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Making sense of peace in exile? Displaced people's intersectional perceptions of peace

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ABSTRACT

This article enquires into how people with lived experiences of conflict and displacement make sense of peace in exile. For the analysis, the article focuses on displaced individuals in Kenya and Germany and theoretically complements the varieties of peace framework, situated knowledge and an intersectional approach. Findings reveal multifaceted perceptions revolving around the three dimensions of structural, collective and individual peace, outlooks shaped by gender-specific experiences, religious beliefs and familial relations. Interlocutors associate structural peace with experiences of sociopolitical, economic and legal conditions in exile, collective peace with support systems and harmonious interactions in communities, and individual or inner peace with desires for and feelings of happiness, hope and healing. Although analytically distinguishable, these three dimensions are inherently intertwined in interlocutors' daily lives due to their lived experiences prior to and once in exile.

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Introduction

What meanings do people who have experienced conflict and displacement ascribe to 'peace'? Despite continuously expanding research on the nexus of violent conflict and forced migration,¹ peace is rarely considered a key part herein.² This applies particularly to the diverse ways in which displaced people³ make sense of peace in exile. While the local turn in

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¹Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence. Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Sarah K. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Gil Loescher and James Milner, 'Protracted Refugee Situations: Domestic and international security implications', *The Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 375 (2005); Idean Salehyan, 'Forced Migration as a Cause and Consequence of Civil War', in *Handbook of Civil Wars*, ed. Edward Newman and Karl DeRouen (New York: Routledge, 2014); Alex Braithwaite, Idean Salehyan, and Burcu Savun, 'Refugees, Forced Migration, and Conflict: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 1 (2019).

²For an overview, see Ulrike Krause and Nadine Segadlo, 'Conflict, Displacement... and Peace? A Critical Review of Research Debates', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2021).

³Although this research specifically focuses on individuals who have fled across national borders and sought asylum in another country, we refrain from using the label 'refugee' in this article due to its legalistic connotations and highly politicised notions. Instead, we refer to the individuals as 'displaced people' or 'people with lived experience of displacement'. This terminological shift aims to place their own personal encounters, experiences and perceptions centre stage.

Critical Peace Studies has catalysed the shift towards more inclusive peace-related research,⁴ displacement and the perspectives of those experiencing it have largely been neglected.⁵ Hence, beyond the state-centric discourses of political elites countering conflict, protecting ‘refugees’ and educating them about peace, the experiences, perceptions and practices of those most intimately affected remain marginalised, their nuanced viewpoints obscured.

This article aims to examine the diverse meanings which displaced people attribute to peace and thus to place their individual perceptions at the forefront of research.⁶ We cast a spotlight on the interplay of peace perceptions and lived experiences, structural contexts and future-oriented aspirations. Hereby we do not seek to develop a conclusive and all-encompassing answer to the question ‘what is peace in exile?’, as such responses always depend on personal perspectives and can change over time. Rather, we are interested in exploring the multiplicity of interlocutors’ personal accounts in contexts of conflict-induced displacement. These accounts allow us to identify patterns relevant to understanding peace perceptions, which we categorise into structural, collective, and individual dimensions. Through this focus, we ultimately seek to contribute to a more comprehensive approach to peace which acknowledges displaced individuals’ own points of view.⁷

To this end, we lean on varieties of peace as the heuristic framework, as capturing ideational, relational and situational peace, and complement it with situated knowledge and an intersectional approach (more below). Empirically, we draw on multi-site qualitative research with displaced people in Kenya and Germany. In lieu of forming a comparison, the two cases serve to generate insights shared across geographical locations, cultural contexts and distinct social groups, reflecting both similar yet also highly individual tendencies regarding peace. Moreover, research on forced migration rarely connects cases in countries of the ‘Global North’ and those of the ‘Global South’; instead, the postcolonial ‘myth of difference’, as Chimni⁸ critiques, persists. Thus, we weave together individual peace perceptions across the two sites of study.

Based on interlocutors’ shared narratives, the article shows that peace is not primarily a political construct but rather a social one. Their understandings of peace are shaped by their past and present experiences of conflict and displacement as well as their hopes of the future. The meanings ascribed to peace concern structural, collective and individual dimensions. We structure the article following these dimensions and reflect on how those we spoke with capture structural peace primarily as the sociopolitical, economic and legal

⁴E.g. Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace’, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013); Thania Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment towards an Agenda for Future Research’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015).

