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Imagining futures/future imaginings: creative heritage work with young people in Uganda

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Abstract: Drawing on research in Uganda, we describe our project in which we invited young people to think about their lives in ways that opened up creative and hopeful imaginaries of the future. We understand future imaginary work to be a significant part of memory work. An important component in the ways we think about the past is imagining the futures it ties to. We wanted the idea of the future to be something our young participants constructed together, in dialogue and iteratively, so that the project had a sense of collaboration and shared interests. To do so we developed the idea of a touring exhibition through which multiple voices, positions, understandings and values could be accommodated side by side. The article contributes to scholarly and public debates about reparations and memorialisation, particularly by showing the crucial role young people can play in articulating more just futures.

Keywords: youth futures, creative methods, imagined futures, Uganda

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Introduction

Uganda has the world's youngest population, with a significant majority of its population below the age of 30. The 18–30 group represents over 80 per cent of the country's unemployed but is also the first to be born in a relatively peaceful and stable country. Although the Juba peace talks (2006–8) between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda were never formally concluded, they marked the end of two decades of conflict and war. As the country continues to be confronted by, and confront, the enduring legacies of decades of conflict, Uganda's youth are negotiating complex legacies of the past in the present at national, community and family levels. The enduring imprint and histories of colonialism and conflict have shaped the country they live in. Associated with this are ongoing struggles over the meaning, accuracy and significance of the country's history, practices of remembering and memorialisation (Reid 2015). Thousands of lives have been lost, millions more have been displaced, and there remain physical, psychological and social wounds that continue to impact on the social worlds of these young people as they navigate their everyday lives.

These conflicts, power relations, connections to place and understandings of the past continue to influence almost every sphere of young people's lives. As in other post-conflict societies, Uganda's heritage can be distressing in character: disturbing and disruptive narratives prevail over compassionate and inspiring ones (Tankink 2007). For some, the past awakens pride, joy and celebratory emotions; for others it is a landscape of loss and anger. Both these positions have been mobilised for political purposes and culturally adopted in different regions and towards different ends (Reid 2017). The more the past is disputed, the harder it is to navigate gracefully. Across the country, Ugandans are grappling with how memorialisation and heritage reflect disputed and painful narratives of the past; these practices are embedded in broader struggles over the power to remember and forget, which are put in place by the state, heritage organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other significant stakeholders (Mwambari 2019). Heritage can become a byword for acrimony and strife, and it is unsurprising that many choose to ignore it altogether (Lowenthal 2000: 18–19). But the past persists in the present in multifaceted and complex ways, and whether they choose to or not, these young people are stewards of their country's heritage, in all its protean, complex and multivalent forms. However, young people are often marginalised or excluded from heritage work and memorialisation practices and representations, though there are increasing moves to bring young people's experience, expertise and representation into the work of narrating their past in order to understand their present.

This project worked to offer young people in Uganda the chance to narrate their past, present and future in ways that move them away from more overarching

accounts of who they are and what lives they live, and instead bring these stories back to their everyday, mundane and lively daily worlds. This follows Imoh and colleagues' (2022) call to counter dominant narratives about African young people's childhoods and lived experiences that foreground 'lacks', deprivation and universality of experience. They quote the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who describes the danger of the single story because it is based on stereotypes, and 'the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story' (Adichie 2009). For our Ugandan youth, this is true on multiple levels – globally, nationally and within their own communities. There are dominant stories about the past and the ways it can shape the future that often either exclude young people or reduce young people's positions to victims of enduring systems and structures, which 'has led to a situation whereby the mundanities of the everyday lives of many children, which consists of various forms of learning, play, religious activities, family life and friendships, are overlooked in favour of narratives that centre around 'difficulties' and the 'extremities' of existence' (Imoh *et al.* 2022: 4).

Foregrounding young people's voices and experiences was the key concern we had in designing the research that informs this article. Using arts-based and participatory methods, we engaged young people to think about pasts and presents as they were lived and experienced, and to imagine shared peaceful futures. This contributes to existing scholarship on reparations and the need for young people's agency within those processes, as well as broader work on heritage, memory and hope.

One of the organisations in Uganda leading on the issues explored in this article is the Refugee Law Project (RLP). The RLP, established in 1999, is a community outreach project (stemming out of the School of Law, Makerere University) that seeks to empower asylum seekers, refugees, deportees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities to enjoy their human rights and lead dignified lives in Uganda, which is currently host to the third largest refugee population in the world. It works across seven main areas, including its Conflict, Transitional Justice & Governance Programme, which collaborates with multiple stakeholders to promote dealing with legacies of violence as the basis for a just, peaceful and sustainable future. The programme supports four distinct projects, including the work of the National Memory & Peace Documentation Centre (NMPDC). This initiative, in close collaboration with Kitgum District Local Government, aims to be a living memorial of Uganda's multiple conflicts . NMPDC collects, organises, archives and communicates Uganda's conflict-related memories and efforts made towards justice and reconciliation. It does so through community outreach, research and documentation. It was with this aspect of the RLP's work that we sought to collaborate, building on existing relationships and appreciation of the important work they do.

