ARTISTIC IMAGINARIES OF WAR IN EAST AFRICA: "WORLDING" AS AN AGENCY OF PEACE CULTURE

Christopher Odhiambo Joseph
Moi University
E-mail: cjodhiambo@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the idea of "worlding" as a form of agency in war-intervention imaginaries in East Africa. The article argues that these imaginaries draw their materiality from experiences of war and in return attempt to provide these "worlds" of wars with new and alternative meanings and possibilities. It is these new alternative meanings and possibilities that indeed constitute peace culture. The agency of (re)imagining a peace culture is what constitutes "worlding." That is, the power of the imaginary to transform lived realities as found in the worlds of these artists as they know and experience them, and in return, the worlds their imaginations (en)vision. Thus, "worldings" in these war imaginaries are construed as a means of devising a world by choosing its chaotic and dysfunctional present while similarly aiming at its transformative future. "Worlding" in a work of art is the process of bringing into being or "setting up" a world or worlds; it is therefore the process of defamiliarizing the world as we know it, investing it with new meanings, and opening it to new possibilities. In demonstrating how "worlding" manifests as an agency of peace culture, the following imaginaries of war are the key subjects of analysis: Ni Sisi, *a film for community development; the play* Thirty Years of Bananas*, by Alex Mukulu; and the novel* Murambi, the Book of Bones*, by Boubacar Boris Diop.*

Keywords: Imaginaries of War, Worlding, Agency, Peace Culture, Alternative Futures

Introduction

This article explores artistic imaginaries of war in East Africa, and how they are implicated in the agency and vision of a culture of peace in situations of postwar violence, as found in three works: *Thirty Years of Bananas* (1992), a play based on experiences of war and its aftermath in Uganda by the Ugandan playwright Alex Mukulu; *Murambi, the Book of Bones* (2004), a novel by Senegalese creative fiction writer and journalist Boubacar Diop, dramatizing the Rwandan genocide of 1994; and finally, the film *Ni Sisi* by Sponsored Art For Education (S.A.F.E) Kenya, directed by Nick Redding, based on the 2007–2008 postelection violence (PEV) in Kenya.

The interesting dimension of these works' imaginaries of war is that they are paradoxically implicated in the agency for peace. The forms of violence encountered in these imaginaries putatively follow Hedley Bull's differentiation of violence and war:

> Violence is not war unless it is carried out in the name of a political unit; what distinguishes killing in war from murder is its vicarious and official character, the

> symbolic unit whose agent the killer is. Equally, violence carried out in the name of a political unit is not war unless it is directed against another political unit. (Quoted in Dower, 2009, p. 7)

As such, the violence dramatized in the artistic imaginaries under inspection is that of war, as it is motivated by a political goal or agenda. Peace, on the other hand, is understood in two ways: negatively, as the absence of war, and positively, as harmony informed by justice and other moral values—as *shalom,* that is, the idea of wholeness in social relations, or as the product of everyone achieving their own inner peace (Dower, 2009, p. 7).

The three war imaginaries under scrutiny also follow very closely Chinyere Nwahunanya's (1997, p. 14) conception of war texts (quoted in Emenyonu, 2008, p. xi), which, though referring specifically to the Nigerian Civil War, similarly applies to these texts from Eastern Africa; as he aptly reminds us:

> In its creation and interpretation of history, Nigerian war literature has enriched the existing body of historical writing from Africa, especially historical fiction. In this way, the writers have made literature continue to function as a mirror of society. In the process of mirroring society and criticizing its pitfalls, the war literature also serves as a compass for social re-direction. A didactic function emerges in the process, especially portrayal of death, devastation, avoidable mistakes and sufferings engendered by the war. The ultimate intention of course is to see whether these records of a sour historical moment will enable the modern African to see futility of wars as a solution to national problems which could be solved without recourse to war, carnage and bloodshed. The suggested mistakes of the war initiators and administrators portrayed in these writings thus become invaluable guides to meaningful national growth and a stable and progressive society. If this lesson comes through, then African nations (and indeed the world) would have gained immensely from this harvest of tragedy.

