

# Understanding, Celebrating and Expanding Creativity

*The contributions of participatory theatre to addressing  
the complex challenge of peacebuilding in Kenya*

*Bonface Beti  
April 2021*

*This memo explores one of nine distinctive characteristics of ethical engagement through the arts. It is part of the research informing the report entitled: Invite | Affirm | Evoke | Unleash: How artistic and cultural processes transform complex challenges.” This research was proposed by the [Community Arts Network](#) (affiliated with the [Porticus Foundation](#)) and carried out and written by [IMPACT: Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture, and Conflict Transformation](#).*

# Abstract

This memo is a brief exploration of creativity through the lens of participatory theatre as it's practiced in the deeply divided society of Kenya in answering to the complex challenge of building peace. Kenya is a country whose conflict is steeped in historical and current complexities. Creative responses such as the use of participatory theatre are the answer to the complex peacebuilding questions Kenya contends with given its colonial and postcolonial experience. African conceptions of aesthetics remain deeply connected to ontological and epistemological meaning of creativity and its political implication to the lived experiences of everyday people in post-colonial states. The theatre practice in Kenya draws on the notion of 'the moral imagination' as articulated by John Paul Lederach (2005) and the teachings of Augusto Boal (1995). Creativity is used to deal with complexities around breaking cycles of violence, working on trauma, transforming of protracted conflict and seeking sustainable reconciliation.

## Introduction

In her book, *Storm of Creativity* published in 2015, Kyna Leski uses the metaphor of a storm to discuss the complex creative responses undertaken by artists by looking at how water droplets define the pathways of a storm as they gather and take form. However, prior to her use of this metaphor to illustrate the continuous motion of the droplets, she elucidates the role played by artists as being similar to creating something that never existed in the first place. Her words deeply resonate with complexities inherent in the challenge of peacebuilding in Kenya and the role played by artist peacebuilders to partner with communities to navigate this terrain for generations. The current social conflict in Kenya requires multidisciplinary, wholistic and a systems thinking approach to its conceptualization and transformation. Recently systems theory has been utilized in the fields of Sociology, Development, Indigenous studies, Social work and Conflict resolution studies. Such societal issues that have complex causes that are difficult to solve are now referred to as *wicked problems*. In his seminal article 'Wicked Problems in Design Thinking', Richard Buchanan has emphasized on the need for designers often to engage in conceiving and planning "what does not yet exist, and this occurs in the context of indeterminacy of wicked problems" (Buchanan, 2015, p.17). The current social conflict in Kenya requires a multidisciplinary, holistic and systems thinking approach.

In Kenya creativity has been conceived and utilized as spontaneous and deliberate responses to life threatening conflict rooted in our lived experiences (Dietrich, 2004). Creative responses such as use of participatory theatre in Kenya are the answer to complex peacebuilding questions in Kenya may sit on both colonial and postcolonial experiences. Most of Africa has been largely dominated by Eurocentric aesthetics until recently where cultural meanings have been studied. Most of African conceptions of aesthetics remains deeply connected to ontological and epistemological meaning of creativity and its political implication to the lived experiences of everyday people in post-colonial states. Among the Yoruba for example the word *Ashe* is connected to *iwa*. *iwa* means "walked with ancestors" and acquired critical discerning eyes. *Oju-inu* are important to *iwa* which is an inner eye or the insight of the artist or the external harmony of the artworks called *oju-ona*. There exist aesthetic commonalities where an "Ibo may recognize a Kikuyu and a Jamaican may recognize a Chewa and African American

may recognize a Sotho” (Welsh & Welsh-Asante, 1993, p. 53). In Kenyan experience, creativity has been the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity has been applied by the ability to perceive the world in new ways beyond conflict, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate creative solutions. Additionally, creativity can act as a lens to imagine the world beyond conflict, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate creative solutions.