In this project, we wanted to build on work the RLP had already done with young people in the north of Uganda, to offer another way for young people across four regions of the country to consider their pasts by redirecting their attention towards the future. By inviting young people not just to offer narratives of the past but also to imagine forwards, the project added a 'futures' dimension to memory and transitional justice work. In doing so, it allowed the past to be thought about through a different lens. 'Heritage, then, seems a productive disciplinary frame through which to pay attention to the social relations and contexts that produce the temporal subjects whose lived futures we are concerned with' (Sandford 2019: 78).

This 'future orientation' is embedded in all heritage and memory work; to think about preserving a past you must imagine that there is a future in which it is retained (Sandford 2019). Heritage is about the cultural and political choices made around what histories and memories to formally preserve, prioritise, display and narrate. As Sandford describes, 'like all social practices, the work undertaken in the present within the field contributes to constructing the eventual future, through setting the context and creating resources for future society' (2019: 7). He goes further to argue that 'heritage joins a smaller number of specific areas of human activity in representing a conscious, reflexive effort to connect the present to the future' (2019: 77).

Underpinning this is the understanding that heritage and memory work are active, social practices which are situated geographically, culturally, temporally and epistemologically, and which produce shared cultural meanings. They inform the values and narratives about who we were, who we are and who we would like to be. These are not free-floating abstractions but rather are embedded in epistemic frameworks and material cultures that shape and guide this 'meaning making' work. This makes heritage and memory a 'view from somewhere'. Importantly, rather than imagining the future as a free, abstract space open to colonisation by anyone in any way, we employ the idea of lived futures as grounded in specific social settings and interactions (Adam & Groves 2007; Sandford 2019). To bring Pierre Nora's understanding of memory into this, it is always belonging to the 'group it binds' (1989: 9), is embedded within the context of lived lives, and both reflects and produces group values and meanings. As Sandford (2019: 78) describes:

> latent futures, dispositions in the present that may contingently take on an empirical form; thick presents, durations that contain past and futures within them (fractal, or thick, or shot through with messianic time) in contrast to unextended and sequential presents; seeing both pasts and futures as unfolding processes, situated within networks of generative structures; an understanding that the construction of pasts and futures through subjects necessarily imbues them with meaning and value.

Chahine (2022) describes how the future can be used as a way of bringing the present into line with the past, offering an alternative temporal frame to investigate the

multitemporal relations of young Kalaallit (Greenlandic Inuit) to the world. Chahine describes how their work supports a move away from 'future as afterthought' towards 'future as forethought', arguing that future imagination influences the ways we (re)create the past. She proposes shifting the focus of memory studies from a unidirectional approach to a multitemporal one, allowing us to discern the 'complex interplay of past, present, and future without linear trajectory' (Szpunar & Szpunar 2016: 385 in Chahine 2022: 7). This informs the way we understand the past and extends to how we want to work with the future.

Heritage works cross-generationally: among other things, it is about inheritance and stewardship, memorialisation and commemoration. Heritage is what is passed to the next generation, and it is inherited and reframed actively and through social practices (Blakely & Moles 2019; Pennell 2018, 2020). This process involves selecting and deciding on what is valued and worthy of passing on, and this of course often produces and reproduces dominant voices, powerful perspectives and stories that are of benefit to particular social groups. All too often, this (re)produces social inequalities and divisions and reduces diversity in terms of representation and in material culture. The politics of memory, and the ways actors actively construct and use stories of the past in the present, run through all interactions and are embedded in ongoing contemporary unfoldings of past events, claims and disputes (Reid 2015). Young people are situated within these unfoldings as well, symbolically and materially.

In this article we set out the social, historical and political context in Uganda which frames our engagement with future heritages. We describe our methodological approach and the ways it opened up spaces of dialogue, interaction and engagement with the past and the future based on and in young people's everyday lives. We then introduce some key insights that we are following through the different data, creative outputs and heritage work that the young people undertook, before concluding with some reflections on the interworking of the past and the present.