It is this very character of war literature as a compass for social direction—as Nwahunanya (1997) has observed—that indeed defines its agency in the process of peace-building, and that constitutes the very idea of "worlding." Therefore, "worlding," in a sense, denotes the process of transforming the lived realities/experiences of war through the power of artistic imagination by investing them with new meanings and alternative possibilities. This concurs with Hegel's argument:

> Art liberates the real import of appearances from this bad and fleeting world, and imports to phenomenal semblances a higher reality born of mind. The appearances of art therefore, far from being mere semblances, have the higher reality and the more genuine existence in comparison with the realities of common life. (Harries, 2009, p. 8)

Thus, the concept of "worldings" in these war imaginaries is construed as the vision of a work of art with respect to imagining a world that is chaotic and dysfunctional while imbuing it with transformative alternative futures. "Worlding," as understood in the of a imaginary work of art, is a process of bringing about or "setting up" a world or worlds. As such, the process of "worlding" is the inauguration of a world (or worlds) that is not already extant through the

artistic imagination. It is therefore, in a sense, the process of defamiliarizing the world as we know it by investing it with new meanings and providing it with new visions and alternative possibilities.

From Worlds of War to "Worldings" of Peace

It is noteworthy how artistic imaginaries whose impulses are pacifistic or anti-war must concomitantly focus on war; thus the unsurprising dominance of horrifying, dreadful, and eerie images encountered in the war imaginaries under scrutiny. In their conscious quest to set a pacifistic and anti-war and agenda, these war imaginaries invest immensely in victim discourses and the grammar of agency that ostensibly point to a culture of peace. By "victim discourse," I mean the use of language and grammar to depict passive bodies in times of war, more specifically the explicit exposure of dead bodies as well as those wounded and in pain; meanwhile, the discourse of agency is construed as the conscious effort of these war imaginaries to consider, promote, mobilize for and act toward the avoidance of war and the restoration and sustainability of a peace culture. In war discourses, therefore, agency is imagined as the contradistinction of complicity.

For instance, *Thirty Years of Bananas* is a collected and collective memory of the thirty years of diverse frictions, conflicts, violence, and wars that preoccupied postindependence Uganda; *Murambi* takes a backward glance at the 1994 Rwandan genocide and, subtly, the RPF guerrilla war, while *Ni Sisi* rehashes Kenya's 2007–8 postelection violence. All these depictions are simultaneously designed to foreground the destructiveness of wars and project the value of peace. This is well articulated by Phares M. Mutibwa in the foreword to *Thirty Years of Bananas*, where he asserts:

> […] there is the importance of spelling out the tragedies and agonies of Uganda's three decades of "Bananas." There are those who have always claimed that it was wrong to reopen the wounds, to tell the people—especially those who were not witnesses to these events—what actually did happen. But not Alex Mukulu, and he happens to be right. If the past is not told the way it really was, then Ugandans will never be able to prevent its repetition. If we are to redeem ourselves, then , surely, the truth must be told wholesale in order to teach new generations what to expect if they harvest another crop of "Years of Bananas." (1992, vi)

Mutibwa's observation indeed clearly spells out how engaging in postmortems of war is in itself an agency for peace. As Giorgio Agamben notes (quoted in Krimmer, 2010, p. 3): "in the war novel, the concept of peace represents an inclusion by exclusion." This means that it is not possible to explore peace in the absence of war. Depictions of wars are therefore conscious intervention projects against wars, as they paradoxically gesture toward a vision of peace. This therefore reveals why victim discourses and the agency for peace are entangled (anti)-war artistic imaginaries. Victim discourses or victimization in artistic imaginaries of war depict, in the most explicitly gory ways, wounded bodies and corpses. Victim discourses of war have also been variously referred to as the aestheticization of pain and the pornography of violence. Deploying the aestheticization of pain and the pornography of violence is

perceived as a strategy for creating aversion to war and similarly inspiring a longing and quest for peace.

In various ways, the three texts that are the focus of this article employ victim discourses as a caution to postwar societies on the dangers of sliding back into war. Mukulu's *Thirty Years of Bananas*, as previously mentioned, employs collected and collective memories to lay bare the victims' discourses. This is made possible through the symbolic deployment of the museum as a site of re-memory. For instance, the atrocities of Idi Amin's reign are remembered through the collective voice of the Chorus as follows:

> This is what must be told
> The crucible through which Uganda has been
> Alarms, gunfire, conflicts and quarrels
> The mystic-mystery
> Through which Uganda has been
> Shame, shame
> Confrontations, guns, pleas, outcries…
> Orphans born of bullets in many a home…
> Where their parents were forcibly laid to rest. (Mukulu, 1992, p. 23)

A more terrifying war experience is remembered and narrated by the character Nakuya:

> In 1979 the world seemed to have exploded. (*Explosions)* I was outside the house when the bang sounded. The next moment I became conscious of myself, I was stuck under my bed and my big toe was bleeding. To this day I don't know what cut me. Later I learnt it was what they called a bomb. That afternoon in 1979, war became a reality to me. Until then it had been a distant grief. (Mukulu, 1992, p. 60)

However, the most horrifyingly grotesque and macabre victim discourses are laid bare in Boris Diop's novel *Murambi, the Book of Bones*. As in *Thirty Years of Bananas,* here the victim discourses are rendered by the victims of the genocide as well as through the gory images of corpses at commemoration sites or museums of death. The encounter with the grotesque and terrifying images is made possible by the character Cornelius, who was in exile during the genocide. It is in *Murambi* (as in *Ni Sisi*, as we shall see later) that one encounters *the aestheticization of pain and the "pornography of violence*." For example, Jessica, a female member of the RPF, though a noncombatant, relates the first gory images of the genocide:

> Near Kyiv I see hundreds of corpses a few yards from the barricade. While his colleagues are slitting the throats of their victims or hacking them to bits with machetes close to the barricade, an Interahemwe militiaman is checking ID cards […] All around me are screams coming from everywhere. In these first hours of massacre the Interahemwe surprise me with their assiduity and even a certain discipline. […] A woman they've wounded but are waiting to finish off a bit later comes towards me, the right part of her jaw and chest covered with blood. (Diop, 2004, p. 32)

Cornelius is confronted with more horrifying images of the victims' bodies in the commemoration museums at the church in Nyamata:

> From Ntarama they set off for the church of Nyamata.
>
> Twenty-five to thirty thousand cadavers were on display in the stately red brick building. Another caretaker led them first to crypt no. 1, a yellow room located in the basement, lit by ten or so electric light bulbs. There too, remains were heaped onto a long table covered by fine sand. At one end stood a preserved body almost intact […] The young woman had her head pushed back and the scream extracted from her by the pain had been frozen on her still grimacing face. Her magnificent tresses were dishevelled, and her legs wide apart. A stake—of wood or of iron, Cornelius did know, he was too shocked to notice—had remained lodged in her vagina. (Diop, 2004, p. 73)

We encounter a similarly shocking spectacle in the film *Ni Sisi* when the character Roxana, in a fit of anger, describes to her friends how her mother was raped by four men and a bottle was inserted into her vagina during the violence that rocked Kenya in 2007–8, and how, out of shame, her mother ultimately committed suicide. All these eerie and horrifying images are meant for shock effect. As Kant reminds us (quoted in Krimmer, 2010, p. 4), "only an observer who is safe from actual danger can appreciate the phenomenon of the sublime." It is this shock effect that is meant to make those who encounter these artistic imaginaries of war from their safe comfort zones awaken to the fundamental values and virtues of peace culture. These gory, horrifying images of wounded bodies and corpses are laid bare to show the debilitating effects of war, and act in turn as cautionary measures by instilling fear. The images are made as overtly terrifying and nauseating as possible because, as Robert Reimer argues: "If images of war are framed in an aesthetically pleasing form, the beauty of the form may overpower the horror of the content" (quoted in Krimmer, 2010, p. 8).

Though these texts are replete with victim discourses, and the mere exposition of such horrifying images may induce an aversion to war and evoke an appreciation for peace culture, on their own, they do not constitute agency. Indeed, the desire for a culture of peace should not be reduced to a simple critique of war. As such, for the victim discourses to meaningfully catalyze transformation and to act as an agency, it is imperative that they deliberately be depicted in complementarity with the grammar of agency and peace (culture). As Krimmer aptly argues: "Even if we are prepared to accept that the representation of the wounded and dead effects a powerful critique of war, we would still have to admit that any pacifist agenda must be subtended by concepts of agency" (2010, p. 70). As such, a critique of war must transcend the affective and appeal to the cognitive; as such, the body/mind dichotomy or the victim discourses and the grammar of agency premised on the Cartesian hierarchy must be juxtaposed against each other to imagine and promote a peace culture. On this symbiotic relationship, Krimmer quite convincingly argues, "If a text subscribes to the Cartesian hierarchy of body and mind while focussing exclusively on the physical side of life, it drastically limits the scope of agency" (2010, p. 70).