Drawing from several African literature writers, the word “theater” is radically different from the way theatre is understood and practiced in the West (actually most African languages have no equivalent for the work theater). For instance: (a) theater in most African settings is both formal and informal space where the division between the storyteller/performer and the spectator is easily blurred; (b) theater is a hybrid of expressive arts that would include song, dance, storytelling, dramatic skits, amongst others; and (c) is fundamentally a process of education, of passing knowledge from one generation to another and, more significantly, of resolving problems in the community. In this Memo the word “theater” and thus creativity, adopts the African meaning of the term to signify and amplify a discursive, heuristic and inclusive space where difficult and sensitive issues of communities are discussed in a way that nurtures joint action towards resolving fundamental questions in the community and the larger society.

Kenya is a country whose conflict history is steeped in historical and current complexities. Coming from British colonialism, One party state dictatorship to current neo-liberal globalization trends that support structural elite political oppression of the masses, the country has seen cycles of political electoral violence since 1992 (Cornell & Hartmann, 2006; Maupeu, 2008). All the above factors have created complex conflict dynamics pitting state-building project against the nation-building dream disrupted by neoliberal internationalism, proliferation of intrastate and ethno-political conflicts (Horowitz, 2000) in which emerging nation states must come to terms with their violent past to heal and rebuild their societies (Hayner, 2002). Ethnopolitical violence as a force shaping human and world affairs can no longer be ignored or denied (Taras & Ganguly, 2015). The moral imagination in this case is on how everyday people in Kenya have used creativity as metaphors to respond to such complex conflicts. On this topic Lederach states thus:

*Moral imagination is the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist; it is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that while rooted in existing challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of destructive patterns and cycles (Lederach, 2005, p. 29)*

In Kenya, the artists have become critical allies to partner with local people caught up in intractable cycles of violence creating a new peacebuilding paradigm premised on local ownership by local actors using creativity to allow for a new emancipatory peace experience (Mac Ginty, 2013; Pugh, 2013). In thinking about participatory theatre use to build processes towards reconcill-action in Kenya, Kagusu Mutima cites Cindy Cohen, dissertation in 1997 where she says: 'reconciliation' and “the aesthetic” are key for “receptivity”. She continues ‘in the creation and appreciation of art, like in the understanding of others with whom we disagree, engaged listening is key”(p.32). This is what we have encountered in creatively thinking about reconciliation.

For artists like myself I embarked on using participatory theatre as responses to explore sustainable reconciliation as modes of working through humanistic everyday negotiations to complex changing social scenarios in my everyday life. In Kenya participatory theatre as creative forms, work alongside other applied theatre forms such as Forum and Playback Theatre, which have the broad goal of challenging

forms of structural violence through processes such as storytelling, active witnessing, and embodiment (Boal, 1979; Fox, 2004; Sajani, 2012). As creative artforms, participatory theatre also taps into the elicitive peacebuilding processes and therefore allow for use of myriad cultural resources and forms of knowledge in promoting reconciliation (Shank & Schirch, 2008).

My theatre method draws inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Brecht Bertolt. Augusto Boal who says:

*The Theatre of the Oppressed is located precisely on the frontier between fiction and reality – and this border must be crossed (Boal, 1995, p.245)*

Boal uses Freire's understanding of the creative and imaginative power of theatre (particularly in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* –(Freire, 1972)) and its ability to liberate the oppressed when he developed Forum methodology (Boal, 1979) as forms of participatory theatre. This approach deeply involves analysis of context specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analyzing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analyzing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied (Boal, 1979; Squiers, 2016).

This memo draws from examples of my own practice with Amani Peoples Theatre; an African theatre-based peace resource organization based in Kenya and the Green String Network, an African social movement of trauma-informed peacebuilding organizations and volunteers that utilize the arts, culture and storytelling as resources for grassroot communities to imagine long-term peace and reconciliation. Amani People's Theatre and Green String Network work through interpersonal and intrapersonal approaches in transforming conflict using theatre and arts to work on issues as complex as armed militias, election violence, land struggles and oppression. Use of forum theatre delves into intimate experiences of conflict using other forms such as Image Theatre and the Rainbow of Desire all devised by Augusto Boal (Burns et al., 2015).