Context

Uganda has a long, turbulent past involving multiple periods of conflict, violence and unrest, many of which can be directly tied to periods of British colonial rule (Otunnu 2016 and, 2017). In the years following the 1884 Berlin Conference which catalysed the 'Scramble for Africa' among the major Western powers, Uganda became a British colonial polity between 1890 and 1902 (Rempel 2018). In 1894 a British Protectorate was proclaimed over Buganda, and Uganda was born. This period is significant as colonial domination and rule fuelled inequality and division between

the north and south of Uganda, and the ways in which the country was imagined as unified caused ongoing tensions around history, identity and belonging that endure today (Reid, 2017).

During the 20th century, Uganda experienced numerous periods of conflict and division that have deeply impacted the country's development and social and political institutions (Kasozi *et al.* 1994). Long-running tensions between the north and south of Uganda can be traced back to colonial recruitment policies: people from the north were conscripted into the police, army and prison systems, while the Ganda from the central region were selected for office and administrative work (Finnström 2008). These divisions were further exacerbated after independence by events such as the Kabaka Crisis (1953–5) and the Bush War (1981–6). As a result, colonial rule and Uganda's later political leaders have concentrated power and resources among various social and ethnic groups. This has created significant problems, not only in generating inter-group conflicts but also in hindering the establishment of sustainable peace and national unity.

The 1970s in Uganda were heavily defined by the brutal rule of Idi Amin. In 1971, Amin led a coup against the government of Milton Obote and declared himself President of the Second Republic of Uganda, a position he maintained through oppressive and brutal control tactics for the following eight years (Leopold 2021; Kosozi *et al.* 1994). Amin's attempt to promote Islam in the country further paved the way for ongoing religious persecution and inter-religious conflict (Haynes 2007). Past religious conflicts and ideologies remain significant in explaining continuing violence between Christians and Muslims, making religion often more of a dividing than a uniting factor in Uganda.

An insurgency against Amin's rule began almost immediately. In 1972 a group of Acholi and Langi anti-Amin forces organised themselves into Kikosi Maalum (a militia group founded by Milton Obote). They were later joined by Yoweri Museveni's Front for National Salvation (FRONASA). The conflict spilled over into neighbouring countries, including Tanzania.

In addition to more well-known conflicts, in recent years the Uganda-based Refugee Law Project (RLP) has documented around 127 different conflicts across the country which have led to large numbers of deaths, trauma, the destruction of cultural heritage and the disruption of people's social and economic lives (see https://www.refugeelawproject.org/). The RLP national reconciliation and transitional justice audit conducted in twenty districts around Uganda shows that the current government has pacified more than thirty-two rebel movements since 1986. In effect, all parts of the country have been affected by violent conflict, which has thus far remained largely undocumented and unacknowledged. Young people have been particularly affected by periods of ongoing conflict (Bird *et al.* 2010). This means that the real work of

understanding many of these conflicts and their long-term impacts has not been done, and the true scale and horror of the various conflicts remain unaddressed.

Of particular significance has been the conflict between the LRA insurgency, led by Joseph Kony, and the Ugandan government between 1986 and 2006. The LRA originated from a rebellion against Museveni's leadership in Uganda, as Kony dubbed himself a spiritual leader and the liberator of the Acholi people of northern Uganda (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010). The LRA war in northern Uganda started in 1987 as the Lord's Resistance Movement (LRM) and later transitioned to the LRA, allegedly fighting to establish a new society with Christian morality based on the ten commandments; this happened shortly after the defeat of Alice Lakwena an Acholi spirit-medium who, as the head of the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), led a millennial rebellion against the Ugandan government forces of President Yoweri Museveni from August 1986 until November 1987. Focused on the north of the country and spilling over into neighbouring states, this conflict led to the displacement of nearly two million and the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. The conflict was marked by widespread human rights violations and atrocities.

The LRA became notorious for abducting and forcibly recruiting children into its ranks. It is estimated that over 60,000 children were abducted by the LRA, with many being forced to serve as sex slaves or child soldiers (Schomerus 2021). By 2005, over 1.7 million people had been forced into over 150 internal displacement camps across the Acholi region in northern Uganda. The conflict had spread to other parts of Uganda, including the areas of Teso and Lango, forcing thousands into IDP camps, alongside numerous mass killings and massacres of civilians.

In 2006, Uganda committed to the Juba peace talks with the hope that the country would be able to begin the long road to reconciliation after decades of armed conflict. The LRA and the Ugandan government committed to an Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation. As Macdonald (2017: 225–6) notes:

> This agreement proposed a national transitional justice (TJ) framework to address widespread human rights violations and war crimes committed during the 20-year conflict in northern Uganda.

