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'We are creating peace': everyday peace practices of displaced women in Kenya and Germany

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how displaced women contribute to everyday peace in exile. While research debates largely focus on the nexus of conflict and displacement, peace and specifically displaced women's peace practices have been widely overlooked. Drawing on Mac Ginty's concept of everyday peace and Lister's approach to agency, the array of practices displaced women use to foster everyday peace in their immediate environments in Kenya and Germany are examined. The findings reflect how they leverage their agency both individually and collectively in seeking to establish, sustain and reinstate peaceful conditions despite and indeed due to often-times precarious conditions in exile. They actively get out of dangerous situations in search for everyday peace in exile and get by challenges through establishing a form of peaceful normalcy. They further employ collective strategies in getting organised to contribute to peace and engage with activism to get back at injustices and restrictions.

KEYWORDS

Everyday peace; gender; agency; displacement; exile

Introduction

Violent conflicts around the world force millions of people to flee their homes, therewith seeking refuge, safety and peace elsewhere.¹ Over the past decades, research on conflict-induced displacement has expanded significantly, addressing conflicts as causes of displacements, political control, governance and insufficient protection of displaced people, as well as their prevailing vulnerabilities, challenges and uncertainties in exile.² Despite these wide-ranging academic debates, the role of everyday peace and the ways in which displaced individuals, and women in particular, contribute to it have been largely neglected to date.³ Only few studies address peace in situations of displacement more broadly,⁴ while research generally tends to treat peace as a prerequisite for displaced people's return to countries of origin,⁵ stresses the need to bridge refugee protection and peacebuilding,⁶ or reflects on the possible proliferation of conflict-related violence in host regions due to displacements.⁷ The latter risks labelling those displaced as disruptors of peace, as seen in discussions on 'refugee warriors'.⁸ The research also hardly considers

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gendered dynamics of everyday peace and life in exile, with the focus remaining instead on violence and vulnerabilities – particularly concerning women.⁹

How, then, do women who have experienced conflict and displacement contribute to everyday peace? This question guides our research with displaced people in Kenya and Germany, and a key response is captured in the article's title: 'We are creating peace'.¹⁰ With this powerful statement, one woman who had fled violence in Nigeria and sought asylum in Germany explained that she fosters peace collectively with others as part of everyday life. Peace, thus, is not solely a political construct; interlocutors ascribe various meanings, covering structural conditions, collective support systems and individual feelings of peace. Based on their shared insights, we approach peace as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon rooted in individual, social and context-specific perceptions,¹¹ therewith exploring women's peace practices.

To this end, we draw on everyday peace per Mac Ginty, as encompassing the 'small acts of peace' which 'ordinary people use to navigate through life in societies affected by violent conflict'.¹² In lieu of separating out regions or countries of conflict and asylum, we approach exile as a post-conflict site where peace-related activities are of central importance to everyday life. We complement this approach with Lister's theory of agency,¹³ to analyse insights from displaced women in Kenya and Germany about their lived experiences in creating, maintaining and restoring conditions they describe as peaceful. Lister proposes four key strategies indicative of agency: getting out, getting by, getting organised and getting back at. These strategies help address the range of activities interlocutors engage in to foster everyday peace despite and indeed due to the difficult circumstances they frequently encounter. Finally, by addressing displaced women's practices in Kenya and Germany, we explore similarities in their individual and collective peace actions and thereby seek to contest and overcome the prevailing imaginary distinction between conflict-ridden countries in the 'Global South' and peaceful ones in the 'Global North'.

We structure the article around these strategies of actions. Accordingly, flight from violent conflict is not a passive impulse but a strategic decision to get out in pursuit of peaceful conditions elsewhere. Yet flight is not a linear sequence from conflict to peace: women's lived experiences in exile frequently remain highly challenging, prompting additional mobilities. These difficulties in exile are also dealt with by creating peaceful normalcy. Women thus get by restrictions and risks via building and sustaining routines which help to restore a sense of everyday peace and stability. Central to their coping are social support systems to foster belonging and peaceful environments. Women get organised in both formal and informal collectives to tackle tensions, craft spaces for interaction and produce spheres of everyday peace. Activism plays a role here too, as they seek to get back at restrictions and risks in seeking to initiate change towards peace individually and collectively. Through their various practices, the women we spoke to intertwine their pursuit of peace with improving their everyday lives in striving for well-being, creating normalcy and fostering community.

Researching displaced women's everyday peace practices

The recent local turn in critical peace research amplifies community-centric and localised viewpoints by stressing the relevance of the everyday in peace endeavours, shifting focus

away from western, state-centric perspectives which primarily address peace as a political framework.¹⁴ Concentrating on everyday peace ultimately places individuals and communities – that is, their daily lives, actions and conditions for peace – centre stage.¹⁵ Despite growing scholarly attention, displacement has been largely neglected in research on everyday peace thus far and vice versa.¹⁶ While this also applies to the insufficient inclusion of gendered perspectives and consideration of women's practices for everyday peace,¹⁷ studies on peace more broadly stress how women advocate for it, engage in local peace efforts, promote justice and contribute to peace-related developments.¹⁸

With everyday peace as our analytical framework, we place women's individual and collective practices to navigate post-conflict circumstances at the forefront, herewith exploring the variety of activities they use to foster peace. Mac Ginty depicts everyday peace as 'a coping mechanism and a survival strategy [. . .]. It is a form of tactical agency that is enacted and embodied into how people behave, present themselves, and go about their daily business'.¹⁹ Central to everyday peace in Mac Ginty's conceptualisation are sociality, reciprocity and solidarity, which refer to the respective – and deeply entangled – ways in which individuals and groups interact in societies marked by deep divisions and conflict.²⁰ Sociality denotes interaction beyond the individual, therewith portraying peace as relational and social. Reciprocity captures the interdependence of human encounters, stressing a sense of sharing beyond immediate personal reward. Solidarity speaks to 'active support for a cause',²¹ for example through activism and mobilisation.