This memo examines key turning points, experiences and themes evoked by application of participatory theatre on the Kenyan complex peacebuilding context. The work it details is happening on the backdrop of a plethora of social change processes sweeping across grassroot communities in Kenya and follows the examples of the works of de-colonial creative writers such as Zakes Mda (1993)(When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1982) (I will Marry When I Want), Augusto Boal (Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre) and the model of Amani People's Theater and Green String Network in Kenya.

## Celebrating Creativity in the Kenyan Complex Peacebuilding Context

*Creativity as Reclamation of Local Agencies and Bodies in Reimagining Grassroots Social Change*

Dessa Quesada-Palm is a theatre artist-educator, who has spent most of her life, working with communities in Negros Island and Mindanao in the Philippines. In 2017 while studying in Canada, I spent a summer week class with her in class on the use of the *Arts in Peacebuilding* at the Canadian University for Peace where she was teaching. But that's beside the point. In this class she shared an article she wrote in 2005 for our reflections as artist-peacebuilders focusing use of creativity to respond to complex conflicts in our countries. She called her paper: *Rehearsal for Change: Reclaiming Senses Through Arts Approaches*. This paper was presented during the Forum of the Asian Regional Exchange on New Alternatives in 2005, Hong Kong. In the piece, she makes a compelling case on why the world is competing for the attention of our senses as critical liberating tools, especially amongst militarised and communities living under different forms of political oppression such as Kenya. She points out that under such oppression, citizens' creativity becomes the first casualty, thereby causing a sensual numbing and erasure of peoples' ability to openly "dialogue" and use "critical thinking" to engage with power structures to gain agency over their own lives (Quesada-Palm, 2005, p.4). Her work in Mindanao is a classic example and augurs well with the creative work of Amani Peoples' Theatre and the Green String Network in Kenya. Our collective work is to consolidate grassroots peace imaginaries and everyday agencies across Kenya through the arts. Like us, Dessa was drawn into creativity of the arts to "help people reclaim their own sense of safety (art as self-discovery and healing), sense of possibility (the role of spontaneity), the sense of connection (linking narratives and taming chaos), sense of agency (dialogue and becoming spect-ators), and a sense of power (with theatre as a process and cultural product)" (Quesada-Palm, 2005, pp. 2-7). The feeling alluded to in the above description resembles, typical political historical developments in Kenya albeit with little variations. Let's take a cursory glance at the political violent situation in Kenya through the above theatrical lenses she has described:

### *Finding Safety through Creativity, Conscientization and Breaking Cycles of Violence*

In 2007, Babu Ayindo wrote a riveting article for artists and practitioners keen to apply the arts in peacebuilding in Kenya called; *Playing Our Way to Transcendence*. He quotes Augusto Boal book published in 1979 from the *Theatre of the Oppressed* foreword where he says that "all theatre is a necessary political process" and so is building grassroots peace in any country. Oppression breeds a culture of fear, violence and therefore instills collective trauma to stifle citizens' creativity and alternative visions for social change through imposition of both mortal and psychological threats on their lives. This has been part of the history in Kenya. The country's people have witnessed continued political violence with its accompanying culture of violent suppression, trauma of national scale and great infringement to personal freedoms and creativity. This is seen in President Kenyatta's brutal rule from 1964 to 1978 followed Moi's dictatorship from 1978 to 2002 as well as the violent advent of multi-party democracy from 1992, 2007 elections violence and the International Criminal Court intervention in Kenya. (Carter et al., 2009; Elkins, 2005; Mamdani, 2001; Nnoli, 1998; Oyugi et al., 2003; Volkan, 1998 as cited in Senehi et al., 2009). From December 2007 to February 2008, Kenya was on the brink of collapse from disputed general elections, with 1500 killed, 3000 women raped, and 300,000 internally displaced (Robert, 2009). This in itself was a case of direct assault on the integrity and safety of both victims and perpetrators, according to the TJRC reports which recommended, among other things redressing of past atrocities (Oyugi et al., 2003). The events of the past coupled with tragedies of today continue to make Kenya unsafe.