⁵For an exception, see Al Fuentes, ‘Karen Refugees Describe Peace within the Context of Displacement’, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2016).

⁶Based on this research on displaced individuals’ peace perceptions, we explore peace practices in another paper, see Hannah Edler, Ulrike Krause, and Nadine Segadlo, ‘“We are Creating Peace”: Everyday Peace Practices of Displaced Women in Kenya and Germany’, *Conflict, Security & Development* (2024). Meanings ascribed to inner peace is central in Hannah Edler and Ulrike Krause, ‘Frieden fühlen? Emotionale (Be)Deutungen von innerem Frieden nach Konflikt und Flucht’, *Zeitschrift für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* (2024).

⁷E.g. Linnéa Blomqvist, Elisabeth Olivius, and Jenny Hedström, ‘Care and Silence in Women’s Everyday Peacebuilding in Myanmar’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 3 (2021); Veronica Strandh and Benni Yusriza, ‘War Widows’ Everyday Understandings of Peace in Aceh, Indonesia’, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021); SungYong Lee, ‘Understanding Everyday Peace in Cambodia: Plurality, Subtlety, and Connectivity’, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2020).

⁸Bhupinder S. Chimni, ‘The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (1998): 351.

conditions which support or hinder peace. Collective peace encompasses the centrality of social networks and support systems, harmonious encounters and interactions, and frames peace as a social process. Individual peace speaks to people's emotions and states of mind, and captures feeling a sense of 'inner peace'. Although these three dimensions are analytically distinguishable, interlocutors frequently connected them, therewith revealing how they perceive peace to be a series of overarching processes deeply embedded in everyday life – including hopes for leading a (more) peaceful existence.

Researching displaced people's various meanings of peace

The body of research on conflict-induced displacement has been growing since the 1980s, linking therewith the interdisciplinary fields of Peace and Conflict Studies and Forced Migration Studies. Dominated by state-centric, top-down perspectives, studies have addressed how conflict triggers displacement, how political elites respond to 'refugees' in seeking to protect and control them, as well as how the latter are confronted with prevalent, multifaceted forms of risk in conflict and exile.⁹ Beneath the surface of these research debates lies the complex terrain of peace, which has been insufficiently explored as part of the conflict – displacement nexus thus far.¹⁰ If studies address peace at all, they mention it only as a condition for displaced people's repatriation to countries of origin,¹¹ discuss peace education in the course of humanitarian assistance¹² or partly emphasise the need to link refugee protection and peacebuilding.¹³ Resonating with research on 'refugee warriors',¹⁴ some studies have also explored how conflict can spread due to displacement, which risks portraying those displaced as destabilising forces for peace.¹⁵ Others have delved into the relationship between diaspora, conflict and peace,¹⁶ or (the lack of) peace and internal displacement¹⁷; we are interested, however, in the interplay of conflict, displacement and peace across national borders.

⁹Zolberg et al., *Escape from Violence*; Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*; Loescher and Milner, 'Protracted Refugee Situations'; Salehyan, 'Forced Migration as a Cause and Consequence'; Braithwaite et al., 'Refugees, Forced Migration, and Conflict'.

¹⁰Krause and Segadlo, 'Conflict, Displacement... and Peace?'. For an exception, see Bradley, Megan, James Milner, and Blair Peruniak, eds. *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement and Building Peace Beyond Beneficiaries* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

¹¹Richard Black and Khalid Koser, *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction* (Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books, 1999).

¹²Tehila Sagy, 'Treating Peace as Knowledge: UNHCR's Peace Education as a Controlling Process', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 3 (2008).

¹³James Milner, 'Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁴Howard Adelman, 'Why Refugee Warriors are Threats', *Journal of Conflict Studies* 18, no. 1 (1998); Reinoud Leenders, 'Refugee Warriors or War Refugees? Iraqi Refugees' Predicament in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon', *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁵Salehyan, 'Forced Migration as a Cause and Consequence of Civil War'; Jecinta A. Ali, D. K. Imana, and W. Ocha, 'The Refugee Crisis in Kenya: Exploring Refugee-Host Community Causes of Tensions and Conflicts in Kakuma Refugee Camp', *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy* 5, no. 2 (2017).

