

“THE COLLAPSIBLE SPACE BETWEEN US”:
REFUGEE THEATRE AS A TOOL OF RESILIENCE IN KENYA
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Can creative expression be a platform for healing and resilience in communities that have been subject to violent conflict? Refugees provide an example of one such group that struggles to rebuild lives post-conflict. This paper provides a case study of urban and camp-based refugees in Kenya who participated in theatre projects. The research examines initial effects of their participation in these theatre projects and then follows up three and four years later to review the longer term impact on participants. It identifies positive and negative effects of their involvement in theatre projects through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Through an analysis of this data, the paper also identifies conditions under which theatre can make a positive contribution to building resilience in refugee participants. These conditions include participant ownership of the project and creating an environment of trust in which stories can be shared and isolation reduced.

Kenya has been the host to large, protracted refugee populations for decades. Refugees often spend decades in camps and in urban centres, struggling to find ways to rebuild their lives after being forced to flee violent conflict in their countries of origin. UNHCR uses the term “durable solutions” to refer to long term options for refugees, which include integrating in countries of asylum, repatriating to their countries of origin, or being resettled to third countries.¹ However, these macro-level solutions are largely beyond the control or access of individual refugees. Another perspective on durable