We complement the research with Lister's agency-centred approach, which she developed in her feminist work on poverty.²² Emphasised here are the capacities held by marginalised individuals coping with poverty, enduring structurally limiting living conditions and actively striving to improve the circumstances they find themselves in. Accordingly, individuals' actions are always shaped and constrained by structural conditions, yet actors still possess the capacities to influence the structures. Lister identifies four key strategies of action: Getting out refers to long-term personal and strategic practices aimed at transforming individual circumstances. It involves seeking an 'exit' from current conditions. Getting by represents individual coping in everyday life and captures the actions by which a person deals with daily challenges.²³ Getting organised encompasses collective, strategic-political actions to bring about structural change. Getting (back) at considers acts of resistance people employ in response to injustices in their daily interactions and involves practices of activism. Linking Lister's agency theory and Mac Ginty's approach to everyday peace provides a suitable framework for analysing the peace practices of displaced women, enabling us to explore their lived experiences and common practices in the face of the extensive structural limitations and widespread risks they frequently encounter.

As part of the project 'Women, Forced Migration – and Peace', we exclusively spoke with people who had experienced conflict and displacement and were, at the time of research, living in Kenya and Germany. In line with the triple imperative regarding research with displaced people,²⁴ we engaged in collaborative research with individuals and placed the primary focus on their lived experiences to learn about their manifold peace practices. In Kenya, research was conducted in Kakuma refugee camp, involving individuals primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Rwanda and Burundi. In Germany, the research predominantly took place in the country's north-western cities,

involving individuals mainly from Syria, Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine and Colombia; when we met, half of them were living in reception centres or containers converted into accommodation, reflective of a form of encampment. The remaining interlocutors had to live there after their arrival in Germany but were now allowed to leave for individual accommodations. For data collection, we employed a multimethod approach ensuring interlocutors had room to disclose their perceptions and activities only as far as they felt comfortable. While we spoke with people who self-identified as women, men and LGBTQ+ individuals, we specifically focus on our work with the first in this article. The primary method of data collection was *ero-epic dialogues*, which represents an unstructured and open form of conversations.²⁵ These dialogues allowed us to overall engage with 82 women – 53 in Kenya and 29 in Germany – as well as 34 men. Furthermore, we conducted three discussions with 9 women and 14 men addressing peace-related questions, organised two workshops involving 10 community leaders (6 women and 4 men) and 9 women active in peace projects, and invited 45 individuals (12 women, 30 men and 3 individuals who did not disclose their gender) to share their respective views via journal writing.

Ethical considerations play a key role in our work.²⁶ Adhering to the ethical standards put forward by the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre and the IASFM²⁷ guided our research process and shaped our careful interactions with interlocutors. To prevent potential risks and negative repercussions arising from participation, we carried out *do no harm* analyses before, during and after data collection as a collaborative team effort.²⁸ All information shared by interlocutors was gathered anonymously and treated confidentially. Informed consent and voluntary participation were key, achieved by using a relational approach inspired by Mackenzie et al.²⁹ We continually dialogued with interlocutors about their involvement in our research, their role therein and the use of their data, rather than merely seeking signatures on standardised consent forms. Ethical considerations are not limited to data collection but continue to be crucial in subsequent analyses and publications. In Kenya, we worked with three individuals – two women and one man – to collect data. Their knowledge, language skills and broad personal networks were pivotal to the research. Our collaboration continues at present, extending beyond data collection and encompassing collective analysis, ongoing discussions, workshops and co-production of findings.

However, intersectional power dynamics persist despite our ethically informed research design and continued collaborations. These concern not only the administrative responsibilities of the 'team lead', 'staff' and 'participants' but are also deeply entangled in our positionalities and the social contexts in which we interact. Factors such as legal status in the countries where we reside and work, diverse educational backgrounds and opportunities, varying economic conditions resulting from employment – including the fundamental right to work and the lack thereof –, our skin colour and the ascribed privileges are just some examples of issues which we continuously and thoroughly reflect upon in our work with people with lived experiences of displacement. We take these issues seriously, leading to regular discussions of ethical and personal matters within the team and also with interlocutors. Through this approach, we seek to mainstream care³⁰ in our interactions with interlocutors and within the team, by placing dignity, agency and diverse perspectives at the heart of proceedings.

Contributing to everyday peace in exile? Displaced people's various approaches to peace

Approaching peace as an everyday phenomenon is directly informed by the experiences interlocutors shared with us. They primarily addressed the various activities they engage in to foster peace and peaceful conditions in their day-to-day lives and only occasionally referred to political-activist practices. Consequently, for them, building peace is an inherent part of their everyday lives and not merely a political objective. This was particularly the case for women who were often confronted with gender-based violence in their countries of origin and continued to face diverse risks in exile. Both despite and due to such prevalent hazards, they sought to – and indeed did – contribute to everyday peaceful surroundings.

Getting out in search of peace

The most common – yet scientifically often overlooked – practice for achieving everyday peace which interlocutors shared is leaving sites of violence and conflict in search of peace elsewhere. Hence, flight is not a passive impulse arising from the dangers encountered in countries of origin but rather a strategy consciously invoked. While the scholarship increasingly approaches conflict-induced flight as an intentional choice,³¹ peace rarely plays a role in related debates. Considering the extent of the physical and structural insecurities, which many are exposed to in conflict regions, however, it is crucial to also acknowledge that some individuals may not actually be able to leave. They herewith experience 'involuntary immobility', which Lubkemann explains as a phenomenon induced by the security-related, financial, social and/or infrastructural circumstances limiting mobility.³² Correspondingly, interlocutors' shared information portray not only such risks of immobility but especially flight as a strategy deliberately chosen in pursuit of peace. Read through Lister's approach to agency, this denotes one's getting out to seek peace.