Arguably, an artistic imaginary of war that is pacifistic and anti-war in its motive and vision must definitively transcend victim discourses and set the tone for a grammar of agency that inculcates and nurtures peace culture. This too is clearly demonstrated in these war/anti-war imaginaries. For instance, *Thirty Years of Bananas* is in itself a grammar of agency, as it is visibly proactive in its anti-war and peace-building efforts. Besides the shock effect of exposing the wounds of the three decades of war, the play accuses the citizens born before independence of complicity and abdicating responsibility, allowing politicians to perpetuate despondency, chaos, and violence. In the section of the play entitled "City Square," the characters ask fundamental questions that clearly reveal their agency. This is succinctly accentuated by the Chorus:

> Chorus 2: (with anger) What have I done for "God and my country" during the thirty years of my country's Independence? If there is anything I have done, what is it? If I have not yet done anything, what must I do? When and, why? (Mukulu, 1992, p. 3).

The motive behind *Thirty Years of Bananas* is obviously to conscientize Uganda's citizens, through a reflection on the past, about precisely what it means to be a nation. Kaleekeezi, a character in the play, unravels how myopic ethnic nationalism and interests undermined the agency of peace culture, since different ethnic identities only perceived the nation-state as a site for eating, even as the country continued hurtling down the path of self-destruction through relentless (un)civil wars. The Chorus once again accentuates this situation quite succinctly:

> Chorus: […]
> We are all clansmen
> An axe by the fireplace
> Does not kill a dog as they
> Share it at the end of the day.
> A Langi shouldn't kill a Muganda
> We are all kinsmen. (Mukulu, 1992, p. 35)

The museum, as a site of the commemoration of memories, interestingly catalyzes the agency of the characters as they engage passionately with their history, asking disturbing questions such as where, why, and how their newly found nation lost its sense of direction and sanity. Through the encounter with the past, these characters gradually realize that the only way to avert future wars and violence in the country is for them to actively participate in the process of writing their country's new constitution. According to Mukulu, it seems that the project of peace-building is the responsibility of all the citizens, and that explains why they must participate in the writing and realization of this new constitution, as it is the most secure guarantee for a peaceful future world. This is brilliantly portrayed in Kaleekeezi's role as a political evangelist.

In this role, Kaleekeezi points out how the leaders who lacked clear vision and ideologies led the nation down the path of chaos, disorder, instability, war, and violence. With Kaleekeezi as his mouthpiece, Mukulu employs the analogy of a football match to dramatize how the leaders created crises. For example, he reveals how Muteesa wants a football match where

two balls could be played—that is, a traditional ball made of banana fibers, and a classy one made of leather. He cannot allow himself to let any of the balls be played; thus the game never begins. Obote, on the other hand, wants to use the classy ball, but only with one team; this is not possible. Amin allows both the classy and the traditional balls to be played, but ironically gives each player a ball to play with—obviously, a recipe for chaos. All the captains come up with different ways of playing football that are largely unorthodox; in the end, no football game can be played. Eventually, the citizens (players) decide that the football match must be played according to the rules. This decision of the players—that the football match must be played according to rules written and accepted by all—is what signals their agency and that of the play's text.

In essence, through the analogy of the football match, Mukulu imagines a constitution that will entrench democracy and democratic ideals. Thus, for Mukulu, peace culture is implicit in the writing of a new constitution that will nurture democracy and multiparty politics. This redemptive agency and expiation, according to Mukulu, is automatically instilled in the generation born after Rwanda's 1962 independence.

In Boris Diop's *Murambi*, the grammar of agency and peace culture is counterpoised against the language of violence prevalent during the Cold War period, and consequently during the genocide. This grammar of agency and peace culture, however, is overtly manifest after the return of Cornelius, the character who has just returned home after living in exile for a number of years. His mother, a Tutsi, and his two siblings, a brother and sister, were all victims of the genocide in Murambi, ironically planned and executed by his own father, a once moderate Hutu now turned into a radical one.

In this novel, the language of violence is contrasted with that of peace culture. For instance, during the genocide, the language of violence was mainly relayed orally, through rumors on the radio. It is through the radio that ethnic stereotypes—that is, "thingifying"/objectifying Tutsis—were constructed and circulated for public consumption. Thus, in this novel, the radio is motific for its centrality in mobilizing hate and hostility against the Tutsis, and also in the very project of "othering." Michel Serumundo (Tutsi) makes the first mention of the radio in the novel. He proclaims thus: "Our neighbors' shutters were hermetically sealed. They were listening to Radio Mille Collines, the station which for several months now has been issuing insane calls to murder. That was new. Up to now they had been listening to those stupid programs in secret" (Diop, 2004, p. 10). Faustin Gesana (Hutu), whose father is a Hutu nationalist, likewise refers to the radio, just after the president's death in a plane crash: "My father is sitting in the middle of the bed. The transistor radio beside him exudes doleful music." Jessica Kamanzi too makes mention of the radio: everyone has a transistor radio glued to his ear. The radio says: "My friends, they have dared to kill our good friend Habyarimana; the hour of truth is at hand!" Then there is some music and games. The host of the program, in brilliant form, quizzes his listeners: "How do you recognize an Inyenzi?" The listeners call in. Some answers are really funny, so we have a good laugh. Everyone gives a description. The

