memorialisation discourses they are working within.

As a way of thinking about the future in these conditions, we could also see past-futures (Adam & Groves, 2007) invoked in the construction of accounts about future imaginaries. The idea of stolen versions of the future that had been present in their past-imaginaries but which were no longer accessible, which had been taken from them by the conflicts and so disrupted those trajectories and replaced them with new present-futures, shaped by the losses they had endured:

> Most of us are so lucky to be born after active war but still the impact of the war that our parents suffered are affecting us now. Our parent had cows and if they were not taken away, I wonder how life would be now, we would be rich. War is terrible, as young people, let's say no to conflict because it leads to loss of lives and property.
>
> (Joseph, Kitgum)

Here we can see the past-future imaginary of 'we would be rich' that has been taken away from Joseph's present-future imaginary – both by the loss of the cows, and the loss of the future the cows facilitated. Th*e*se accounts offer a glimpse of alternative futures paths not taken, futures denied that are part of a limitless world of "futures yet unthought" (Grosz, 1999 in Palmer, 2014: 30). They represent temporal disruptions, whereby continuities of future imaginaries cannot be sustained because of profound changes, are unsettling and it takes a great deal of affective and material resilience to rebuild the capacity to future imagine. As Jerry from our Youth Advisory Board in Kitgum articulates:

> As young people, we have dreams of being lawyers, doctors of tomorrow, others want to become soldier, farmer, pilots, footballers, journalist, teacher, music producer, machine operator, pastors, musician and hawkers of brooms. However, this is only possible if peace prevails. Conflicts kill dreams and all these dreams we have will be killed if we allow ourselves get involved in conflicts.
>
> (Jerry, Kitgum)

Horizons move closer and as a result, future imagining become truncated and require less investment in uncertainty. The vision – in times of difficulty – refocuses on the here and now. Distant, utopian futures are out of sight, too hard to grasp and hang on to. Adam and Groves (2007) describe this through the idea of knowledge of the future, and the ways we might think about whether it is valid or not. During times of increased turbulence and upheaval, as conflict inevitably brings about, uncertainty about futures prevail and so imagining futures with any clear conviction becomes a challenge:

> 'the fewer changes we anticipate, the more we can continue to rely on our knowledge for the future. If society tends on the whole to conserve the present state of affairs, our present knowledge has a high chance of being valid in the future. On the other hand, the future validity of our knowledge becomes increasingly doubtful as the mood of society inclines towards change and the changes promise to be rapid' (Adam & Groves, 2007: xiv)

This is not to signify a lack of hope for a peaceful future, and we do not want to point to any kind of dejection or despair as an outcome of this work. In fact, we argue that these local, everyday futures that the young people described were embedded and embodied in local contexts, and full of kindness and care towards each other and their families:

> Peace begins with you, let's be god fearing and love education, love one another, be humble, honest, stop taking drugs, no condition is permanent and stop bad peer groups, we should learn to work for our self. As young people, we need never to give up on whatever we want to achieve. We need to work hard towards all our dreams and above all let's embrace peace and avoid bad characters. Let's follow and keep chasing our dreams and above all let's embrace peace and avoid bad characters, let's follow and keep chasing our dreams.
>
> (Jerry, Kitgum)

We recognise the importance of this work, and the necessity to situate reparation work locally, within practices of care and kindness, and as part of the ways young people make sense of the world around them. Indeed, following Plummer (2013) we reassert the importance of attending to the everyday, down to earth, local accomplishments of empathy, justice, kindness, and care:

> 'The days of the big dreams of the utopias are over. We have seen too much damage come from this. We need instead a down to earth pragmatism of empathy, justice, kindness and care. We have to think small in a big way.' (Plummer, 2013: 514)

These big small acts are all part of the instigation of changes that we want to see globally, and at different times and in different places they will become obvious, possible and, perhaps, inevitable. The emergence of these futures, with their generative potential, may be unseen in some accounts of these young people, 'latent, yet to be actualised, still in the process of becoming' (Sandford, 2019: 74), but these acts of kindness, these local, everyday ways of thinking and being empathetically are where the traces of those futures will be found. The ways in which we can facilitate conviviality with care can offer the resources, the spaces and the encounters that make possible reparation practices and peaceful, just futures.

9. Conclusion

In this paper we have argued for the need to attend to the local and interactional accomplishment of repair in the construction of reparative futures, and the different labour involved therein. We have considered different ways we saw this occur in a participatory, creative exhibition, which sought to foster generative interactions and encounters, and offered us empirical moments and accounts that made visible the hard work that underpinned the creation of hopeful and careful futures. Through this, we have shown the need to refocus on the registers we might use to think about reparative practices; shifting from one of outcomes (agreements, economic reparations, epistemic shifts) towards an attendance to the processes and practices that are embedded in the everyday lives of those involved, while also accommodating the broader social and political structures that they operate within. Instead of these practices being characterised by closure, redemption, and reconciliation, we have looked at how encounters marked by messy, entangled but open and inclusive spaces and interactions can support future imaginary work.

Through the idea of conviviality, we have thought about how different values, beliefs, and epistemic positions can be brought into dialogue, identifying and communicating contradictions, while at the same time not looking to erase or ignore difference (Back & Sinha, 2016). Through the creation of spaces of creative action and shared conversation, the acts of 'being together' both physically and across geographical space, we have shown how space of understanding, empathy, and dialogue might emerge and understandings of a shared future could be fostered. Through the curation and cultivation of these spaces of shared, but different, histories and biographies we showed how these conditions opened up spaces where there was room to engage with different meanings of the past and so, through hard work, produce particular accounts, embedded in struggle and situated temporally and geographically, of reparative futures.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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