Due to the violence encountered in Sudan, one woman stressed 'the only thing you can think about is, I want peace of mind. I want to walk out of that country. I want peace'.³³ Such statements reveal flight exists as a strategy to leave behind violence in countries of origin and seek peaceful conditions elsewhere. Interlocutors literally spoke about their flight as a 'run for peace'³⁴ or 'run for your safety'³⁵; they also addressed how important conditions in host countries were for their decision to leave. '[You] could find peace if you are in the right place',³⁶ remarked one woman; another pointed out that 'the country plays an important role in peace'.³⁷ While conversation partners in Kenya and Germany regardless of gender shared such perspectives, women frequently reflected the gendered conditions which contributed to their decision to flee conflicts, find safe(r) spaces and pursue peace – both for themselves and oftentimes their loved ones, particularly their children. One woman recalled how she found herself amid armed combat and gunshots daily in Sudan, describing the situation which forced her to leave with her little son as follows: 'You are worried every day. What will happen? What will be next? But when you run to Kakuma, you will find peace. You sleep. You wake up. You're ready to work. But there, you're afraid'.³⁸ Others addressed the permanent fear induced by intrusive violence

in their countries of origin: 'You are searched. There is no sleeping at home. So, we searched for a place where you can have a little peace'.³⁹

Further to immediate threats of attack, the daily sound of gunfire and prevalent gender-based violence, also structural violences, drove interlocutors to leave and seek peace elsewhere. Having been subject to highly patriarchal social structures with harsh restrictions to their rights, women protecting themselves and creating peaceful surroundings in which they and their children can enjoy rights and related opportunities was of paramount importance. As such, a woman from Nigeria spoke about the prevalent gender-based violence she experienced within her family,⁴⁰ others from DR Congo and Rwanda explained that they had escaped early and forced marriages in their countries of origin.⁴¹ Moreover, one woman from Iraq spoke about the societal injustices preventing women there from living freely and safely, explaining that she was not allowed to study in a male-dominated field of education in Iraq because she would be labelled a lesbian – punishable by death. She highlighted that, for her, peace and equality are about 'respect for women'.⁴²

Fleeing such insecurities represents no linear sequence from conflict, to displacement to peace, with a stringent process of simply leaving one site and soon reaching another; instead, it can take days or even weeks to pass and is often a demanding, exhausting and dangerous endeavour.⁴³ Interlocutors employed diverse strategies while fleeing such as hiding, only moving at night or relying on (un)trustworthy individuals in navigating perilous pathways. For example, one woman from Egypt recalled how she was separated from her son who had fled some time before her and how she now worried constantly about his well-being.⁴⁴ Another from South Sudan shared the story of her mother's recurrent displacement before finally reaching Kakuma in the early 1990s. She had fled with her children to Ethiopia in the late 1980s, but after the fall of the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime was forced to move back to southern Sudan and from there to Kenya. During these journeys she was raped and became pregnant as a result, eventually giving birth in the camp; this left the daughter stigmatised and saw her rejected by her stepfather.⁴⁵

During flight, enduring such challenges was not least driven by individuals' hopes for and expectations of peace in places of exile. Some had initially thought exile to be 'another world entirely'⁴⁶ or a 'peaceful reality',⁴⁷ but these expectations were often scaled back or dashed entirely due to prevailing challenges like gender-based violence, economic constraints, sociopolitical insecurities as well as new issues such as legal barriers, prevalent racism and discriminatory structures.⁴⁸ Consequently, getting out leading to everyday peace in exile is by no means a given. Further to the multiple displacements occurring due to both new and recurrent violence,⁴⁹ choosing to move on extends beyond the moment of leaving conflict zones and captures also the – potentially repeated – decisions to find a place of peace, safety and security after arriving at certain destinations.⁵⁰

In Kenya, such onwards or multiple mobilities occurred within the camp, its surrounding region as well as between the camp and the capital Nairobi or other Kenyan cities. These mobilities were rooted in the striving for security, income, education and healthcare, thereby serving people's well-being and what they perceived as a peaceful life with opportunities. The 'back-and-forth' mobilities between the camp and urban areas were highly gendered and required permission to move as well as the financial means to

do so. While scholarship opportunities to pursue education outside the camp were said to be available for both women and men, many highlighted that the former were prioritised due to their vulnerabilities and exposure to additional hardships.⁵¹ While giving various examples, a woman from DR Congo narrated correspondingly that ‘they are a bit favoured because they know how the girls struggle, especially for education’.⁵² In contrast, mobilities related to grasping business opportunities are a difficult road for women – and single mothers in particular – to take. While operating a business often requires going to larger cities – if not the capital itself – to stock up or buy equipment, such trips were only allowed with movement passes issued by camp authorities. ‘Getting that permit is hard’⁵³ was the lament of one woman from DR Congo, echoing the criticism of many others. The difficulty in obtaining the permit stems mainly from officials requiring payment to issue the necessary documents; on this, she further added: ‘Here, there is nothing for free’.⁵⁴ In addition to needing money to pursue economic opportunities, the woman stressed that she was responsible for looking after her children and thus could not just take off for several days. Such gendered immobilities are experienced as a lack of freedom by this woman and many others, which they directly associated with a lack of peace in the camp. She concluded, accordingly: ‘I cannot say we have full peace’.⁵⁵