The creative spaces in Kenya generate a place for self-discovery, collective consciousness, creative agency and healing storytelling across identity. For now constructive dialogue at the middle-level and grassroots still remain unattainable and often lead to more cycles of violence and hate crime across ethnic and class divides. Forum theatre has provided creative and brave spaces in a vicarious way, for both victims and perpetrators to share stories, transform emotions, validate each other and humanize each other through play (games for actors and non-actors-Agusto Boal). In Kenya, current conflict is nested and framed from the past tapping into imagined or real historical fears, attitudes and prejudices. Ethnic clashes and militia violence, police brutality and political assassinations have marked the country's history, making human security a difficult dream to catch (Carter et al., 2009; Petroska-Beska & Kenig, 2009). According to Boalian forum theatre (Games and Actors and Non-Actors) in staging, the actors have physical styles of playing which successfully articulate their characters' ideology, work, social function, profession etc. This can provide a transformative space even in environments with strict political control or ethnic filtering such as Kenya (Boege, 2006; Burton, 1997; Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1972; Galtung, 2001; Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2013, cited in Wanis-St John, 2015; Rothman, 1992;)

### *Creativity, Sense of possibility and the role of Spontaneity*

In Boalian forum theatre as used in Kenya, original solutions proposed by protagonist, must contain at least one political or social error, which will be analyzed during the forum session. Kenyan society prides itself as a politically conscious society due to the constant and underlying ethnic divisions. However, a myriad "political and social errors" remain embedded in peoples' psyche causing trauma and political stereotyping (Quesada-Palm, 2005, p.2). Long years of suppression of personal freedoms has led to denial of a peoples' agency to creatively and critically view conflict. Dictatorial controls, political trauma and fear in Kenya, has limited the abilities for people to creatively dialogue and express themselves, leading to more violence due to pent up anger. The arts provide such an integral part in recovery of such skills, voices and embodiment, according to Dessa Quesada-Palm (2005). The sense of possibility maybe not only for people to find an opportunity by creating theatrical symbols and expressions of their fears, hopes and aspirations at community levels, but to exchange ideas of their dreams of the Kenya they want to see with other ethnic groups deemed as enemies to reduce psychological distance. Dessa Quesada-Palm (2005), points to human "bodies and voices as being receptors and expressive devices that manifest our conditions, values and dispositions" (p.1). She therefore, states that, if we aspire to change society, we need to free our bodily agencies and imagination in order to find possibilities and a new world. This the only way to bring about, social change. These critical senses were largely stifled in the periods listed above in Kenya to date.

The participants in the Kenyan clashes of 2007 can be viewed as both victims and perpetrators. This very fact has made such conflict difficult to solve by the usual criminal justice approaches alone which are seeking only to punish perpetrators and find who should take the blame. A case in point is the International Criminal Court which has failed to nail any Kenyan suspect over the violence. Theatre may provide critical ways to explore other restorative justice approaches and mechanisms. In commenting on Alice Love Lace poetics, in a "Brief History of Theatre Forms" Babu Ayindo (2008) shows that; "In aboriginal theatre, the community (artists were always part of the community) gathered in the open, under the sky, nature providing the scenery and backdrop. *The action was interdisciplinary* using songs, masks, dance, ritual and unscripted so that the audience and community was free to intervene and

shape it. This theatre was under the authority of the community. Together they told stories, reflecting their values and worldview” (p.9). In Kenya, most communities have been using song and dance and ritual to celebrate and dialogue at grassroots levels a resource through agencies such as “Amani Peoples” Theatre and “Green String Network” harnessed to start community dialogues after the 2008 elections conflict in order to foster political dialogue.