The success of the peace talks has been widely debated. Some have noted that a greater degree of stability and peace has been achieved in northern Uganda (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010: 279). Despite ongoing conflicts around land and resources and public health challenges, over 95 per cent of the displaced persons have returned to their areas of origin. The government has implemented a Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan, the second phase of which ran from 2012–15 looking at the recovery aspect in post-conflict Uganda. These efforts have allowed a number of communities to begin rebuilding the country's physical, economic and social infrastructures.

At the same time, there has been a sizeable redeployment of the Ugandan army to the northeast of the country, ostensibly for the purposes of disarming the Karimojong. These political responses to the LRA and the aftermath must be understood within a context of strategy on the part of the government as well – the control and suppression of northern Uganda is an ongoing political priority.

At a national level, the government leadership, the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS), civil society and other development partners have become increasingly cognisant of the national dimensions of conflicts and their legacies in Uganda. The establishment in August 2008 of a Transitional Justice Working Group within the Justice Law and Order Sector is perhaps the strongest indicator of this conceptual shift away from a narrow focus on LRA-affected areas towards looking at Uganda as a whole.

However, the limits of the peace process and the realisation of transitional justice principles has also been acknowledged (Schomerus 2021). It's important to note that the final peace agreement between the Ugandan government and the LRA was never signed (Macdonald 2017). This was due to a range of interlocking factors. The first barrier to negotiations was the attempt by the International Criminal Court prosecute Joseph Kony and four of his senior commanders. The second was the United States' designation of the LRA as a terror group and their inclusion under the broad sweep of the Global War on Terror. The insurgents wanted these revoked to fully participate and sign an agreement ending the conflict.

The third barrier was the tension between achieving a peaceful, non-violent resolution on the one hand and realising justice and accountability on the other. The fourth was the scramble for ownership of the Juba process among groups and organisations with local and regional partners, which caused confusion, mistrust and suspicion among many of the parties involved. However, while there was no signed agreement, the Juba peace talks produced a number of progressive and useful discussions. Since then, the establishment of a JLOS Transitional Justice Working Group by the Government of Uganda, and its commitment to the development and adoption of a national Transitional Justice Policy Framework, has provided an unprecedented opportunity for Uganda to engage with key issues of impunity, accountability, human rights violations, amnesty, reparations, institutional reform, truth-telling and national reconciliation. At the same time, it has become clear that stakeholders from grassroots communities to national policy and political levels are struggling to identify the range of mechanisms necessary to achieve these goals and the scope of their interventions.

The impact of these many conflicts is hard to overstate and has dramatically shaped the economic, social and political life of the country. Despite some areas of progress, in a country of over 45 million people, it's estimated that just over 30 per cent of the population are classified as living in poverty (AfroBarometer 2022).

Thinking creatively and collaboratively about the future: methods and practice

The Youth Futures study we use to inform this article is based on a research collaboration with the National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre, Gulu University and Cardiff University. It set out to use creative, participatory qualitative methods to explore questions about heritage, memory and transitional justice in Uganda with young people. Specifically, we offered arts-based methods for young people to engage with the project, which included the use of poems, drawings, stories, drama, music, paintings and proverbs and were used to think about the experiences of the young participants and how they imagined the future. This contributes to existing methodological work that is thinking creatively about imagined futures (Carabelli & Lyon 2016; Ravn 2021; Chahine 2022) and which highlights the importance of offering ways for people to engage meaningfully with thinking about the future, and to avoid the often stereotypical accounts that are produced or the refusal to engage in that sort of imaginative work at all (Shirani *et al.* 2016). Ravn (2021) describes some of the methodological concerns with researching the future, using a double focus on materiality as method, and the materiality of methods as a way of both opening up and anchoring narratives of the future in the lives of young women in Australia. Through the materiality of objects the young women brought to interviews, the future became 'within reach' of the participants and facilitated future narratives.

In the following sections, we think about how our methods align with this previous work and why we chose to work in the way we did. This will help us consider what affordances it opened up and how we offered spaces for young people to explore their imagined futures and future imaginaries in ways that related to their everyday lived experiences.

Youth advisory boards

To begin this process, we knew we had to ask the young people themselves how best to proceed, and so we established youth advisory boards and recruited two young researchers to lead the curation of and discussions at the exhibition with the young participants. We had initially planned to have one board for the four regions of Uganda in which we were working, which would be brought together in Kitgum to discuss the similarities and differences across each geographical region with diverse historical, social and economic factors. The research was undertaken in four districts of Uganda, namely Kasese, Kitgum, Amuria and Adjumani. These districts were purposively selected on the basis that they had all experienced violent conflict from the political violence that had been witnessed in the country.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted those plans and forced us to rethink the ways we would engage young people. Having paused the project during lockdown, we then did not want to bring the young people together across regions, and so instead we convened four youth advisory boards – one in each region of the project. We met the northern Uganda board at the very start to think about ways to engage young people, how to display and think with creative outputs and any other issues they thought might arise. We then met with advisory board members from the other project districts of Kasese, Amuria and Adjumani online and conducted the meetings over Zoom.