While such onwards mobilities were less frequently addressed in Germany, interlocutors recalled fleeing from Syria through Iraq, Lebanon or Turkey. They experienced therewith precarious economic conditions, a lack of legal status and ethnicity-based discrimination resulting in physical- and mental-health issues. One woman thus underlined the importance of health: ‘Like keep living very healthy, I’m healthy [. . .]. So that is how I could describe peace, healthy, you know?’⁵⁶ Another stressed that ‘health comes first, always in life’,⁵⁷ and explained how her onwards mobility to Europe was a way to get out of this precarity in search of peace. Although internal mobilities within Germany were not noted by those spoken with, some studies have explored the scope and reasons behind them – focusing particularly on family networks, economic aims, cultural and linguistic factors, and the seeking of a better future.⁵⁸

Getting by and creating peaceful normalcy

Given the prevalent risks faced, displaced people continue to strive for everyday peace in exile. Sayings such as ‘Peace is not up to you and me. That comes from above’⁵⁹ – stressing responsibility being with those in power (e.g. politicians, ethnic/religious majorities, aid organisations) – are revealing of how structurally rooted struggles impact the possibilities to live in peace. Legal limbo, dependency on humanitarian aid or social services, economic precarities and sociopolitical restrictions are commonplace occurrences among the displaced. Yet, they do not passively submit to these challenges; instead, they actively pursue economic independence, claim their rights, create spheres of belonging and sow normalcy despite the many uncertainties and difficulties they continue to encounter. Scholars have addressed a range of such practices in use, including meeting friends, watching football and making one’s house feel like home.⁶⁰

Based on interlocutors’ narratives, this cultivation of normalcy is central and serves to establish an atmosphere they perceive to be akin to everyday peace in exile. Per Lister’s agency theory, it reflects the ways in which the individuals seek to get by in daily life while

pursuing circumstances they perceive as peaceful. Interlocutors cited common examples: among others, being with family, sending their children off to school in the morning, enjoying hobbies, sports or nature and going for walks. Such seemingly ordinary pursuits are integral to their daily lives and crucial for understanding their own perceptions and practices vis-à-vis peace. What ensues was not only framed as enjoyable moments but peaceful ones, hence those in which conversation partners felt at peace or perceived their condition to be peaceful. A woman from Nigeria, for example, recalled how she found peace in coping with gender-based violence at home through journal writing and poetry: 'I used to write a lot. Yeah. That will make it more peaceful [...]. I forgot almost everything that happens'.⁶¹

Peaceful normalcy is therefore actively sought and produced by individuals in communities. Establishing and sustaining routines contributes significantly to restoring a sense of everyday peace and stability, even amid prevailing challenges and uncertainties about the future. For some, this can encompass creating peaceful environments within the family living space, wherein problems can be discussed openly.⁶² For others, this concerns community engagement for example, girls' gathering together to listen to each other's challenges.⁶³ Also, coping with war and the resulting anxieties can be accomplished by care, compassion and love from family members,⁶⁴ for children particularly through that of their parents – mostly mothers in our case.⁶⁵

To pursue peace, women organised such routines and spheres of belonging collectively in social communities. One from Somalia correspondingly emphasised that peace is when people 'live together in a nice way',⁶⁶ while another from Syria noted how peace, democracy and freedom do not simply exist but must be actively created in everyday life.⁶⁷ In line with this, interlocutors – regardless of their experiences, gender, ethnicity, age or religion – described peace as fundamentally embedded in and dependent on the social relations they establish. As such, they pointed out: 'Everything is together, connected'⁶⁸; 'One hand alone cannot clap'⁶⁹; and 'Just being able to enjoy life, living with people well and having a good relationship with the people that you live with [is key]'.⁷⁰ This resonates with the reciprocity and relational elements of everyday peace emphasised by Mac Ginty; those spoken with explained how they hold on to, maintain and strengthen acceptance, respect and peace in communities in a variety of ways. For example, one woman from South Sudan emphasised the importance of mutual support for a peaceful co-existence in Kakuma: 'You are at peace with yourself and your neighbour. But you need to be there to help. You need to be there to solve their problems too. You need to be there like to advise them. Do a lot of things. Yeah, that is at peace. You love them. You see their problem is also your problem and that will be better'.⁷¹

An extremely challenging part of everyday life for many people who have experienced conflict and displacement is coping with trauma: many conversation partners associated peace with healing and being able to deal with the past to move towards a peaceful life, meaning achieving inner peace.⁷² This is not merely an association or a feeling of peacefulness; their coping and healing is, indeed, an active process. Such a connection being drawn between optimism and mental health corresponds with the scholarly debate on coping.⁷³ Interlocutors explained how they sought to come to terms with the past in pursuit of a healthier, more content and peaceful present as well as future. Their coping strategies here varied greatly; some noted how 'thinking of [...] fears, doubts, anger'⁷⁴ was avoided by focusing on the here-and-now, helping re-establish a sense of inner peace.

