

MEDIA ROLES IN HARNESSING ART FOR PEACE BUILDING IN IMPROVING SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY LIFE

Silas Oghenemaro Emovwodo

Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

silasoghenemaro@gmail.com

Abstract : The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 27, Part 1 states: *Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.* Art- film, music, painting, dance- can be a way to approach peace and reconciliation. Whether it be a way of expressing the emotions created by conflict, a piece of public art which commands attention or a community project bringing together affected and even warring participants, the arts can offer a creative and non-political means to engage communities in projects of peace and reconciliation. Peace building cuts across disciplines; however the field of the arts often receives less attention. Given the complexities of conflict and violence there is need to adopt diverse tactics that meet the challenges posed during peace building. Because there is little documentation of how art creates social and personal change, this paper will highlight how media can harness art for peace building and sustenance to improve socio-cultural community life.

Keywords: media, art, peace, peace building, community life.

INTRODUCTION

Art is a diverse range of *human activities* in creating visual, auditory or performing artifacts (artworks), expressing the author's imaginative or technical skill, intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power. Art as the expression and materialization of human creativity gives specific meaning to an idea. In improving socio-cultural community life through art, the media through its four major functions, plays the vital role of publicizing art, so as to raise awareness and deepen the appreciation for and creation of art.

Researches have shown that creativity is innate to who we are as humans, and the solutions to our world problems can be found in creativity, so engaging our individual creative muscle through art and music could be a viable path to peace in a restive world, consequently improving socio-cultural community life.

Peace building needs to have a safe and welcoming space in order to accomplish its goals. Art provides a simple and creative outlet for people in conflict to express themselves. Recreation helps build a spirit of friendship while achieving a shared common goal. Throughout history, the arts have been a way for people to speak out. Whether during the conflict in Syria or following the Great Depression in the U.S., people have always been using the arts for expression and healing (www.increasingthepeace.com). According to Wood (2015), in conflict zones, often amplified by social media, the arts tell and interpret people's stories, heal trauma

victims, mend communities, give voice to women and other marginalized groups, protest injustice, provide livelihoods, educate populations, express heritage, define identity, engage youths with alternatives to violence, and humanize the “other.” Ewubareh (2014) corroborates this stating that art-based approaches play a number of roles in the promotion of peace. In conflict-ridden areas, international actors, whether governments, international institutions or NGOs can help promote art based activities in such a way as will give local people ownership of the endeavours.

Media plays a vital role in conflict situation. Basically, their role can take two different and opposed forms. Either the media takes an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to conflict management and peace building. Being considered as the fourth pillar of democracy, media has an active role in peace building process.

Functions of the Media

Media basically refers to the platform used to communicate information. Communication is the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another, while the platform for transmitting the information is the medium or media. A medium is the channel through which a message travels from the source to the receiver. Mass media therefore, refers to communication devices, which can be used to communicate and interact with a large number of audiences. A comprehensive definition of mass media will not only include the mechanical devices that transmit and sometimes store the message, but also the institutions that use these machines to transmit messages (Obe, 2008). There are several types of Mass Media which fall under three main categories: Print Media, Electronic/Broadcast Media and New Age Media.

The mass media according to Laswell (1948) performs four major functions:

- 1) Surveillance of the Environment: An important function of the media is to keep up a surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society. The media has the responsibility of providing news and cover a wide variety of issues that is of some service to the society. Media help maintain social order by providing instructions on what has to be done in times of crisis, thereby reducing confusion among the masses.
- 2) Correlation of parts of Society: This function relates to how the media’s selection of certain news and its interpretation affects how society understands and responds to it. People’s attitudes towards political issues, events, public policy, etc. are influenced to an extent by how the media frames and presents the issue in their discussions and presentations.
- 3) Cultural Transmission: This refers to the ability of the media to teach the various norms, rules and values that exist in a society and ensure its transfer from one generation to the next. Television programmes by and large reflects the society in which they are broadcast and promote the understanding of a society’s cultural heritage. Children’s television programmes are designed to showcase good behaviors and moral standards which children can learn by watching.
- 4) Entertainment: This popular function of the mass media refers to the ability of the media to help relax people and create a means of escape from the stress of everyday

life. The entertainment function of mass media has both positive and negative effects. The low quality of content is often criticized but the other benefits like helping people experience new events, stimulating emotions and helping people pass their leisure time show how important this function is.