¹⁶E.g. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares, eds., *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007); Päivi Pirkkalainen and Mahdi Abdile, 'The Diaspora-Conflict-Peace-Nexus: A Literature Review', *Dispeace Working Paper* No. 1 (2009); Osman Antwi-Boateng, 'After War then Peace: The US-based Liberian Diaspora as Peace-building Norm Entrepreneurs', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011); Élise Féron and Bruno Lefort, 'Diasporas and Conflicts – Understanding the Nexus', *Diaspora Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁷E.g. Steve Utterwulghé, 'Conflict Management in Complex Humanitarian Situations: Peacemaking and Peacebuilding Work with Angolan IDPs', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004); Patricia Weiss Fagen, 'Peace Processes and IDP Solutions', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009); Charis Psaltis et al., 'Internally Displaced Persons and the Cyprus Peace Process', *International Political Science Review* 41, no. 1 (2020).

While the research landscape has, accordingly, long been characterised by a focus on risk factors and on top-down political perspectives, the recent shift in Peace and Conflict Studies away from western, state-centric liberal peace to hybrid, everyday and agonistic peace requires us to now broaden our analysis of the conflict – displacement – peace nexus. Such a shift places local peace endeavours centre stage, helping to overcome the portrayal of locals as ‘a homogenous and disorderly Other’.¹⁸ The local turn further aids zooming in on community-centric grassroots initiatives and context-specific dynamics in pursuit of peace.¹⁹ The ‘local’ is certainly not limited to specific groups such as local elites; rather, it refers to a range of social and political actors as well as everyday conditions.²⁰

Our research is situated amid these debates and seeks to contribute to them by attending to the ‘local’ peace perceptions of people with lived experiences of conflict and displacement. For the analysis, we draw on the varieties of peace framework.²¹ By moving further away from peace as a political construct, one which political decision-makers (have to) establish, enforce and maintain, the framework assumes that meanings of peace are complex and manifold. Building on long-standing debates, the framework focuses on ideational, relational and situational peace as three intertwined areas.²² Ideational peace encompasses notions, desires, aspirations and norms about what peace is and how it could or should be; relational peace pertains to the relational ties among actors and social entities, including their practices, attitudes and interactions; situational peace captures societal conditions, as spanning various scales or contexts like a region²³ – or, in our study, a refugee camp. This framework facilitates examination of displaced people’s own perceptions of peace, as embedded in their individual aspirations, social relations and local conditions.

We operationalise this framework through a micro-level perspective on the situated knowledge of displaced people and an intersectional approach to the meanings they ascribe to peace. First, situated knowledge is pivotal in exploring their understandings of peace. Haraway approaches situated knowledge from a feminist standpoint, as embodied knowledge which originates from individual positions yet extends beyond those by encompassing shared experiences as well.²⁴ In her work on black feminist thought, Collins also highlights the social and political situatedness of knowledge, emphasising that it is not fixed and static but evolves dynamically, as influenced by shifting power conditions and experiences.²⁵ Given the focus on displaced people, such knowledges are

¹⁸Oliver P. Richmond, ‘Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism: Liberal-Local Hybridity via the Everyday as a Response to the Paradoxes of Liberal Peacebuilding’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 3, no. 3 (2009): 325.

¹⁹Mac Ginty and Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building’; Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’.

²⁰Roger Mac Ginty, ‘Where is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015); Pamina Firchow, *Reclaiming Everyday Peace: Local Voices in Measurement and Evaluation After War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²¹Anna Jarstad et al., ‘Three Approaches to Peace: A Framework for describing and exploring Varieties of Peace’, *Umeå Working Papers in Peace and Conflict Studies* no. No. 12 (2019).

²²Jarstad et al., ‘Three Approaches to Peace’; Elisabeth Olivius and Malin Åkebo, ‘Exploring Varieties of Peace: Advancing the Agenda’, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021).

²³Jarstad et al., ‘Three Approaches to Peace’, 6–16. For further research on each form, see, e.g. Johanna Söderström et al., ‘Friends, Fellows, and Foes: A new Framework for studying Relational Peace’, *International Studies Review* 23, no. 3 (2021); Strandh and Yusriza, ‘War Widows’ Everyday Understandings of Peace in Aceh, Indonesia’; Aidan Gnoth and H. Khan, ‘Situational Peace – Exploring the Conditions of and for Peace(s)’, *평화들 PEACES* 1, no. 2 (2022).

²⁴Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988).

²⁵Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York; London: Routledge, 2000), 25.

informed by the unique – yet shared – experiences of individuals, including their encounters of violence and persecution, im/mobilities, restrictions and social surroundings prior to and once in exile. However, it would be unrealistic to assume that we can fully capture interlocutors' knowledges. 'Situated bits of knowledge', following Elorduy,²⁶ is thus the focus, enabling us to reflect on displaced people's own highly diverse but mutually shaped perceptions of peace.