host becomes serious again, almost severe: "Have fun, my friends, but don't forget the work that's waiting for you!" (Diop, 2004, p. 28). There are many more instances where the radio is deployed to circulate the message and ideology of violence in the novel. The other strategy is the use of oral history and myths anecdotal of "othering." In these anecdotes, the "other" is objectified. For instance, the Tutsis are referred to as "Inyenzi," which literally translates to "cockroaches." Faustin says of his father: "How well do you know the story of these Inyenzi Rwandan Patriotic Front guerrillas?" It's the kind of question he always asks when he's about to recount one of his numerous anecdotes (Diop, 2004, p. 16). These are the kinds of violent messages that catalyze war and end up in the massacre of innocent citizens.

The agency for peace culture in this novel, on the other hand, is conveyed through characters and their language. Three characters take up this role: one is Jessica Kamanzi, who overtly signifies the agency of women in war. Though she is not in the combat zone, she provides a support system for fighters and intelligence. Unlike the women who symbolize the victim discourses, she is described as sickly and sexually unattractive. The other character is the old man Siméon Habineza, uncle of Cornelius Muranganiza, whose agency for peace started much earlier, and finally, Cornelius Muranganiza, the son of Dr. Joseph Karekezi, the planner and executor of the genocidal killings at Murambi Polytechnic. Jessica, for instance, notes how her impulse for agency is closely implicated in Rwanda's violent history, which became manifest in 1959. As she reminds us:

> Ever since 1959, every young Rwandan, at one moment or another in his life, has to answer the same question: Should we just sit back and wait for the killers, or try to do something so that our country can go back to normal? Between our futures and ourselves, unknown people had planted a sort of a giant machete. Try as you might, you couldn't ignore it. Tragedy would always end up catching you. Because people came to your house one night and massacred all your family. Because in the country where you live in exile, you always end up feeling in the way. Besides, what could I, Jessica Kamanzi, possibly brag about? Others have given their lives for the success of our struggle. I have never held a gun nor participated in the military actions of the guerrillas. I stayed almost the whole time at Mulindi to take care of the cultural activities of the resistance […]
>
> While I am walking I think back on our night watches. We used to sing, "If three fall in combat, the two who are left will free Rwanda." Very simple words. We didn't have time for poetic tricks. These words come back to me like an echo and give me strength. The moment of liberation is at hand. Since this morning our units have been moving to Kigali […] (Diop, 1992, p. 31)

Jessica's agency, as described above, resonates with Krimmer's (2010) observations on the role of women as represented in German war literature. Though the women do not go to the front line, they support the combatants, as Jessica does in this novel.

Cornelius Mugaraneza and Siméon Habineza are the other characters who project the grammar of agency and peace culture. As we had mentioned initially, Cornelius did not witness the genocide, and only comes back four years later in an attempt to find out how the members of his family died in the genocide. As the son of a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother,

he symbolizes the duality that is Rwanda's contradictory identity. Because of his ambivalent identity, he has a unique vantage point to scrutinize the genocide with less subjectivity. What is significant, however, is the way that the commemorative museums of death catalyze his agency. His kind of agency is, in a sense, implicated in first understanding the self. The omniscient narrator captures this well through Cornelius's self-introspection when he explains:

> In disparate fragments, scenes of the past and the present crossed each other in his mind. He sensed how difficult it was going to be for him to put some order into his life and he didn't like the idea. To come back to one's country—to be happy there or to suffer—was a rebirth, but he didn't want to become someone without a past. He was the sum of everything he had experienced. His faults. His cowardliness. His hopes. He wanted to know, down to the very last detail, how his family had been massacred. In *Murambi*, Siméon Habineza would tell him everything. He had to. (Diop, 2014, 44)