Participatory research methods disrupt hierarchies between young people and researchers to allow for more relational and dialogic spaces within sites and across sites to work with international researchers. More specifically, participatory *arts-based* research surfaces young people's thoughts, interests, knowledge and capacities in an unobtrusive way so that they grow from their own experiences. Giving youth a space, materials and some technical scaffolding allowed those involved in the project to explore topics that are more difficult to discuss through traditional methods. In this way, as a team we were committed to taking an ethical stance on our application of participatory methods – allowing young people to co-produce (Grocott 2022) and co-design (Pink *et al.* 2022) together to explore topics close to their hearts.

The advisory boards provided key ideas and raised important issues for the project team to consider as we developed the exhibition and engaged with young people around the country. They described how young people had two 'levels' of experience: the direct experience of past conflict and experiences that were mediated through narratives from parents, relatives and friends. These intermingled and produced frameworks of knowing which could be used in making sense of the future as well, and which were embedded in the everyday practices used by the young people to deal with their experiences. Speaking about these, the advisory board described how storytelling, drawings and paintings would offer productive ways for young people to communicate their frameworks for engaging with the past and the future with us, as well as working with everyday objects that can be used to situate narratives in the past and stretch them into the future. Alongside the making and designing together, the young people had conversations about topics within art compositions and the ways that modal affordances such as paint colours and brush techniques draw out key ideas and provocations that they wanted to foreground (see Figure 2). Arts-based participatory methods (Nunn 2017) allowed for a knowing through design together that we were able to analyse and follow up with the advisory group with our thoughts, experiences and lingering questions (Cutter-Mackenzie & Rousell 2019).

Touring exhibition

From this, we finalised the idea of a 'touring exhibition' that would move from site to site within each region. This allowed us to develop a dialogue between different places and the young people who live there. This was done with the intention of making the exhibition an iterative, dialogical event that displays content produced in other sites while at the same time inviting comment and contribution at the next site. At each site, the young people worked with a curator to exhibit the existing displays while also working to produce additional ones to add to the exhibition. This opened up dialogue around what was relevant and resonated with their own experiences of the past, while also prompting discussions about what a shared future might look like. In total, twelve meetings were conducted with young people from lower secondary schools across the four regions. Three schools per area were identified, with four participants taking part in the co-design of the exhibition and discussing it with our young researchers. Teachers from selected schools in the four districts were also interviewed to enable researchers to engage with and reflect on the legacies of the violent past in the everyday lives of the youth under their care in schools.

The touring exhibition featured artworks, poems and stories but was also a site where dancing, singing and conversations could take place. Seeing what others had contributed offered a way of thinking about the ideas they represented, and different

Figure 1. Young people engaging with art.

Figure 2. Creating the exhibition.

Figure 3. The touring exhibition on display.

themes emerged across the different exhibitions – including conflict and peace, environment, land and employment (see Figures 1 and 3). These themes were both universal and specific, serving as anchors in the present for the young people to think with, and also providing material ways for the future to be 'within reach' of their imaginations and the narratives they might tell.

Material memories

Alongside the artworks, objects such as a panga (machete), a knife, a hoe, an axe and a spear were put on display in the touring exhibition. Through these objects, war and loss were the initial narratives of meaning that were being presented. But they were also used as points of departure, where young people developed their own narratives in relation to the objects, pointing to issues of marginality and resistance. These objects were understood in their obvious ways – as objects of war or violence, for example – but also held more latent meanings, based on stories about them in relation to their object biographies, the materials used to make them and their place in the community. They were at once domestic and violent, everyday and significant for broader issues associated with conflict. For the young people, they became symbolic of resistance to the wars and the violence suffered, while at the same time they reconfigured a peaceful imagination by eliciting the dangers of war and violence. The meanings of these objects are not limited to the present but are co-constitutive of the past and also the future in a temporal intertwining that unifies the past, present and future in a simultaneous co-presence, meaning the objects and things are subject to constant imaginings and re-imaginings. This is another significant part of the interpretation of these objects. They were valued in different ways in different spaces, and they had the potential to endure conflict and retain significance, something that the young people described with hope and optimism for their own futures and Ugandan society more broadly.