In most political forum theatre in Kenya, ethnic groups present and view themselves as both “oppressor” and “oppressed” and “protagonist” and “antagonist” in equal breath making it difficult at times to subject the “oppression” to scrutiny of “spect-actors” due shifting ethnic lenses and interests. While working with the Kikuyu ethnic group in the Kibera slum in Nairobi, they reported to have been victims of evictions by the Luo ethnic group. However, this prompted revenge attacks by Kikuyu-allied Mungiki militia that raped Luo women in Mathare Slums. Amani People’s Theatre has used forum theatre and the Green String Network used creative arts in all these instances working on trauma at times but also trying to transform the conflict spirals.

### *Creativity, Connection, Narratives and Taming Chaos:*

Use of historical narratives of “victimhood and “aggressor” is a common feature among ethno-political competition in Kenya. These narratives shape the political talk of the day. Fordred Lesley (1999) says that, “stories are powerful because, structures and meanings that comprise them, can be reproduced a thousand times, become how people think of themselves, filter into taxi buzz, pub talk, playground tuants, discussion over fence with neighbor, they establish what nation is(world), who am I in it, who could I be and how do I expect to be treated?” (p.12). In Kenya, Kikuyu remains the largest ethnic group, dominating the political scene since independence, more recently in concert with the Kalenjin. Bitter rivalry has ultimately pitted the Kikuyu-Kalenjin axis against the Luos, who have spent many years opposing what they see as Kikuyu hegemony over the Kenyan state. The smaller tribes remain excluded from political power altogether, further fueling ethnic tensions during elections. The Luos, political arch-rivals of Kikuyu power since independence, lost senior politicians to assassination during the first two presidencies (Kenyatta and Moi regimes). These assassinations reinforced the Luo’s self-image of victimization and cemented mental images of Kikuyu as enemies and aggressors. Kikuyus have spearheaded campaigns to delegitimize the Luos as “hungry for power,” with attendant dehumanizing narratives. The belief is spread that Luo may not understand how to rule a nation-- after all, it’s the Kikuyu who fought for independence from colonialists. Other stereotypical prejudices include cultural practices, with circumcision being seen as an important credential for state leadership. Since Luo do not practice this rite, how could they manage matters of the Kenyan state.

In ethnically divided societies such as Kenya, use of forum theatre can be a better “model of action” to constructively discuss political relationships. In theatre one can recreate election win and lose scenarios and signs of violence. By doing so one can learn from these situations and prevent political violence in the future. When conducting these performances consent is essential especially when working across ethnic lines. Each character must be play in the “safe space” and spect-actors must easily identify with the issues related to identity. Through the work of Amani People’s Theatre, we established “Peace Marshals” program a community-based election violence prevention intervention before and during the new constitution referendum in 2008. In this initiative, spot-forum theatre was applied as a spontaneous tool to diffuse youth conflict tensions. Additionally, the Amani People’s

Theatre used forum theatre in 2014 when addressing issues with Kikuyu landlords and tenants in Kibera to prevent potential violent outbreaks.

### *Creativity, Dialogue and Becoming Spect-actors*

The most challenging task in this task is forging the dialogue and becoming a credible “spect-actor” with further prejudicing and further “othering” in politics. Ensuring safety and integrity of the space remains paramount. Playing and presenting fixed mental images of both “victims” and “aggressor” is highly contested due to ethnic fears and sometimes hate. Discussion of hot political topics and self-reflections to reduce bias may be central to such work and prior research on issues needed as well as consent. Much of the forum theatre work may focus more on transforming self-fears using different genre (realism, symbolism, expressionism etc.). Integration of other theatre such “cop in head” may be crucial allies. In talking about how actors define their identity and their roles in society, Babu Ayindo (2008), says there’s need to go back to ‘process and products’ of art to redeem it from the larger political conspiracies and mental colonization (p.5). Use of spontaneity and improvisations were critical in creating public awareness on the new constitution in Kenya. Forum theatre and legislative theatre were critical in these conversations throughout the work of Amani People’s Theatre.