Second, in exploring the nuances to such ascribed meanings, taking an intersectional perspective is key. As Kappler and Lemay-Hébert argue, an *intersectionality of peace* approach does not deny the hybridity of experience and allows to integrate research on the everyday and the narratives that emerge therein, yet without being blind to the power relations that shape the formation of identities in peacebuilding contexts.²⁷ Intersectionality is, accordingly, primarily used as 'an analytical tool'²⁸ to expose the complex entanglements and power relations informing individuals' experiences, practices and indeed existence. An intersectional approach thus helps move beyond binaries, giving way to 'the possibility for (a) plural peace(s)'.²⁹ To tease out such pluralities in peace perceptions, we do not use intersectionality to analyse the data in the sense of how identity markers intersect and subsequently shape individuals' understandings; instead, intersectionality emerged as a result of the analysis and we reflect on how interlocutors' peace ascriptions are inherently shaped by intersectional perceptions. As such, we take the situated bits of knowledge seriously throughout the research process and address the intersectional understandings of peace harboured by those we spoke with. We show how interlocutors intertwine peace with personal experiences vis-à-vis gender relations, familial support or also separation across generations, economic possibilities, religious faith, discrimination and racism.

Interlocutors shared their perspectives with us in the context of the research project 'Women, Forced Migration – and Peace'.³⁰ We engaged in multi-site qualitative research with displaced people in Kenya and Germany. In Kenya, the research took place in Kakuma refugee camp with individuals primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Rwanda and Burundi. In Germany, research involved individuals mainly from Syria, Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine and Colombia, half of whom lived in organised collective reception centres or containers as forms of encampment, while the remaining interlocutors had previously experienced such encampment but were residing in private accommodations when we met. Using a multi-method approach for data collection sought to provide space for interlocutors to share as much of their views as they wanted to. Ero-epic dialogue as an unstructured form of open conversation³¹ represented the main method used to speak with 116 people in total, 38 in Germany (29 self-identifying as women, 9 as men) and 78 in Kenya (53 self-identifying as women, 25 as men). In addition, we conducted three discussions with 23

²⁶Nerea Amorós Elorduy, *Architecture as a Way of Seeing and Learning: The built Environment as an added Educator in East African Refugee Camps* (London: UCL Press, 2021), 20.

²⁷Stefanie Kappler and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, 'From Power-Blind Binaries to the Intersectionality of Peace: Connecting Feminism and Critical Peace and Conflict Studies', *Peacebuilding* 7, no. 2 (2019): 2. Italics in the original.

²⁸Kappler and Lemay-Hébert, 'From Power-Blind Binaries to the Intersectionality of Peace', 16; Elena B. Stavrevska and Sarah Smith, 'Intersectionality and Peace', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 2.

²⁹Stavrevska and Smith, 'Intersectionality and Peace', 5.

³⁰This work was supported by the German Foundation for Peace Research under grant number FP 05/18 – SP 02/11-2017.

³¹Roland Girtler, *Methoden der Feldforschung*, 4. Auflage ed., vol. 4. edn. (Wien, Köln, Weimar: UTB, 2001), 147–68.

individuals on specific peace-related questions, two workshops with 19 community leaders who engaged in concrete peace projects and invited 45 individuals to share their perspectives via journal writing. Drawing on qualitative content analysis, emphasis here was on reconstructive elements.³² By identifying not just core themes but relational encounters, contextual descriptions and ideational attributions, the reconstruction of interlocutors' subjective meaning-making as regards peace was key.

The research was led by ethical considerations throughout.³³ We drew on the codes of ethics by the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre and the IASFM³⁴ as our guiding frameworks and concentrated on research *with* instead of *about* displaced people. This shaped the entire process, including approaches to collaborative research, informed consent, voluntary participation, do no harm and now disseminating findings. The team was completed by three peer-researchers with lived experiences of displacement in Kenya whose expertise, language skills and extensive networks were crucial to the project. Our collaboration is not limited to data collection but continues in data analysis, publication and discussion (e.g. at workshops and conferences). To prevent risks potentially arising from individuals' involvement, we conducted do no harm analyses prior to, during and after data collection in the team³⁵ and continue to reflect on ethical issues in the writing process. During data collection, we used a relational approach following Mackenzie et al.³⁶ to ensure informed consent and voluntary participation; instead of merely seeking signatures on standardised consent forms, we repeatedly discussed what interlocutors' rights are, how data would be used, in what scope they wanted to take part and how we could achieve reciprocity. During dialogues and discussions, we avoided a strict 'question/answer' format and created conversational spaces for people to share as much of their experiences and outlooks as they wished to and felt comfortable with.