Further, many also reflected on the value of daily self-care activities and routines aiding with stress relief. They expressed how they strove to specifically find inner peace for themselves by taking an hour every day at a concrete time to relax on the couch and breath, do physical exercise or how they consciously chose to practice yoga, sing or pray. One woman from South Sudan explained her strategy of taking time for herself here: it's either I go to a quiet place, like I just walk around going far from where people are, try to sit down and reflect, see different things, and then after that, when I come home, I'm released. That anger goes down.⁷⁵ She stressed that such practices help her to accept her situation of protracted displacement and the circumstances she lives under as a consequence thereof. Another from Uganda described, meanwhile, her stress management via 'writing any hurtful life experience and throwing it into the burning flame of fire. It's releasing yourself and giving yourself a peaceful state of mind'.⁷⁶

Believing in God and individually or collectively practised faith were also depicted as important mechanisms by which to heal from trauma and pursue feelings of peace. Conversation partners shared that their faith serves as a source of calm and patience. A woman from Nigeria highlighted, accordingly, the profound tranquillity religiousness provided her with: Because it has such a lot of peace to me. Because when you are religious and you [are] being stressed up, you can go to a quiet place and do some prayers [...] and reach some patience in the Bible.⁷⁷ Additionally, interlocutors emphasised how faith helps them handle the numerous hardships encountered in Kakuma, preventing them from feeling isolated and left without any support. Some also underscored that it is their faith which gives them the motivation to persevere. In response to the question about how she copes with the hardships she has experienced in Kakuma, one woman from Burundi expressed: I'm grateful. All these years God has helped me completely and has given me peace of mind to endure what to do. All that I say is only: God, thank you'.⁷⁸

Getting organised to contribute to peace collectively

Creating such everyday peace and normalcy relies on people fostering a sense of belonging through their social practices. As indicated, collectives were deemed crucial for those spoken with in Kenya and Germany to craft diverse social spheres wherein they can experience a genuine sense of community, comfort and peace. The powerful support provided by and in communities and social networks for displaced individuals is widely reflected in research demonstrating how – whether within formal or informal social systems – people address presenting challenges collectively, offer assistance in emergencies, manage economic activities for increased productivity and aid in healing from traumatic experiences.⁷⁹ Though the role of peace is neglected in such scholarship, our work demonstrates the connections between the value of community and practices for everyday peace, resonating with Mac Ginty's approach to sociality and reciprocity as well as Lister's agency-related getting organised.

In Kenya and Germany, interlocutors frequently addressed how they drew on social support, established collectives and fostered a spirit of togetherness to help nurture everyday peace. In Kakuma, widely referred to were community leaders, such as the chairpersons of administrative entities like blocks and zones, as well as councils of elders. Even though women play their part in community leadership, it is predominantly men who take over these roles. Such leaders are often the first seeking to

resolve any issues arising in the community, for example thefts, quarrels, misunderstandings and domestic disputes. A woman from Somalia who volunteers as chair lady in her block described her work as part of the community-leadership team as a way of helping people by bringing different parties together and spending time with them to solve emerging problems.⁸⁰ All this happens directly without any interference by the police or humanitarian organisations. A conversation partner from DR Congo described the process as follows: 'We prefer all of us to sit together with the community leaders to handle our issues within the community, ask each other for forgiveness. We do reconciliation'.⁸¹

Moreover, interlocutors organised dialogue formats and other forums for people to meet, learn and shape their social environment such as cafés or women's meetings. One from Syria addressed the importance of getting to know the different customs of other displaced individuals as much as familiarising oneself with the intricacies of German culture, with the goal of reducing prejudice and allowing people to 'talk [and] live with each other. One must get to know the surroundings, [...] and build a connection with others'.⁸² Initiatives focused on facilitating discussions allow different individuals to come together and share. During the pandemic, many of these spaces of exchange continued digitally – for instance, via a WhatsApp group dedicated to matters of religion and peace.⁸³

People furthermore engage in a range of other collective initiatives, informal groups and community-based endeavours to get organised and contribute to peace. As one woman from South Sudan stressed: 'You tell your friend your story. Maybe that friend might have a solution to your problems. Then that's what we do. At least we do the action, not only the talking now'.⁸⁴ Another from Syria spoke, similarly, of host communities involving displaced people in the organisation of events⁸⁵ or their celebration of religious festivals together: 'They dance together, eat together, cook together, [they] celebrate together, for example Christmas [or] I make the [...] the sweets of Eid and [...] they say "Yes, happy Eid", that's enough, that's enough for me. That's peace, yes, that's what I think'.⁸⁶ Some convene educational groups so as to share their respective experiences on issues around language-proficiency acquisition⁸⁷ with fellow students and displaced peers: 'I also think that it would be peace for me if I helped other people and if I took care of other people; that would also be peace for me'.⁸⁸

In Kenya, such collective endeavours are often institutionalised as refugee-led organisations in which individuals join forces to improve local safety and security for greater everyday peace. This includes saving groups, especially common among women. They meet regularly and collect small financial contributions from members. If one of them needs a loan, she can borrow from the group at a modest interest rate and herewith finance her own project(s). Yet the benefits hereof are not only economic: such practices help foster trust and peaceful relations, too, among women from different nations and diverse backgrounds. Some young people also engage in such self-organisations, while others set out to teach modes of peaceful interaction in the community. One such organiser, a woman from Somalia, hence remarked: 'So, we solve it within themselves and we teach them how to react and solve the problem, basic peacebuilding skills, I can say'.⁸⁹ These examples reveal the importance of collective practices for everyday peace and perceptions of reciprocity, to which communality, care, trust and mutual support are all integral.⁹⁰

Getting back at challenges to pursue activism for peace

Some of those we spoke with noted their engagement in political activism to counter prevailing issues and contribute to peace. While such peace activism has been thoroughly explored in Peace and Conflict Studies by now,⁹¹ Forced Migration Studies has seldom addressed it.⁹² Rather, the focus has predominantly been on political activism and mobilisation, such as via protest campaigns.⁹³ Yet, some interlocutors explained how they took proactive steps both individually and collectively to challenge societal injustice and promote positive change. Such activist practices resonate strongly with Lister's strategy of getting back at as well as Mac Ginty's notion of solidarity.