The young people described situated and contextual practices of remembering that were embedded in frameworks they made with their parents, their communities and through their formal education. The past was used as a way to explain current situations to the young people – often the lack of access to education, enduring poverty or disputes over land. In this way, these objects from conflicted pasts were used by young people to describe 'futures-already-in-the-making' (Ravn 2022) – the steps were already in place for the futures to emerge as they would like.

> Interviewer: So if a museum was developed in your area, what are some of the items that you think would be put, that will relate to the past and communicate to the past, what items do you think would be put in that museum?

Participant: The weapons used and the names of the people who died under the war.
I: Wonderful, any other items?
P. Piece of bones.
I. Good.
P. Guns.
I. Guns?
P. and spears yes.

(Amuria young participant)

However, as the quote above shows, in the interviews, museums and formal sites of heritage were positioned as sites of memorialisation and recognition, places where weapons should be on display and those lost during conflict should be remembered. Formalised acts of remembrance are sparse in Uganda, with many conflicts having no memorialisation and ongoing demands for reparations and recognition for the loss the conflict has inflicted. What is notable is the fact that their selectivity does not necessarily correlate with state or wider public remembrance of the violent past.

The data revealed a strong community memory of certain conflicts and violence, which were often situated in the broader political and cultural politics of memory. For example, students in Kasese (the capital of the Ugandan Kingdom of Rwenzururu) recalled the period now known as the Kasese Killings, in November 2016, when violence erupted in the aftermath of a Ugandan police raid on the government offices of the Rwenzururu Kingdom, resulting in the arrest of Omusinga (King) of Rwenzururu Charles Mumbere and a death toll of nearly one hundred civilians. As Peterson (2012) describes, 'the architects of Rwenzururu recognized the organizing power of linear history' and 'the past was the forum wherein Rwenzururu's partisans conjured up a constituency, established a political persona, and identified a project to pursue' (Peterson & Macola 2009: 961). Peterson (2012) describes how, in this region, but of course also elsewhere, the past is a resource, a political construction to justify, lay claim to and construct identities and boundaries in ways that legitimate violence, and also claims to independence and post-colonial freedoms. The contemporary legacies and ties to movements that started in the 1960s frame the ways these young people make sense of their histories and their places within broader narratives of Uganda. The practices are geographically and historically situated.

Remembering and forgetting

The data collected revealed that young people remembered certain conflicts and periods of violence while forgetting others. At first glance, this is unsurprising. Heritage experts, such as Rodney Harrison, have discussed at length the way national memory formation is a bounded entity; to avoid a '"crisis" of accumulation of the past'

(Harrison 2013: 580), certain memories are held onto while others are discarded. This is not simply an exercise in managing volume. It is a political act, usually choreographed at state level. It is well understood that the writing of 'accepted' ordered histories is crucial to the formation of national identities in the modern era (Smith 1999). As historian Ernest Renan stated in 1882, 'the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things' (Renan & Giglioli 1882 [2018]: 251). If commemoration of past events can serve an integrative function in society, it can equally fuel conflict and contestation. Awkward, uncomfortable and divisive experiences may destabilise attempts to use historical memories to promote political and social cohesion. Certain memories are pruned and cut, while others are allowed to grow and flourish (Augé 2004 cited in Harrison 2013: 588). Again, we must stress this is not a neutral action, but one bound up with issues of power, representation and identity.

> I: What role do you think young people can play to construct a better future a brighter future, what role do you think you can play as a young girl and as young people?
> P: I can help them with some advice if they are going wrong.
> I: Okay.
> P: I will advise them not to remember what happen in the past because if you have to remember those have to remember the past, you will be scared every time I can advise them not to remember the past and they should start new generation like this time here. Mmh. (Kitgum interview with young participant)

Why were some conflicts and periods of violence forgotten and not others? How did young people act with agency in the practice of forgetting, or were the frameworks and accounts simply not available to them? The data pointed to two common denominators that came to the foreground in relation to the events that were remembered, which were intensity of violence and proximity to locality. The lower the intensity of the violence (i.e. 'minor' conflict with minimal interruption of day-to-day life), the higher the propensity was to forget it. The greater the proximity of the violence to where the young Ugandans lived (either now or growing up, or both), the more likely it was that memory had been retained.

This points to the embeddedness of informal, local and community-level memorialisation and narrativisation that has the power to undercut 'national' and state-level practices or amnesia. It highlights the complexity of memorialisation and narrativisation; what may be presented to young Ugandans as 'the past' via formal settings such as classrooms or national-level commemorative events is not necessarily the understanding that takes root. This raises questions about the role played by everyday vernacular and local communities in memory formation about the violent past. Clearly households, families and interactions with other young people on the streets and in

hangouts, such as bars and cafes, are as important as (if not more important than) national vehicles of memory communication and formation. Homes, households and local settings are sites of intense memory production. It is in these spaces that that state's peace and conflict curriculum is discussed, challenged and deconstructed. Homes and local communities are sites of not only 'education' but also 're-education'. This suggests an atmosphere where local memories and narratives are pitted against official state and 'national' ones.