While the research is thus theoretically, methodologically and ethically guided by the focus on own perspectives of people with lived experiences of conflict and displacement, the nature of this article risks reproducing some of the power asymmetries which we are seeking to address and negate. First and foremost, despite our ethical reflections and collaborative approach, we are aware that intersectional power dynamics persist; these are, indeed, already evident in the authorship of this article. We are three white, women researchers, trained and employed in western academia. The privileges of our skin colour, education, employment, passports – in tandem with prevailing structural problems and inequalities – are starkly evident when working with displaced people in Kenya and Germany. Be it the legal status in the countries where we reside and conduct

³²Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software* (London: SAGE, 2014). We opted for this approach using MaxQDA instead of narrative analysis as team members furthermore drew on and explored additional sources (policy documents, media formats etc.) for individual areas of consideration with the scope of the overall project.

³³This study was approved by the USIU-A Institutional Review Board (USIU-A/IRB/164-2020).

³⁴Refugee Studies Centre, 'Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2007); International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM), 'Code of Ethics: Critical Reflections on Research Ethics in Situations of Forced Migration', <http://iasfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IASFM-Research-Code-of-Ethics-2018.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2018).

³⁵Ulrike Krause, 'Researching Forced Migration. Critical Reflections on Research Ethics during Fieldwork', *RSC Working Paper Series* No. 123 (2017).

³⁶Catriona Mackenzie, C. McDowell, and E. Pittaway, 'Beyond "Do No Harm": The Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007).

research, the varying economic conditions resulting from employment or the lack thereof, including the right to work, the prevalent risks of violence or the multifaceted uncertainties about the future lying ahead. These are just some examples of factors profoundly shaping the perspectives we, and the people we were able to work with, hold to. In the team, we repeatedly discuss these power dynamics and ethical questions, seeking to place cooperation and care at the forefront of our work.³⁷ This, of course, extends to our interactions with interlocutors, as guided by the prioritisation of individual dignity, rights, agency and voice. Collaboration remains a cornerstone here; while we had hoped to co-publish such research with team members with lived experiences of displacement, the critical findings and also their named visibility could potentially endanger them. Preventing such risks is of the utmost importance, which is why co-publication is not viable here.

Moreover, while we purposefully use situated knowledge to delve into interlocutors' subjective peace perceptions, as embedded in their individual aspirations, social relations and local conditions, there is an inherent risk of generalising from personal accounts or prioritising some ascriptions over others. For example, many of those we spoke with referred to safety and security when discussing peace, which thus might appear to be *the* core dimensions they attribute to peace at first sight. However, this would merely be our interpretation (likely influenced by research discourses) because conversation partners equally often and simultaneously addressed several other areas, too – such as community spirit, freedom and hope. Each person ultimately laid out their own personal emphasis according to their subjective experiences. Hence, focusing on subjective understandings requires us to respect pluralism, overcome the academic pursuit of conclusive arguments and refrain from making strong abstractions or fixed prioritisations.

Peace as structural dimension: seeking security, freedom and opportunity

Encountering conflict and displacement, along with persecution, gender-based violence, the loss of family members and friends, poverty as well as various uncertainties, influenced interlocutors' perceptions of peace as structural circumstances. In consequence, they emphasised not only how violence represents or contributes to a lack of peace but also how (ideal) structural conditions were key to future-oriented hopes for their freedoms and security. They spoke of these structural perspectives irrespective of gender identity, sexual orientation, origins or age, revealing how they understand such structural conditions as fundamental necessities for peace.

The significance becomes immediately evident in one interlocutor's notion of peace as a right 'everyone is entitled to have'.³⁸ As a result of exposure to violent conflict, limitations during the asylum procedure and socio-economic deprivations in both Kenya and Germany, conversation partners emphasised that peace necessitates not only one's own individual dedication but especially formal political regulations safeguarding it. As one person who had fled the war in Syria stressed: "There is also peace as long as [there is a] proper structure of the government system. There is always a body and

³⁷Philipp Schulz et al., 'Self-Care for Gender-Based Violence Researchers – Beyond Bubble Baths and Chocolate Pralines', *Qualitative Research* 23, no. 5 (2023); Christina Clark-Kazak, "Why Care Now" in Forced Migration Research?: Imagining a Radical Feminist Ethics of Care', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 22, no. 4 (2023).

³⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 10, 2021.

various institutions [. . .], I turn to them, they can help me when I am in a difficult situation. [That] also gives a bit of a sense of peace, a sense of security for people [. . .], that you are also supported as a human being, that you are treated as a human being, that is peace'.³⁹

This corresponds with traditional state-centred research approaches to peace as a political project⁴⁰ and links feelings of peace to notions of support and protection, merging politics with individual perceptions. This fundamental entanglement is also reflected in the emphasising of 'peace means law and rules' by a conversation partner who had fled Iran due to political persecution.⁴¹ He explained that regulations should not only exist on paper but must be implemented, guaranteeing people access to their rights therewith. Likewise, one interlocutor who had fled sociopolitical violence in Colombia perceived being in Germany as more peaceful due to its structures enabling a relatively respectful, open and inclusive way of life. She noted that people generally adhere to the laws regulating everyday life in Germany, which 'really created peace'.⁴² In Kenya, conversation partners shared similar perceptions, highlighting the upholding of justice and human rights as central to their understanding of peace. An individual who had fled Somalia narrated 'a peaceful life is having access to fundamental rights',⁴³ while another from DR Congo emphasised the crucial role for stability and humanity of the structural conditions enabling one to lead a peaceful life: 'Peace is something very important for the development of our life as human beings. We cannot do anything without peace. Almost everything is impossible if there is no peace, because if there is no peace, there is chaos'.⁴⁴

Along with these concerns, interlocutors addressed intersectional issues of (in)equality and discrimination based on their gender identities, family situations (e.g. as a single mother or widow), religious beliefs and ethnicities, which ultimately shaped their understandings of peace and limited their assertion of themselves living in peaceful conditions. While this links to research on law and (in)justice, social exclusion, discrimination and racism against displaced people,⁴⁵ peace is widely ignored here. Unequal rights and opportunities due to patriarchal gender relations and heteronormative structures compromised individuals' physical and mental well-being as well as feelings of freedom, safety and peace. Particularly interlocutors who self-identified as women and LGBTQ+ explained how their rights, security and equality of opportunity were at risk due to discrimination and violence. Women frequently spoke about experiencing gender-based violence in their home and partnerships, as well as facing patriarchal suppression. One hence emphasised that 'every woman is abused in her home. You find women who are beaten like a donkey'.⁴⁶ Others shared the challenges of being single mothers in the camp,

³⁹Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, September 5, 2022.

⁴⁰E.g. Daniel Philpott and Gerard Powers, eds., *Strategies of Peace. Transforming Conflict in a Violent World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴¹Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, September 8, 2022.

⁴²Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 16, 2022.

⁴³Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 13, 2022.

⁴⁴Dialogue, self-identified as man, Kenya, September 19, 2022.

⁴⁵E.g. Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei, 'Refugees, Race, and Gender: The Multiple Discrimination against Refugee Women', *Refugee* 19, no. 1 (2001); Karin Wachter et al., 'Drivers of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Three Refugee Camps', *Violence Against Women* 24, no. 3 (2018); Yvette Ruzibiza and Lidewyde H. Berckmoes, 'Making "The Process": Sexual Vulnerability and Burundian Refugee Boys and Young Men's Strategies for Onward Migration from Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 35, no. 3 (2022).

⁴⁶Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, September 29, 2022.

including instances of being robbed and suffering discrimination,⁴⁷ and expressed the societal injustices preventing women from living freely and safely, noting how peace and equality for her entail ‘respect for women’.⁴⁸ Due to homophobic and transphobic social contexts, queer individuals stressed to constantly live in fear and regularly face structural and physical violence, including discrimination, social exclusion, harassment, assault, and even murder.⁴⁹ One interlocutor shared that their neighbours ‘took me in their midst, pushed me. [. . .] They beat me. I had to scream, so that someone comes to help me’.⁵⁰