Peace activism among the women we conversed with was prompted by their lived experiences of conflict, displacement and restrictive everyday conditions in exile. These endeavours did primarily not address national politics but rather social injustice within their communities. They, accordingly, promote dialogue and advocate for peace in both their countries of asylum and ones of origin. Such activism takes diverse forms: from individual engagement, over grassroots movements to advocacy campaigns, aiming to raise awareness about the underlying causes of tensions. Despite facing immense difficulties, the individuals channel their collective strength and voice into challenging oppressive systems, bridging communal divides and fostering understanding among diverse social groups. Through their activism, they not only (re)claim agency over their lives in oftentimes highly restrictive situations but also inspire others, fostering a sense of solidarity and peace.

Interlocutors emphasised their active involvement in shaping peaceful relations in their countries of origin, for example by chatting with friends and relatives over social media and sharing messages of peace.⁹⁴ Sending money back to relatives,⁹⁵ donating to aid organisations⁹⁶ or advocating for change by emailing politicians⁹⁷ are further activist strategies women use to seed peace in their countries of origin. Despite restrictive environments in exile coupled with the uncertainty about being able – or forced – to repatriate, they still outlined the activities they planned to pursue once back home. While one woman envisioned starting a sustainability-related project in South Sudan with the aim of using it as the basis for sharing political messages later on,⁹⁸ another dreamt of opening an orphanage there to create a home for children while ‘instilling in their minds positivity, not negativity’.⁹⁹ Moreover, a woman from Zimbabwe shared her experiences of political and social activism aimed at democratic reform and women's empowerment, leading to the latter's increased economic independence for women in her community. She assisted them in establishing their own businesses, enabling them to pursue self-reliant lives and provide for their families: ‘I found peace because you know there is joy when you see that this person was struggling. But then now she's happy. She's able to buy the little things for her children that she couldn't buy. [...] So, it brings peace to me that people are developing [...]. So, to me, I'll be happy to see that my vision has helped other people. It has brought a change in someone's life’.¹⁰⁰

By establishing and engaging in social networks, interlocutors described their strategies to navigate risks and support peace in exile, having the broader objective of transforming societal conditions in their surrounding areas. One woman from South Sudan recounted how she acted as a ‘peacemaker’ in a particular school: ‘All I need is the student must live a positive life, a happy life’. She thus sought to support students in

leading peaceful lives, which she said was also crucial for her and her well-being as she could learn to cope with her past and present alike: 'I leave my past. I leave my present. I leave my own situations'.¹⁰¹ Hence, peace activism served those who engaged in it while targeting the support of others, too.

Coinciding with this, some also use activist practices to speak in public, or online via platforms such as YouTube, in raising awareness about existing grievances in the community – such as forced marriage or gender-based violence. A young woman from Rwanda in Kakuma considered such endeavours a way to show everyone that 'we can still contribute in society as women'.¹⁰² Others placed emphasis on the key value of engaging children and youth for peace. A teacher from South Sudan in Kakuma does so by organising student debates tackling conflict resolution and peaceful living. She described her motivation here as follows: 'I focus on instilling peace in the minds of children [rather] than big people'.¹⁰³ Social exclusion enacted through structural/institutionalised racism (e.g. in everyday encounters, in schools or in asylum processes) or religious discrimination experienced in host communities also frequently hindered individuals from seeing their living conditions as peaceful: 'Peace is not to feel foreign. It is peace when I feel that I am a piece of this social – of this city – and I am important here'.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, some have formed groups to advocate for diversity and inclusion,¹⁰⁵ joined associations for human rights¹⁰⁶ and/or lead conversations about the impact of such social exclusion on one's mental and physical well-being.¹⁰⁷

For LGBTQ+ individuals in Kakuma, self-organising to improve their security situation has proven to be a highly valuable practice. As people seeking asylum in Kenya as a result of potential or prior persecution over their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, they come face-to-face with what is ultimately a widely antagonistic and homophobic environment. This only exacerbates the challenges already borne in relation to life as displaced people in a camp context.¹⁰⁸ LGBTQ+ individuals spoken with in Kakuma revealed multidimensional daily problems, spanning violence, discrimination and intimidation in and around the camp, delayed official registration and refugee-status-determination processes, as well as acute hostility when attempting to access resources and opportunities from service providers.¹⁰⁹ As a way of navigating these threats to their personal safety, LGBTQ+ people decided to live together in one compound around which they put a fence to improve their own security situation and thus take care of each other as a group.¹¹⁰ One member of the latter highlighted how this practice is a way 'to look for peace ourselves and to protect ourselves'.¹¹¹ It shows how the displaced can cultivate solidarity to resist existing challenges and, in lieu of fear, marginalisation and violent attacks, develop activist strategies to cope with their lived realities.

Conclusion

'A peaceful life for me looks like [sharing] words for peace together. Sharing love to others [...], sharing food and basic needs with the poor. Visiting the sick'.¹¹² This powerful statement by a woman from South Sudan echoes the variety of practices interlocutors use to contribute to peace in their daily environments. It also exemplifies how their engagement with existing hardships fosters everyday peace. Many women spoke about how they actively promote peace through their diverse individual and collective practices: namely, by getting out of danger in pursuit of peace, by getting by

daily challenges and creating peaceful normalcy, by getting organised and striving for peaceful conditions collectively, and by getting back at injustices and supporting peace activism. Interlocutors explained fostering peace not to be an extraordinary endeavour but as integral part of their everyday life; not least because their lived experiences of violent conflict, displacement, restrictions, racism and discrimination in exile prevail for years on end.