Art-based Approach to Peace building: A Viable Complement

While peace on the one hand is all about cultivating attitudes and values that are germane to democratic culture of making people work together, share together, help one another by respecting the rights of others, obey the rule of law and promote social justice. It is a conscientizing process that helps to eliminate prejudices, stereotypes and hatred among people of diverse nationality by encouraging harmonious coexistence. Peace building on the other hand is the learning and internationalization of values antithetical to violence (Ezeoba, 2012).

According to **Lederach (1997)**, Peace building is more than post-accord reconstruction and is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords.

The term "peace building" came into widespread use after 1992 when Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then United Nations Secretary-General, announced his *Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The term "peace building" according to Morris (2000) has since then become a broadly used... term connoting activities that go beyond crisis intervention such as longer-term development, and building of governance structures and institutions. It includes building the capacity of non-governmental organizations (including religious institutions) for peacemaking and peace building.

Peace building in other words is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. The central task of peace building is to create positive peace - a stable social equilibrium in which the surfacing of new disputes does not escalate into violence and war.

Art-based approach is therefore being adopted as one of the wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. KOOF (2015) gives two reasons why the field of art and peace building is gaining increasing significance and efforts are being made to develop expertise in this area. The first is due to developments within the art world: artists are showing a growing interest in various arenas for their work outside established art institutions, with a new generation of socially and politically engaged artists trying to break away from the philosophy and gravitational pull of these establishments. Secondly, there is a heightened interest in expanding the repertoire of approaches within the areas of conflict resolution, peace building and humanitarian rehabilitation through art projects.

Wood (2015) notes that the arts fundamentally change the discourse around conflict and peace... inspire, elicit, evoke, provoke, teach, challenge, memorialize, idealize, and

unmask hidden truths...Through the arts, humans engage their somatic, sensory, cognitive, affective, and symbolic faculties to manipulate and organize natural phenomena such as light, color, sound, mathematical proportion, and movement. The form this organization takes depends largely on the cultural context of the creator. Thus arts lie at the intersection of nature and culture, and open a gate to better understand the emotional and psychological drivers of conflict.

Cases of Art-based Approach for Peace Building

Kenya

About a decade ago the violence that erupted in Kenya between December 2007 and the end of February 2008 following a disputed presidential election left at least 1,133 people dead and displaced more than 600,000 people (Halliday, 2017). During this time there were cases of arson, looting of property, maiming of citizens and eviction of people from their homes. Following the post-election violence of 2007-2008 an array of peace building efforts took place. In Nairobi, the bulk of the post-election violence took place in the slums. The informal settlement of Kibera was a stronghold for Raila Odinga, leader of the oppositional Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) who had a robust patron–client relationship with Kibera’s residents. Following the results that Raila Odinga had lost the presidential elections, people in Kibera came out in large numbers to protest. Some began committing arson and looting. Violent confrontations took place between ODM supporters, and the police forces and supporters associated with incumbent President Mwai Kibaki and his Party for National Unity (PNU).

For artist and resident of Kibera, Soloman Muyundo (who goes by the name of Solo 7), something had to be done. Initially Solo 7 began writing messages of support for ODM on people’s property. He claims where he wrote ODM people would not loot there – seemingly demonstrating the power of slogans. In January 2008, Raila Odinga called for three days of mass action. Concerned that violence would intensify Solo 7 came up with a new initiative. Armed with a tin of paint and brush the artists began writing peace messages all over Kibera. These messages – which read ‘KEEP PEACE’, ‘PEACE WANTED ALIVE’ and ‘KEEP PEACE FELLOW KENYANS’ – were written on roads, walls, gates, electricity poles, buildings and fences.