### *Creativity, Power Dynamics and Use of theatre as a Process to Transform Enemy Images*

In ethnically divided societies, state-power remains a sure way to guard and protect ethnic interests and keep perceived “enemies” in check. Therefore, election time becomes important. Ethnic groups form political alliances with the chief purpose of excluding or isolating others, rival ethnic groups, from positions of power. Losing an election is always a loss for tribes, and an affront to their identity, shameful, something they may be willing to go an extra-mile to redeem or suffer in bitter silence. In Kenya, Kikuyus have ruled the country the longest, followed by Kalenjin. Luos have relentlessly strived to wrestle power from the Kikuyus with no success. This question for power, has prompted vicious ethnic alliances aimed at locking individual politicians from power.

In 2013 and alliance of Kikuyu and Kalenjin won a hotly contested election, almost traumatizing half of the country supporters of those who lost, especially the Luo-Kamba-Luhya alliance. These political realities coupled with ICC cases have divided the country right in the middle. The battle lines among groups were drawn for the 2017 elections with each side vowing not to accept election results if they lose. Forum theatre was a solution to this problem, providing violence early warning signs as well as reducing “enemy images” especially with diehard ethnic supporters. Martin Luther King’s (1958) principles espouses. The approach recognizes that perpetrators are also victims. The field of political psychology and unofficial diplomacy has developed this idea further. Volkan (1985), states that “exaggerated enemy images can be viewed as a shadow—a counterpart to an individual that is impenetrably linked to him or her”(p. 21). When they are engaged in a serious conflict, people will normally project their own negative traits onto the other side, ignoring their own shortcomings or misdeeds, while emphasizing the same in the other. Enemy images also involve ‘scapegoating.’ It is common for each side to decide that it is the other side (the ‘enemy’) that is the source of all their problems. If only the enemy could be vanquished or eliminated, then those problems would go away (Volkan, 1985).



Forum theatre instills a sense of community leadership and community action in Kibera slums where Amani People's Theatre has worked with youth organizations on important community issues such as participation in country governmental affairs. Green String Network has applied such approaches to transforming violent extremism with great impact through of water colour paintings to work on different types of trauma. Without individual and collective healing, these underlying pains remain, wounds fester, and become chronic leading to repeated cycles of violence. The research and practice of Green String Network (GSN), a national social healing organization applying the trauma-informed peacebuilding framework with a network of national community organizations in Kenya suggest that to heal the individual and collective trauma we must build on Indigenous resources and cultures extant in the local communities.

However, given the politics of external funding, there is also a tendency to focus on the use of dominant approaches addressing mental health needs that are biomedical, pathologizing responses to trauma while divorcing these experiences from broader structural and historic factors, such as violence, inequality and poverty or individualized approaches, focusing on an individual's experiences without taking into account how they fit into collective experiences. Green String Network and others, have employed creative approaches to unlock new ways of embodying, thinking, and feeling about the present and future conflicts thus informing new behaviour for individuals and communities to make meaning of their lived experiences.

## Conclusion

The use of creativity such as Participatory theatre and other artistic processes remain critical in advancing use of emancipatory peacebuilding and reconcili-action while offering opportunities for healing of bitter feelings, memories, rebuilding relationships by transforming divisions embedded in social structures towards attaining real reconciliation and future (Mac Ginty, 2013; Pugh, 2013; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Pugh continues to agree with Oliver Richmond on the use of the creative artistic modes in providing pathways needed for, 'local agency, resistance, and liberation open up the politics of peacebuilding more fully and require an engagement with agonistic mediation of difference' (Pugh, 2013, p. 23; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011, p. 214). This is true for Kenya as these creative responses continue to shape the emerging emancipatory peacebuilding paradigms.

Ethnic violence in Kenya has been a recurring issue with no lasting solution. Theatre making is a creative approach in addressing Kenya's conflict ridden reality. Periods of strife often produce trauma leading to increased "powerful emotions, such as fear, anger, mistrust and betrayal, which can in turn bind societies and communities together by generating cultures of fear, anger, resentment and anxiety" (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2013, p. 87). This was the case in South Africa post-apartheid as authors such as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) notes, communities continued to suffer post-traumatic effects of previous violence even though Apartheid had ended. Through opportunities afforded by theatrical storytelling, such deep emotions could be transformed towards deeper communal healing. Lederach (2005) affirms, moral imagination is the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist; it is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that while rooted in existing challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of destructive patterns and cycles (Lederach, 2005, p. 29).