On this journey, he is guided by a number of people who witnessed, and also played profoundly significant roles in impeding, the annihilation of Hutus during that moment of temporary insanity and irrationality. These include his childhood friends Jessica and Stanley, as well as his paternal uncle, Siméon Habineza: his only relative who survived the genocide. It is through this journey that the grammar of agency and peace culture are explicitly laid bare. Through this grammar of agency for peace culture, it becomes increasingly obvious that both the perpetrators and their victims must forgive each other and reconcile for genuine healing to take place. The quest of Cornelius, a returnee from exile, is in itself a form of agency. It is through the painful act of unearthing the truth that peace culture can be restored. This involves comprehending the meaning of Rwanda as a nation. He muses:

> It was on that day—in Obock, north of Djibouti—that an idea was born in his mind that would not leave him during the course of his years in exile. He had thought, as he was looking at Zakya angrily, "After all, Rwanda is an imaginary country. If it's difficult to talk about in a rational way, maybe it's because it doesn't really exist. Everyone has his own Rwanda in his head and it has nothing to do with Rwanda of others." (Diop, 2014, p. 27)

It seems that the agency that leads to a culture of peace can only be crystallized after seriously engaging with the traumatic past. This is the rite of passage that Cornelius and Rwanda must agree to go through. A conversation between Cornelius and Siméon captures this sufficiently:

> He looked all around him and said, pointing to a row of bricks on his right, "That's where the animal pen used to be."
>
> "I saw you head over there a little while ago. Jessica and Stanley also asked about it once."
>
> "And what did you say to them?"
>
> "That it is good to remember certain things. Sometimes it helps to find your path in life."

> "Which means …?"
>
> Cornelius saw in Siméon's face that he didn't want to expand on the subject. But the old man nevertheless answered:
>
> "That's how we know what trials we had to overcome to merit being alive. We know where we come from."
>
> The whole process of going back to the history of Rwanda:
>
> "But I'd like us to talk about the day when I took you to the shores of Lake Muhazi. Do you remember?"
>
> Cornelius looked at him with emotion:
>
> "I remember that child who played the flute. I've never forgotten him."
>
> "I see that you have a very good memory."
>
> Then Siméon listened to Cornelius tell him how twenty-nine years earlier he, Siméon, had driven him to Gasabo Hill and had said to him, as he showed him the shores of Lake Muhazi with a broad sweep of his hand, "This is where Rwanda was born." (Diop, 2014, p. 140)

Siméon seems to suggest that for Rwanda to remain a nation, they should have memories that are enchanting. Memories of a pastoral, serene place. According to Siméon, what is important is to "try to think about what is yet to be born than what is already dead" (Diop, 2014, p. 143). The future is more important than the past. But the past must always be revisited to ensure that the future is protected. This is why, according to Cornelius, it was important not to bury the victims of genocide:

> It was too soon to throw them into the darkness of the earth. Besides, every Rwandan should have courage to look reality in the eye. The strong odor of the remains proved that the genocide had taken place only four years earlier and not in ancient times. As they were perishing under the blows, the victims had shouted. No one had wanted to hear them. The echo of those cries should be allowed to reverberate for as long as possible. (Diop, 2014, p. 148).

Siméon tells Cornelius that the genocide should not be mythicized because that trivializes its gravitas, and also legitimizes it as predestined act of divine power:

> No, there was no sign, Cornelius. Don't listen to those who claim to have seen spots of blood on the moon before the massacres. Nothing of the sort happened. The wind didn't howl with sorrow during the night, nor did the trees start to talk to each other about the folly of men. It was all very simple. Here in our region one of the prefects had said: "No, none of these barbarous crimes here." They immediately killed him. (Diop, 2014, p. 154)

Indeed, for Siméon, privileging these myths and premonitions would absolve the perpetrators, because the guilt and responsibility would be transferred elsewhere, as the acts of killing would be justified and legitimized. It is only by accepting the fact of the genocide that there can be accountability and responsibility. This is why people like Dr. Joseph Karekezi must be held to account and bear responsibility for their actions, as there were no other forces behind

them. They were conscious of their acts, which were premeditated and influenced by a selfish greed for power and material wealth. The genocide was not fate. Thus by delegating the genocide to forces beyond the orbit of the rational such as myth, and superstition then the human agency both local and external will be exonerated from responsibility and accountability.