Hundreds of, if not more, messages filled Kibera’s ‘public spaces’ and created a discourse of peace during a period when political negotiations had ended in failure. According to the artist the use of short and clear visual slogans were powerful because they “speak louder than our voices” and have a persuasive quality in that they force people to stop and think before acting. The work of Solo 7 shows that with minimal resources the activism of an individual can have considerable effects in creating a peace dialogue through peace slogans (<http://africanah.org/peacebuilding-through-art/>).



Figure 1. (Pictures of Solo 7's peace art), Source: Halliday (2017)

Pakistan

Dara, a South Asian history play about Islam, completed its successful run at London's National Theatre in 2015. Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeer explained that his play, originally written for audiences in South Asia, offers insight into the history of Islam and contemporary conflict, violence and extremism in Pakistan and beyond. For 30 years, Nadeer and his theatre group Ajoka have used performance to transform conversations with thousands of Pakistanis around democracy, pluralism, religion, identity and disenfranchisement. This kind of theatre is helping to build a shared South Asian cultural identity beyond religion. Such arts-based peace-building projects are increasingly seen as complementing institutional and structural approaches to peace-building programming

(www.positive.news/2015/lifestyle/arts/17653/realising-potential-art-peace-building/).



Figure 2. (A scene from play 'Dara') Source: Jalil (2014)

Wood (2015) agrees that by blending drama, poetry, theatre, visual and literary arts with traditional peace-building tools, conflict-affected people can renegotiate power and catalyze dialogue between opposing groups thereby making art-based approach to peace building a viable complement of traditional peace building tools.

Georgia

“Resort to Art” has a double meaning: it suggests recourse to artistic activities, but also refers to the transformation of a health resort into a creative space. This project is run by “artasfoundation” in Tskaltubo, a famous thermal spa resort in the Soviet era

which is now home to 4,500 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled here from Abkhazia during the war of 1992/1993 and set up home in the rooms of the luxurious sanatorium complexes left behind by the Soviets. More than 20 years later, they are still living these buildings which have now fallen into a very poor state of disrepair.

In January 2013, representatives from the Tskaltubo IDP Women's Association, the Community Development Centre and "artasfoundation" met to discuss the possibility of reviving an old tradition – the annual festival.

The project is geared particularly towards young people from the IDP community, with a local project team coordinating with the art, music and dance schools to select interested participants. Various aspirations and opportunities are explored and artists from both Georgia and abroad are invited to come and hold one-week workshops in Tskaltubo. The ultimate aim is to showcase the participants' work at the festival. The workshops are an essential part of the project –it is during these week-long courses that hidden talents are discovered and the young people have the chance to work on their creative ideas together. The festival programme ranges from classical music and modern dance to painting workshops, performances, exhibitions and readings. More than 300 people from Tskaltubo took part in the festival in October 2013, which was the first to be held in over 20 years.

One of the most impressive items on show was a video and photography exhibition entitled "in my view", which was made possible as a result of a camera-collecting scheme in Switzerland. During the workshop, the young people learned how to capture moments in their everyday lives. Through their photos, they invite viewers into their homes, something which is not possible in reality. The predominant theme in the videos was the burden of family history, but there was also an element of hope – hope of being in the right place at the right time and of heading into the future with paid employment.

"Resort to Art" aims to enable the people of Tskaltubo bring a new lease of life to the former spa resort and prevent them from being resettled (again) in another region against their will (KOOOF 2015).

Media and Art-based Peace building: Exploring through Powerful Effect Model

The Powerful-Effect Model of communication developed by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1973 is also a model guiding this study and it is hinged on the perception that the mass media has a significant effect on a large number of people. This Model can therefore be used to spur audience of the mass media including conflicting parties, peace and humanitarian workers and government officials see and embrace art as a viable approach to peace building.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973) was the first to present this model (Anaeto, Onabajó and Osifeso, 2008). The basic tenets of the Powerful-Effect Model according to Mendelsohn (1973) as cited by Anaeto et al (2008) include the following:

1. The media spell out clearly the objectives of the campaign.
2. The media pinpoint the target audience.
3. The media work to overcome indifference of the audience towards the particular issue

4. The media find relevant themes to stress its messages.

The Powerful-Effect Model is given priority in this study because it elucidates how the mass media through the instrumentality of art and culture can help in building and sustaining peace so as to improve socio-cultural community life.