This research contributes to deeper comprehension of the intricate dynamics of peace in exile by exploring agency of displaced women in their pursuit of everyday peace. While lived experiences of conflict, displacement and exile certainly shape the way the women in Kenya and Germany perceive and contribute to peace, this cannot be deemed a purely reactive process. Proactively initiating peaceful change is, indeed, frequently central. Through their actions, they challenge the labels of victimhood and passivity still often imposed on them and their existence, showcasing their determination to shape a peaceful today and tomorrow for themselves and their communities. Peace-related practices are, of course, not limited to women, being, instead, widespread among all those we conversed with. However, pinpointing specifically women's perspectives is key to reflecting on how they – despite and indeed due to their exposures to various gendered challenges – seek to protect themselves, build livelihoods, pursue leadership in everyday peace individually and collectively.

Peace requires further scholarly attention considering the prevailing research focus on political responses to those displaced, or their multiple vulnerabilities. Interlocutors' narratives indicate how peace practices are inherently linked to the individual, social, political, legal and economic spheres of their everyday lives, which needs to be explored more extensively. Our findings suggest placing at the forefront the various practices displaced individuals use to enhance their well-being, promote stability and nurture peaceful interaction instead of predominantly concentrating on top-down political responses. However, this is not to propose leaving responsibility for creating more peaceful environments solely in the hands of displaced people. On the contrary, we argue for active consideration of their own ideas, approaches and practices, while at the same time paying close attention to structural restrictions and related hardships. Thus, we posit the specific need for additional exploration of displaced individuals' peace practices across time and space to gain deeper insight into how they shape their social relations and impact their environments in and beyond exile in navigating such structural constraints.

Notes

1. UNHCR, *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2023*.
2. E.g. Zolberg et al., *Escape from Violence*; Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*; Milner, ' Militarization and Demilitarization'; Czaika and Kis-Katos, 'Civil Conflict and Displacement'; Adhikari, 'Conflict-Induced Displacement'; Salehyan, 'Forced Migration as a Cause and Consequence of Civil War'; Krause, 'Konflikt-Flucht-Nexus: Globales Ausmaß, genderbezogene Auswirkungen und politische Relevanz'; Krause, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*; Zhou and Shaver, 'Reexamining the Effect of Refugees on Civil Conflict'.
3. For a research review, see Krause and Segadlo, 'Conflict, Displacement... and Peace?'.

4. Fuertes, 'Karen Refugees Describe Peace within the Context of Displacement'; Karbo, 'Traditional Approaches to Peace in Africa'; Bradley et al., *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement*; Bryant and Hatay, 'Performing Peace'.
5. Black and Koser, *The End of the Refugee Cycle*; Jacobsen et al., 'Refugees and IDPs in Peacemaking Processes'.
6. Sagy, 'Treating Peace as Knowledge'; Milner, 'Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding'.
7. Salehyan and Gleditsch, 'Refugees and the Spread of Civil War'; Rüegger, 'Refugees, Ethnic Power Relations'.
8. Adelman, 'Why Refugee Warriors are Threats'; Gerdes, *Forced Migration and Armed Conflict*; Leenders, 'Refugee Warriors or War Refugees?'.
9. E.g. Pittaway and Bartolomei, 'Refugees, Race, and Gender'; Akhter and Kusakabe, 'Gender-Based Violence Among Documented'; Buckley-Zistel and Krause (eds.), *Gender, Violence, Refugees*; Wachter et al., 'Drivers of Intimate Partner Violence'.
10. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
11. On peace perceptions, see Krause et al., 'Vielfalt von Friedens(be)deutungen in Fluchtsituationen'; Edler et al., 'Making Sense of Peace in Exile? Displaced People's Intersectional Perceptions of Peace'; Edler and Krause, 'Frieden fühlen? Emotionale (Be) Deutungen von innerem Frieden nach Konflikt und Flucht'.
12. Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace*, 2.
13. Lister, *Poverty*.
14. Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building'; Paffenholz, 'Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding'; Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace*.
15. Lee, 'Understanding Everyday Peace in Cambodia'; Blomqvist et al., 'Care and Silence in Women's Everyday'; Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace*.
16. For a research review, see Krause and Segadlo, 'Conflict, Displacement... and Peace?'. Fuertes, 'Karen Refugees Describe Peace within the Context of Displacement'; Karbo, 'Traditional Approaches to Peace in Africa'; Bradley et al., *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement*; Bryant and Hatay, 'Performing Peace'.
17. As an exception, See Blomqvist, Olivius, and Hedström, 'Care and Silence in Women's Everyday Peacebuilding in Myanmar'.
18. E.g. Kirk, 'Promoting a Gender-Just Peace'; El-Bushra, 'Feminism, Gender, and Women's Peace Activism'; Nyathon, 'The Role of Women in Peace-Building in South Sudan'; Donahoe, *Peacebuilding Through Women's Community Development*; Sahin and Kula, 'What Women Want Before Justice'.
19. Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace*, 9.
20. Ibid., 51–79.
21. Ibid., 67.
22. Lister, *Poverty*.
23. Ibid., 124–157.
24. Krause and Denkowski, 'Transfer of Knowledge for and with Whom?', 145.
25. Girtler, *Methoden der Feldforschung*, 147–168.
26. This Study was approved by the USIU-A Institutional Review Board (USIU-A/IRB/164-2020).
27. Refugee Studies Centre, 'Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice'; IASFM, 'Code of Ethics'.
28. Krause, 'Researching Forced Migration'.
29. Mackenzie et al., 'Beyond "Do No Harm"'.
30. See Clark-Kazak, '"Why Care Now" in Forced Migration Research?'; Schulz et al., 'Self-care for Gender-Based Violence Researchers'.
31. E.g. Bohra-Mishra and Massey, 'Individual Decisions to Migrate During Civil Conflict'; Adhikari, 'Conflict-Induced Displacement'; Kuhnt, 'Literature Review'; Krause, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*, 192–199.
32. Lubkemann, 'Involuntary Immobility'.