Siméon Habineza is indeed the embodiment of the agency for peace culture in this text. He advocates for forgiveness, reconciliation, and understanding because he has painfully realized that those are the keys to peace culture after many years of hostility, violence, and genocide. When the inhabitants of Murambi want to destroy Dr. Joseph Karekezi's house in revenge for his heinous role in the genocide, Siméon talks them out of such acts of revenge. Such acts, he reminds them, will perpetuate hatred and new waves of killings. As Gerard explains to Cornelius:

> "[…] I want to tell you this: you have suffered, but that doesn't make you any better than those who made you suffer. They are people like you and me. Evil is within each one of us. I, Siméon, Habineza, repeat, that you are not better than them. Now go back home and think about it: there comes a time when you have to stop shedding blood in a country. Each one of you must have strength to believe that that moment is here. If someone among you is not strong, then he's not better than an animal. My brother's house will not be destroyed. It will be a home for all the orphans who hang about on the streets of Murambi. And I am going to say one last thing to you: let not one of you try, when the moment comes, to find out if those orphans are Twa, Hutu, or Tutsi." No one dared to insist. In Murambi, everyone knows who Siméon Habineza is. (Diop, 2014, p. 164)

With Siméon and Gerard as his mouthpieces, Boris Diop envisions a Rwanda where ethnic identities are no longer the determining categories for privileges, but become merely sociocultural markers, not significations of difference. As in *Thirty Years of Bananas*, the vision of peaceful coexistence is embodied in the agency of the younger generation, as reflected both in their grammar and actions. In *Murambi*, Siméon Habineza, who plays the same role that Kaleekeezi performs in *Thirty Years of Bananas*, believes that peace culture can only be realized if democracy is allowed to flourish.

In terms of the grammar of agency and peace culture, the commemorative sites housing the dead of the genocide not only remind people of those who died and the horrors of genocide, but their presence is to remind the living, to appreciate the value of life. The value of life is embedded in sustained peace culture. This is why these commemorative sites act as an agency for peace culture. As Siméon Habineza reminds Cornelius:

> "There are no words to speak to the dead," said Siméon in a tense voice. "They won't answer you. What you'll learn there is that everything is quite over the dead of Murambi. And maybe then you'll respect human life more." (Diop, 2014, p. 168)

This resonates very well with Mahmood Mamdani's (2001, p. 39) assertion when declaring his motivation for researching the Rwandan genocide: "I aim to probe that possibility in the hope that life must be possible after death …"

In *Ni Sisi*, the grammar of agency and peace culture is framed through a number of narrative techniques. There is the use of juxtaposition, the environment, music, and dreams. In the film, as mentioned previously, the practices of everyday life, which in fact reflect a harmonious coexistence, are disrupted by political power struggles and machinations of Mr. Mzito and his wife Zuena, whose deeds in many ways mirror those of Iago in Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Othello*. The politician, a là the serpent in the Book of Genesis, acts as a harbinger of the doom that might visit this peaceful community, a synecdoche of postcolonial Kenya. Mr. Mzito uses rumors to create friction, tension, and hostility among various cultural, ethnic, and religious identities that have been living peacefully and in harmony all along. Through the manipulation of media—orality (rumors), radio, and social media—he takes advantage of ethnic stereotypes that have long been suppressed, and uses them to create suspicion and mistrust among the different cultural and ethnic identities in the community. His main aim is to play the different ethnic identities against each other so that he can take advantage of the ensuing violence to insulate and consolidate the votes from his own ethnicity.

Through juxtaposition with his employee, Tall, a salesman at his shop, Mr. Mzito is depicted as extremely insensitive and violent. While his attempt to use poetry to seduce Roxana fails (though he is already married to Zuena) because he uses brutal, violent, and vulgar language to exhibit and perform his masculinity, Tall on the other hand deploys soothing romantic language, full of images of love, to warm his way into Roxana's heart. Roxana eventually agrees to marry him (Tall), to the chagrin and anger of Mr. Mzito, who finally sacks him from his job at the shop. Thus, Mr. Mzito, the aspiring politician, is already projected as selfish, insensitive, immoral, vulgar, violent, and manipulative. The audience is therefore not surprised when he uses rumours and propaganda to cause friction and tension among the different ethnic identities in his community. However, within the plot of the film, his evil machinations are averted by Jabali's revelatory dream, which acts as a premonition for what will befall this community if they allow Mr. Mzito to continue his evil deeds, intended to polarize the community in terms of antagonistic ethnic identities that are contrary to the previously cordial social and cultural coexistence.