Media Roles in Harnessing Art for Peace building

An important function of the media is to keep up a surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society. This function of the media can be used in publicizing and raising awareness about the potential of art based peace building approach. Since the media has the responsibility of providing news and cover a wide variety of issues that is of some service to the society, news on the successful use of art based peace building is definitely of service to the community.

The correlation of parts of society function of the media should be employed in appropriately interpreting the arts. Since people's attitudes towards events are to a large extent influenced by how the media frames and presents the issue in their discussions and presentations, the various art forms must be properly interpreted so as to positively influence the masses attitude with regards to conflict and peace building.

Arts-based peace building requires the combined knowledge base of the professional arts community and traditional conflict and development experts. However, conversations between these two groups are rare and a sustained effort is needed to bridge the gap and encourage cross-sectoral collaboration. The media remains in the best position to bridge this gap as it has the ability through its agenda setting function to stimulate discussions among various stakeholders through specially designed programmes.

Through media's cultural transmission function, artists who work in the peace and conflict field as well as mass media audience would benefit from developing their knowledge of conflict analysis, prevention, resolution, and transformation, and of basic practices and concepts such as mediation, negotiation, dialogue, rule of law, and theories of change, among others.

Conclusion

A combination of art with traditional dialogue methods can help transform and influence political discourse and generate a more conciliatory message around cultural identities, shared cultural values and whether art can play a role in peace.

While the existence of these projects demonstrates the use of creativity for peace-building, there is lamentably little documentation about how art and creativity actively create social, political and cultural change. By offering evidence as to how the arts can support peace at different levels, and ultimately zeroing in on how the media can harness and promote art for peace building, we can be sure of improving socio-cultural community life.

Acknowledgements

My utmost gratitude goes

.news/2015/lifestyle/arts/17653/realising-potential-art-peace-building/to God, the One who makes all things beautiful in its time.

My sincere gratitude to Leon Gilberto Medellin Lopes for bearing me in mind and keeping me informed, as well as Dr. Edy Tri Sulisty, M.Pd for a warm reception.

Mas Adri Muhammad, meeting you has been a blessing, thank you.

I am eternally indebted to my parents – Rev. Moses & Mrs. Wemimo Emovwodo - and siblings – Daniel Ovie & Gideon Ufuoma - for the encouragement and support all the way! God bless you all.

References

Anaeto, S. G., Onabajo, O. S. and Osifeso, J. B. (2008). *Models and Theories of Communication*. Bowie, Maryland, USA: African Renaissance Books Inc.

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. (1995). *An Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations.

Ezeobe, K. O. (2012). Strategies for Interpreting Peace Education into Social Studies Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria. *Africa Research Review: International Multidisciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia, 6(3). 218-231.

Lederach, John Paul. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*.

Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Morris, Catherine. (2000). What is Peacebuilding? One Definition. Retrieved July 20, 2016 from <http://www.peacemakers.ca/publications/peacebuildingdefinition.html>

Obe, J. (2008). *Introduction to Mass Communication*. Lagos: National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Wood, K. (2015, August 28). The Arts and Peacebuilding: An Emerging Approach. Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/insights-newsletter/the-arts-and-peacebuilding-emerging-approach>.

Creating Space for Peace through Art and Play. Retrieved from <http://www.increasingthepeace.com/resolution/arts>

Ewubareh, Loveth. (2014). Promoting Peace Building and Conflict Transformation through Art Based approaches: the case of Koko and Opuama communities in the Niger Delta. Retrieved from <http://ndlink.org/2015/06/10/promoting-peace-building-and-conflict-transformation-through-art/>

KOFF Newsletter. (2015). The Role of Art in Peace building- Recent Developments. *Art and Peacebuilding*, No. 136, 3 – 5. Retrieved from <http://www.swisspeace.ch/>

Halliday, Craig. (2017, June 11). Peace building through art: Art-Based Approaches to Peace building. Retrieved from <http://africanah.org/peacebuilding-through-art/>

Realizing the Potential of Art for Peace-building. (2015, June 5). Retrieved from,
<https://www.positive>