33. Woman, Kenya, 8 October 2022.
34. Woman, Kenya, 8 October 2022.
35. Woman, Kenya, 8 October 2022.
36. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
37. Woman, Germany, 18 March 2021.
38. Woman, Kenya, 8 October 2022.
39. Woman, Kenya, 28 September 2022.
40. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
41. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022; woman, Kenya, 23 September 2022.
42. Woman, Germany, 18 June 2021.
43. See also Krause, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*, 192–199.
44. Woman, Germany, 20 September 2021.
45. Woman, Kenya, 10 October 2022.
46. Woman, Germany, 10 August 2021.
47. Woman, Germany, 7 September 2022.
48. E.g. Abdi, 'In Limbo'; Boulila and Carri, 'On Cologne'; Bishop, *Kakuma's Shadows*; Camminga, 'Encamped within a Camp'.
49. Beytrison and Kalis, 'Repeated Displacement in Eastern DRC'; Muggah, 'The Invisible Displaced'; Cottyn, 'Livelihood Trajectories in a Context of Repeated Displacement'.
50. Turner, 'Staying Out of Place'; Tegenbos and Büscher, 'Moving Onward?'; Krause and Gato, 'Escaping Humanitarian Aid in Camps?'.
51. Woman, Kenya, 29 September 2022; women, Kenya, 4 October 2022.
52. Woman, Kenya, 22 September 2022.
53. Woman, Kenya, 3 October 2022.
54. Woman, Kenya, 3 October 2022.
55. Woman, Kenya, 3 October 2022.
56. Woman, Germany, 10 August 2021.
57. Woman, Germany, 10 March 2021.
58. E.g. Della Puppa et al., 'Onward Migration and Intra-European Mobilities'.
59. Woman, Germany, 7 March 2021.
60. Agier, 'Between War and City', 326; Jansen, *The Accidental City*, 123; Omata, 'Home-Making During Protracted Exile'; Fathi, 'Home-in-Migration'.
61. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
62. Woman, Kenya, 4 October 2022.
63. Woman, Kenya, 25 October 2022.
64. Woman, Germany, 23 December 2020.
65. Woman, Germany, 14 August 2022.
66. Woman, Kenya, 26 October 2022.
67. Woman, Germany, 14 August 2022.
68. Woman, Germany, 10 February 2021.
69. Woman, Germany, 7 March 2021.
70. Woman, Kenya, 29 September 2022.
71. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
72. Edler et al., 'Making Sense of Peace in Exile? Displaced People's Intersectional Perceptions of Peace'; Edler and Krause, 'Frieden fühlen? Emotionale (Be)Deutungen von innerem Frieden nach Konflikt und Flucht'.
73. For literature reviews, e.g. Hutchinson and Dorsett, 'What Does the Literature Say About Resilience in Refugee People?'; Seguin and Roberts, 'Coping Strategies Among Conflict-Affected Adults in Low- and Middle-Income Countries'.
74. Woman, Germany, 8 September 2022.
75. Woman, Kenya, 10 October 2022.
76. Woman, Kenya, 26 September 2022.
77. Woman, Germany, 10 August 2021.
78. Woman, Kenya, 27 September 2022.

79. e.g. Khawaja et al., 'Difficulties and Coping Strategies of Sudanese Refugees'; Erdener, 'The Ways of Coping with Post-War Trauma'; Alzoubi et al., 'Coping Strategies Used by Syrian Refugees in Jordan'; Krause, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*.
80. Woman, Kenya, 13 October 2022.
81. Woman, Kenya, 3 October 2022.
82. Woman, Germany, 6 February 2021.
83. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
84. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
85. Woman, Germany, 26 May 2021.
86. Woman, Germany, 18 June 2021.
87. Woman, Germany, 26 August 2021.
88. Woman, Germany, 26 May 2021.
89. Woman, Kenya, 13 October 2022.
90. Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace*, 61–67.
91. E.g. Bunch (ed.), *Peace, Human Rights, and Women's Peace Activism*; El-Bushra, 'Feminism, Gender, and Women's Peace Activism'; Chigudu, 'The Social Imaginaries of Women's Peace Activism'.
92. For an exception, see Anderson and Eskandari, 'From Peace Talks to Pandemics'.
93. E.g. Nyers and Rygiel (eds.), *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*; Lecadet, 'Refugee Politics'; Coffie, 'Liberian Refugee Protest and the Meaning of Agency'; Odugbesan and Schwiertz, 'Refugee Struggles in Germany'; Bhimji, 'The Temporalities of Refugee Activism'.
94. Woman, Kenya, 22 September 2022.
95. Woman, Germany, 10 February 2021.
96. Woman, Germany, 18 June 2021.
97. Woman, Germany, 30 December 2020.
98. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
99. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
100. Woman, Germany, 7 September 2022.
101. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
102. Women, Kenya, 23 September 2022.
103. Woman, Kenya, 11 October 2022.
104. Woman, Germany, 18 August 2022.
105. Woman, Germany, 19 June 2021.
106. Woman, Germany, 10 August 2021.
107. Woman, Germany, 18 June 2021.
108. Camminga, 'Encamped within a Camp'.
109. Lesbian woman, Kenya, 7 October 2022; lesbian woman, Kenya, 9 November 2022; gay man, Kenya, 28 October 2022; gay man, Kenya, 9 November 2022.
110. Krause and Segadlo, 'Surviving Exile. LGBTQ+ Displaced People's Lived Experiences of Aid, Risks, and Coping in Kakuma'.
111. Gay Man, Kenya, 28 October 2022.
112. Woman, Kenya, 27 October 2022.

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