Furthermore, Hutchison & Bleiker (2013) links “positive emotions” to “reconciliation” and to both transforming conflicts and restoring relationships (p.20).

Creativity builds on Indigenous approaches thereby providing mechanisms to fit in situations of countries with problematic state-building projects such as Kenya (Snyder, 2000). Creativity also supports Elicitive rather than prescriptive approaches that accommodate diversity and empower local people (Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1972; Lederach, 1997). Creativity helps in exploring unmet human needs like dignity, identity, safety, & justice (Burton, 1997; Rothman, 1992). Creativity taps into psycho-social approaches to address traumas resulting from violent conflicts, humiliation, structural and historical injustices as well build on Storytelling - Healing/recovery- addressing root cause of trauma, working through emotions, establishing meaningful relationships (Senehi et al., 2009; V. Volkan, 2003).. Creativity is based on critical and emancipatory peacebuilding and reconciliation approaches used in this memo and may be summed by the following three main factors; the local context is the new arena for renewed contestation and conflict rooted in competing values, but also a critical opportunity for learning new lessons on how to transform conflict towards sustainable peace and reconciliation for both the locals and external peace stakeholders (Mac Ginty 2008, cited in Wanis-St John, 2015, p. 360).

## Author Biography

Bonface Njeresu Beti is an interdisciplinary practitioner academic who specializes in application of theatre-based interventions with grassroots communities to transform conflict and create a story of peace. Since 2004, working with Amani Peoples’ Theatre and with the Green String Network he has utilized these tools in conflict in Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, US and Canada among others. He uses all these approaches in a culturally relevant way working with community members to reflect deeply on complexities of historical trauma and social conflicts. The main objective is attaining critical emancipatory peace where community members are reclaiming their human agency through such processes. He holds two MA degrees, one in International Relations from United States International University in Nairobi, Kenya, the other in peacebuilding from the University of Manitoba, Canada and Graduate Certificate in Use of Arts in Peacebuilding at Canadian Peace School. He’s currently admitted into the advanced certificate leading to PhD program in use of Expressive Arts in Conflict transformation at European Graduate School in Saas Fee, Switzerland. He also currently an instructor at the Menno Simons College affiliated to the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada where he's teaching a course titled: Nonviolence for Social Change. Bonface is joining the PHD in Peace and Conflict Studies at University of Manitoba Canada the fall of 2021. Bonface is partnering with [IMPACT](#) on different levels, including design and implementation of virtual Learning Exchange in Africa.

## References

- Ayindo, B. (2008). Arts Approaches to Peace: Playing our Way to Transcendence. In B. Hart (Ed.), *Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies*. University Press of America.
- Boal, A. (1979). *Theater of the Oppressed*. Urizen Books.
- Boal, A. (1995). *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. Psychology Press.
- Boege, V. (2006). Traditional Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Potentials and Limits. In M. Fischer, H. Gießmann, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management,. <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/traditional-approaches-to-conflict-transformation-potentials-and-limits/>
- Buchanan, R. (2015). Wicked Problems in Design Thinking. *Kepes*, 7(6), 7–35.
- Burns, M. A., Beti, B. N., Okuto, M. E., Muwanguzi, D., & Sanyu, L. (2015). Forum Theatre for Conflict Transformation in East Africa: The Domain of the Possible. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 5(1), 136–151. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.5.1.136>
- Burton, J. (1997). *Violence Explained: The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and Their Prevention*. Manchester University Press.
- Carter, J., Irani, G., & Volkan, V. D. (2009). *Regional and Ethnic Conflicts: Perspectives from the Front Lines*, CourseSmart eTextbook. Routledge.
- Cohen, C. E. (1997). *A poetics of reconciliation: The aesthetic mediation of conflict*.
- Cornell, S., & Hartmann, D. (2006). *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. SAGE Publications.
- Dietrich, A. (2004). The cognitive neuroscience of creativity. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 11(6), 1011–1026. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03196731>
- Elkins, C. (2005). *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*.

- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
- Fordred, L. (1999). Taming chaos: The dynamics of narrative and conflict. *Track Two: Constructive Approaches to Community and Political Conflict*, 8(1), 0. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC111761>
- Fox, J. (2004). Playback Theatre compared to psychodrama and theatre of the oppressed. *Centre for Playback Theatre*.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum. New York.
- Galtung, J. (2001). After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution. In M. Abu-Nimer (Ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*. Lexington Books.
- Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2002). Remorse, Forgiveness, and Rehumanization: Stories from South Africa. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(1), 7–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167802421002>
- Hayner, P. B. (2002). *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*. Psychology Press.
- Horowitz, D. L. (2000). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict, Updated Edition With a New Preface*. University of California Press.
- Hutchison, E., & Bleiker, R. (2013). Reconciliation. In R. Mac Ginty (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. Routledge.
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. *Washington, DC: USIP*.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
- Leski, K. (2015). *The Storm of Creativity*. MIT Press.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2013). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. Routledge.
- Mamdani, M. (2001). *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.
- Maupeu, H. (2008). Revisiting Post-Election Violence. *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review*, 38, 193–230.

- Mda, Z. (1993). When people play people: Development communication through theatre. *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre*.  
<https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/19931859838>
- Ngũgĩ, T., & Ngũgĩ, M. (1982). *I Will Marry When I Want*.
- Nnoli, O. (1998). *Ethnic Conflicts in Africa*. Conseil Pour Le Developement De LA.
- Oyugi, W. O., Wanyande, P., Odhiambo-Mbai, C., & Heinrich Böll Foundation (Nairobi, Kenya) (Eds.). (2003). *The Politics of transition in Kenya: From KANU to NARC*. Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Petroska-Beska, V., & Kenig, N. (2009). The ethnic conflict in Macedonia from the Ethnic Macedonians Perspective: Being Victims in Their Own Country. In J. Carter, G. E. Irani, & V. D. Volkan (Eds.), *Regional and ethnic conflicts: Perspectives from the front lines*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Pugh, M. (2013). *The problem-solving and critical paradigms*. University Press.
- Quesada-Palm, D. (2005). *Rehearsal for Change: Reclaiming Senses Through Arts Approaches*. Unpublished.
- Richmond, O. P., & Mitchell, A. (2011). *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*. Springer.
- Robert, M. (2009). Constitution-Making in Contemporary Kenya: Lessons from the Twentieth Century. *Kenya Studies Review*, 1(1), 11–30.
- Rothman, J. (1992). *From Confrontation to Cooperation: Resolving Ethnic and Regional Conflicts*. SAGE Publications.
- Sajnani, N. (2012). Improvisation and art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 3(1).
- Senehi, J., Flaherty, M., Kirupakaran, C. S., Kornelsen, L., Matenge, M., & Skarlato, O. (2009). Dreams of Our Grandmothers: Discovering the Call for Social Justice Through Storytelling. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 5(2), 90–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505340902837366>

- Shank, M., & Schirch, L. (2008). Strategic Arts-Based Peacebuilding. *Peace & Change*, 33(2), 217–242.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2008.00490.x>
- Snyder, J. (2000). *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. Norton.
- Squiers, A. (2016). *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht: Revolution and Aesthetics*. Rodopi.
- Taras, R., & Ganguly, R. (2015). *Understanding Ethnic Conflict*. Routledge.
- Volkan, V. (2003). *Large-Group Identity: Border Psychology and Related Societal Processes*.
- Volkan, V. D. (1985). The need to have enemies and allies: A developmental approach. *Political Psychology*, 6(2), 219–247. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3790902>
- Wanis-St John, A. (2015). Indigenous peacebuilding. In R. Mac Ginty (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of peacebuilding* (First issued in paperback). Routledge.
- Welsh, K., & Welsh-Asante, K. (Eds.). (1993). *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*. Praeger.