Such problems echo the experiences many of those spoken with shared in Kenya and Germany. They also criticised how laws are often insufficiently – if at all – implemented by state authorities such as bureaucrats, police and military, giving rise to great risks in people’s everyday life and peace. As a result, interlocutors frequently portrayed peace as ‘conditional’,⁵¹ deficient or only partially realised. Many described living in Kenya and in Germany as *more* peaceful compared to their places of origin as there is less poverty or violence such as hearing gunshots or feeling worried about attacks and bombings. However, this relative peace was limited due to the ongoing uncertainties encountered. After arrival in Germany, for example, structural risks in dehumanising asylum processes⁵² continue and affect legal, socio-economic and individual conditions. Their rights, and what they perceive as a peaceful, calm life, relied on the outcome of these processes, with many finding themselves trapped in the precarity of holding the temporary status of ‘tolerated stay’ (German: Duldung),⁵³ exposed therewith to the constant threat of deportation. One interlocutor expressed her frustration here about the immense barriers faced when seeking access to essential documents: ‘It’s like when [. . .] you applied for something that you are entitled to have, they don’t want to give it to you. I attached [. . .] no peace there. [. . .] You know that this time you’re supposed to get it, as humans’.⁵⁴ Another shared his desperation at living under Duldung status with no permission to work, his chronic fear of deportation to Kosovo and thus experiencing no peace at this time in his life: ‘Nobody took our situation seriously. Many were deported and then disappeared there. [But] you are normal, like a normal human, I can never forgive anyone this’.⁵⁵

⁴⁷Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 3, 2022.

⁴⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, June 18, 2021.

⁴⁹Dialogue, self-identified as lesbian woman, Kenya, November 9, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as gay man, Kenya, October 7, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as gay man, Kenya, October 28, 2022. For further research on lived experiences of queer displaced people in Kenya, see B Camminga, ‘Encamped within a Camp: Transgender Refugees and Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya)’, in *Invisibility in African Displacements. From Structural Marginalization to Strategies of Avoidance*, ed. Jesper Bjarnesen and Simon Turner (London: Nordic Africa Institut; Zed Books, 2020); Ulrike Krause and Nadine Segadlo, ‘Surviving Exile. LGBTQ+ Displaced People’s Lived Experiences of Aid, Risks, and Coping in Kakuma’, *Gender Issues*, no. 41 (2024).

⁵⁰Dialogue, self-identified as gay man, Kenya, October 28, 2022.

⁵¹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 14, 2022.

⁵²E.g. Elena Fontanari, ‘Confined to the Threshold. The Experiences of Asylum Seekers in Germany’, *City* 19, no. 5 (2015); Gerald Schneider et al., ‘Forty-Eight Shades of Germany: Positive and Negative Discrimination in Federal Asylum Decision Making’, *German Politics* 29, no. 4 (2020); Mengia Tschalaer, ‘Queer Motherhood in the Context of Legal Precarity: Experiences of Lesbian Mothers seeking Asylum in Germany’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 2 (2023).

⁵³Theresa Schütze, ‘The (Non-)Status of “Duldung”: Non-Deportability in Germany and the Politics of Limitless Temporariness’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 36, no. 2 (2022).

⁵⁴Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 10, 2021.

⁵⁵Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 20, 2021.

In the protracted situation of Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, the prevalent violence, imposed restrictions and heavy dependency on the humanitarian-aid system also hinder the possibility of individuals experiencing structural peace.⁵⁶ One individual spoken with articulated her scepticism about the presence of 'enough and sufficient peace' in Kakuma, citing the crimes regularly committed in the camp which threaten any sense of well-being: 'This is what I call a life of being scared of your life. [...] Peace here in the camp is not much. It is little. Peace is really not much. Peace is not much. It is not enough'.⁵⁷ Similarly, others characterised the situation in Kakuma as embodying 'half peace, not full'⁵⁸ or noted how 'we cannot claim that there is peace 100 percent'.⁵⁹ These inadequate structural circumstances are largely shaped by the politics of encampment in Kenya limiting opportunities and freedoms. Interlocutors also attribute this to deficient justice, denial of rights and widespread corruption impeding law enforcement. These structural restrictions inherent to camp life led many to conclude that there is no peace in Kakuma.⁶⁰

Corresponding with these narratives, interlocutors – and those who self-identified as women in particular – discussed how access to educational and economic opportunities intersected with living a peaceful life. Research on the socio-economic impact which conflict and displacement have on those affected⁶¹ and their insights into life in poverty emphasise the importance of economic stability for perceiving one's daily world as peaceful. Statements such as 'peace is money'⁶² and 'education is fundamental'⁶³ convey this key connection. Those we conversed with linked education with their decision to flee in seeking (more) structural peace elsewhere by gaining access to schools or universities. They viewed safe and free education as enabling them to 'be creative',⁶⁴ 'feel strong'⁶⁵ and 'to improve [their] lives'.⁶⁶ Relatedly, one person described Kakuma as a 'land of opportunities'⁶⁷ because it offers free education from childhood to advanced levels, including scholarship opportunities for which girls are particularly encouraged to apply.