Jabali's dream is significant in our context as it catalyzes the agency toward conscientization and political transformation. The dream acts as a revelation of a possible recurrence of the postelection violence of 2007–8 if no action is taken to stop Mr. Mzito and his wife Zuena—the Iago figure—from their manipulative and evil schemes. Jabali shares his frightening dream with some members of the community, though most of them are initially skeptical about his revelation. Roxana, however, a victim of PEV, convinces them that Jabali's dream curiously approximates what happened in her own community during the postelection violence. It is Roxana's affirmation that drives Jabali to mobilize the community to stop Mr. Mzito from accomplishing his evil scheme to sow the seeds of discord in this previously harmonious community.

It is through Jabali catalysing youth's agency that Mr. Mzito is confronted at church, where he has gone to spread propaganda to create hostility among the various ethnic identities. His evil schemes are nonetheless exposed by the youth, who has recorded his speeches, full of hatred, calling for violence against those he deems outsiders.

His violent language, which overtly promotes ethnic profiling and polarization, is instructively juxtaposed against the grammar of agency and peace culture in the romantic poetry of Tall, the reconciliatory and didactic language of Jabali, Roxana, and Scola, and the music/songs used in the film, which all gesture to an agency of a peace culture. For instance, Jabali persuades the youth not to allow themselves to be manipulated by politicians like Mr. Mzito for their own greed and selfish ends. His grammar stresses the virtue of hard work toward the project of nation-building and development; in addition, it reminds the community that it is only through fair democratic elections that peace can be guaranteed.

The film utilizes songs and music as an agency for peace. The play begins with the national anthem, which is in fact prayerful and pleads with the almighty God to bless and protect Kenya. Among other songs, there is Eric Wainaina's popular "Daima," which urges patriotism and aspires for Kenyan nationhood, as well as the song "Mbegu Gani" [Which Seed], which solemnly questions the genesis of the friction among ethnic identities that have been living harmoniously. This film, like the other two artistic war imaginaries discussed, also privileges the younger generation in the agency and vision of a peace culture and a peaceful future.

Unlike the other two imaginaries of war, which deployed physical commemorative sites (museums) to catalyze agency, in *Ni Sisi*, dreams are symbolically deployed as archives, and as such arguably act as catalysts for agency in the realization of a peace culture. An interesting observation is that these artistic war imaginaries are themselves commemorative sites of the wars' effects, and as such are themselves necessarily agentive of the imagination of peace cultures.

Conclusion

The artistic imaginaries of war that have been scrutinized here all attempt, in one way or another, to transform their particular worlds by providing alternative "worldings." This is through the selection of their dysfunctional pasts and maybe presents, but more importantly, their acting as interventions by emphasizing transformative alternative futures. It is in this sense, then, that these artistic imaginaries inaugurate worlds that were not yet extant, but imagined. The imagined world in the work of art is what constitutes "worlding," since it bestows new meanings on the world or a slice of the world as we know it. These three artistic imaginaries have, in various and variegated ways, attempted to invest the different war situations with new meanings and possibilities.

References

Bruin, J. (1992). Heidegger and the world of the work of art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism, 50*(1), pp. 55–56.

Diop, B. B. (2000). *Murambi, the book of bones* (F. McLaughlin, Trans.). Indiana University Press.

Dower, N. (2009). *The ethics of war and peace*. Polity Press.

Emenyonu, N. E. (2008). War in African literature: Literary harvests, human tragedies. *African Literature Today, 26*, pp. xi-xiv

Falola, T., & H. ter Haar. (2010). *Narrating war and peace in Africa*. University of Rochester.

Harries, K. (2009). *Art matters: A critical commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art."* Springer.

Howard, M. (2000–2002). *The invention of peace and the reinvention of war*. Profile Books.

Krimmer, E. (2010). *The representation of war in German literature 1800 to the present*. Cambridge University Press.

Lamberti, E., & V. Fortunati (Eds.). (2009). *Memories and representations of war: The case of World War I and World War II*. (Textext: Studies in Comparative Literature 58). Rodopi.

Lundestad, G., & O. Nolstad. (Eds.). (2002). *War and peace in the 20th century and beyond*. World Scientific.

Macdonado-Tores, N. (2008). *Against war: Views from the underside of modernity*. Duke University Press.

Mamdani, M. (2001). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.

Mutibwa, M. Phares. (1993). "Foreword". *Thirty Years of Bananas*. Oxford University Press.

Mukulu, A. (1993). *Thirty Years of Bananas*. Oxford University Press.

Nester, R. W. (2010). *Globalization, war and peace in the twenty-first century*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Redding, N. (Director). (2010). *Ni Sisi* [Film]. S.A.F.E Kenya.

Singh, R. R. (1990). Heidegger and the World in an Artwork. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 48*(3), pp. 215–222.