These everyday processes of forgetting and remembering as active practices requiring agency and negotiation contribute to the larger literature on social memory (Fentress & Wickham 1992) in two important and connected ways. Firstly, placing young people at the centre of these investigations forces scholars to rethink the concept of 'community'. These explorations across northern Uganda, Luwero and the Rwenzori Region expose the multiple layers of 'communities' that overlie boundaries of age and seniority. Any commitment to developing greater co-existence and a sense of mutual respect between local and national understandings of past violence cannot be restricted to adult-only forums. Secondly, it is clear from these creative activities that young people have an important part to play in processes of 'rememoration'. It is they who are digesting the formal, state-led education they receive and placing it alongside the memories of the past that they have been exposed to within their local connections and affiliations. If 'rememoration' is seen as an essential part of peacebuilding – particularly in terms of its role in recovery, resistance, and the rebalancing of power for communities who feel excluded and marginalised – then these data highlight the significance of including young people in such inquiries in order to explore further where the similarities and differences lie in the transmission and silencing of social memories across communities who face the hegemony of those in power (Tallentire 2001). As Sandford (2019: 77) describes:

> To frame the stories that the present wants to tell, only certain elements of the past are needed: when heritage 'celebrates victory (success, conquest, supremacy) and consecrates loss (defeat, misery, degradation)', it requires the kind of 'principled forgetting' that Nandy describes (Nandy 1995, p. 47). The subjects through whose interests these pasts are mediated have different purposes and projects that they attempt to sustain through this use of heritage.

Here we can see a young participant in Amuria talk about the things they need to forget in order to move on to a place where new forms of interaction and engagement can happen:

> Yeah, the message that I want to pass to everybody is let's forget the mistake that we also know how to cope with the situation thinking of the effect of the conflict but get to know how to handle what has come with conflict and aim also requesting the

> entire youth now should wake up and start doing things seriously, yes I want them to get engaged and have the world changed to be a peaceful world not again the world of conflict. I want them to learn how to make friendship, be united and also have peace, Yeah thank you so much that is the message that I wanted to pass. (Amuria young participant)

Young people's visions of peace

A key aspect of data collection involved documenting young people's visions of peaceful futures. The theme of peace is explored through visual representations (drawings) and interviews with young people themselves. Figure 4 represents a young person's vision of what a peaceful future looks like.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, their vision focuses on a secure home and family environment where threats of external violence are absent. Across the data, it can be seen that while most of the young people were optimistic about creating conflict-free futures, this was often mixed with doubt about what the future held. As one interviewee remarked:

> Sometimes I feel like the future is bright but again sometime there is another believe in me that makes me feel the future is dark.

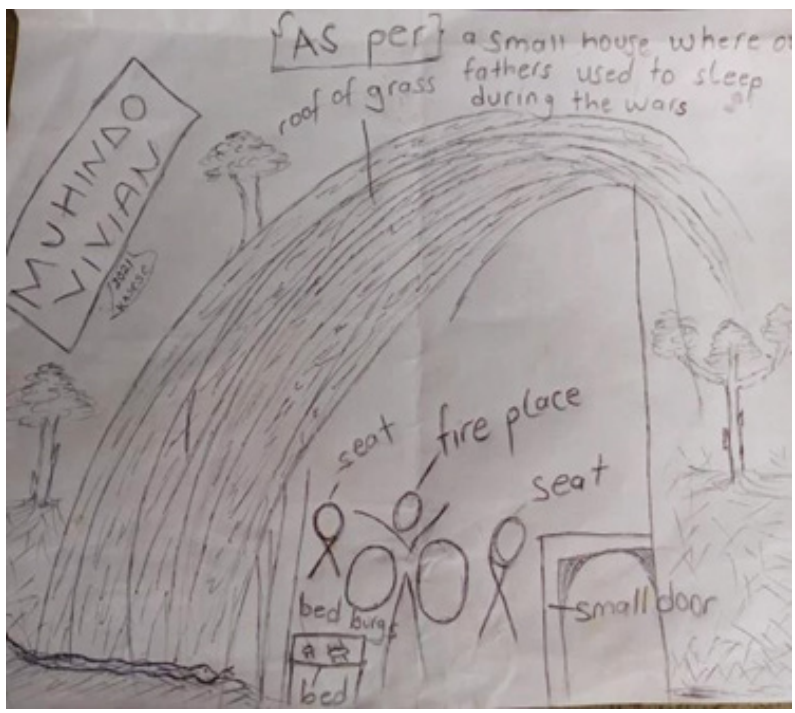

Figure 4. Representations of a peaceful future.

At each of our research sites, young people expressed concern about the development of new and ongoing conflicts, the absence of opportunities and resources, and the ongoing challenges associated with engaging with the past.

If we focus on the more positive dimensions to young people's visions of peace, we can see from the interview data that more specific solutions and models for the future emerge. Across multiple interviews, several of the young people focused on the importance of creating positive inter- and intra-group relations. The wider literature on peacebuilding recognises this as a core part of reducing the likelihood of future conflicts. For example, one participant, describing her vision of a peaceful future, remarked, 'I want them to learn how to make friendship, be united and also have peace'. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the age of the interviewees, several identified the power of sport in bringing people together when they articulated their visions of a peaceful future. A male participant remarked that:

> … a young person can promote peace, maybe organizing football for young people then they play during their free time …

Another young person said:

> Sport, I am not only speaking of particular sport but as in doing this all while we are holding together in the crowd, this brings joy, this brings in as in passion or love for something … if people are in sports they forget about their bad things when they are idle leading to a better performance of peace and unity.

What these data extracts draw attention to is how the young people's visions of peace and peaceful co-existence involve sharing in positive and fun activities, friendship and group interactions. Many of the young people in the project strongly tied visions of peace and a just future to ideas of community and groups coming together to achieve shared goals.

An interesting aspect of the data is how young people's imagined and hoped-for futures had an educational and communicative dimension to them. For several of the young people, a necessary condition of building a peaceful future was to share information about the past and communicate it to other young people and the population more broadly. This was then reflected in the occupations they hoped to pursue. A female participant stated that she wanted to 'be a journalist, if I become a journalist in future I know if there is anything wrong, I can help the community and my country I can speak it out'. Another young person wanted to become a teacher because they would be able to explain to children the 'danger of conflict in society because it brings a lot of harms in the society'. For these young people dialogue and communication about past conflicts was central to building more peaceful futures.

Future questions

In this article we have set out the context and framing of the project and situated our methodological approach in relation to existing work in Uganda and on future imaginaries. In this project, we invited young people to engage in future imaginary arts-based practices that are in dialogue across multiple geographical regions and with each other. Through collaboration and support, this futures work not only offers the potential for young people to consider the ways their futures can be peaceful, but also supports presents that are more 'resilient and adaptable' by offering our young participants the chance 'to articulate futures that are meaningful and worth bringing about' (Sandford 2019: 79). We have opened up creative spaces that allow for what Chahine (2022: 14) describes as 'future memory work', which 'is conducive to understanding what matters to individuals, the way they position themselves in the world, and their multitemporal entanglements. The future gets mobilised in different ways: it functions as a catalyst for eliciting these positionalities; it offers a place to reimagine the present and the past; it makes their temporal interdependencies apparent.' By focusing on three ways that work gets done in practice by young people – through materiality, with situated practices of remembering and forgetting, and with their descriptions of visions of peace – in this article we have reconsidered the situated, contextual practices that are part of future memory work in a tentatively post-conflict, post-colonial society.

Imoh and colleagues (2022) call for people to move beyond the stereotypes of African childhoods and avoid the damaging consequences of the single story about Africa and African childhood. Instead, they have called for, and we have sought to foreground, the space for these young people to describe, explore and represent the mundane, everyday, lived experiences of the past in the present and the futures imagined. As part of this, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges for this work, distancing the young people from each other, the young researchers from the participants and the research team from the research sites (researchers both from the United Kingdom and within Uganda were unable to travel for long periods during the project). However, through creative methodologies, and being methodologically creative, we overcame these challenges and offered young people a space to think hopefully about their shared futures in a time when we all really needed to do so.

Imagining the future is a challenge, and one that young people are often burdened with. This requires considerable work: as Ravn (2022) describes, 'cultivating a sense of hope and remaining hopeful under current conditions, especially when already positioned on the margins, requires significant efforts', and this is reinforced within societies where the legacies and material realities of conflict shape one's everyday life. Elsewhere (Moles *et al.* 2023) we have explored the ways these young Ugandan

participants have worked within available frameworks and expectations, of being hopeful, peace-orientated, conscientious subjects, and how the practices we have described in this article constitute a significant part of the resources they have to draw on to achieve this.

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PART FIVE

Afterword