Concerning economic opportunities, one interlocutor from Turkey identified her financial independence prior to flight with a free and peaceful life and thus sought to quickly regain this independence from the German state by seeking employment.⁶⁸ However, in Germany, interlocutors faced challenges accessing jobs due to discrimination based on, among other things, their ethnicity, religion, age, gender identity, and sexual orientation. For instance, the university education and employment experience

⁵⁶E.g. Awa M. Abdi, 'In Limbo: Dependency, Insecurity, and Identity amongst Somali Refugees in Dadaab Camps', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 5, no. 7 (2008); Hanno Brankamp, "'Occupied Enclave": Policing and the underbelly of humanitarian governance in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya', *Political Geography* 71 (2019); Camminga, 'Encamped within a Camp'.

⁵⁷Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 26, 2022.

⁵⁸Dialogue, self-identified as man, Kenya, October 2, 2022.

⁵⁹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 4, 2022.

⁶⁰e.g. dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, November 17, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, November 2, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, 27 September 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 3, 2022.

⁶¹E.g. Prakash Adhikari, 'Conflict-Induced Displacement, Understanding the Causes of Flight', *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013).

⁶²Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 3, 2022.

⁶³Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 13, 2022.

⁶⁴Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, February 10, 2021.

⁶⁵Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, February 27, 2021.

⁶⁶Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, September 23, 2022.

⁶⁷Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, September 26, 2022.

⁶⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, December 23, 2020.

one middle-aged Muslim woman had gained in Egypt were not recognised by the German authorities, leaving her to apply for an apprenticeship in her field. She described receiving such a position at her age as immensely difficult; the interplay of her gender and religious identity, visible in her hijab,⁶⁹ led to one rejection letter after another – despite her German-language proficiency.⁷⁰ The lack of job opportunities in Kakuma partly impacts peaceful conditions on-site, as the absence of employment is likely to contribute to people becoming idle or being forced to engage in criminal activities.⁷¹ As the restrictive camp environment also impedes the pursuit of business opportunities, many described the circumstances there as not or only relatively peaceful.

Peace as collective dimension: fostering community, exchange and support

Conversation partners also explained that they perceive peace to be a social phenomenon deeply embedded in one's interpersonal relations. This resonates with the notion of relational peace,⁷² with interlocutors emphasising the reciprocity seen as inherent to peace – as captured by sayings like '[p]eace within the individual is peace within society'⁷³ or '[o]ne hand alone cannot clap'.⁷⁴ Such framings underscore the value of social collectives for individuals, as enabling feelings of peace to emerge when '[p]eople live in harmony'⁷⁵ and how 'bringing people together, that's a way of creating peace'.⁷⁶ Addressed here were various links between peace and intergenerational/familial relations, religious norms and cultural traditions.

The roles of families and familial care for peace perceptions were frequently mentioned and reveal a particular area of intersectionality. Many we spoke with had witnessed violence against their loved ones during conflict or displacement; some had become separated from or even lost relatives. This reflects not only a complex interplay between such violence and family dynamics; interlocutors also described families as social surroundings in which they felt at peace, characterised by recognition, belonging, trust, joy, well-being, mutual support and care. They mainly addressed their immediate family living nearby. One interlocutor from Burundi succinctly noted 'peace is the family'.⁷⁷ Another person from Zimbabwe explained how: 'Peace that's at home, that whatever you grow in your child's mind is what is being preached outside there. So, if we all have peace in our homes, then the whole country can have peace'.⁷⁸ Familial support can transcend national boundaries, becoming herewith transnational in scope as well.⁷⁹ This quality is particularly brought to the fore in situations of displacement, with family

⁶⁹Note that job applications in Germany still often require a photo of the applicant, typically placed at the top of the CV.

⁷⁰Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 20, 2021.

⁷¹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 13, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 31, 2022.

⁷²See Jarstad et al., 'Three Approaches to Peace', 10–13; Söderström et al., 'Friends, Fellows, and Foes'.

⁷³Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 31, 2022.

⁷⁴Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, March 7, 2021.

⁷⁵Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 8, 2022.

⁷⁶Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, December 21, 2020.

⁷⁷Dialogue, self-identified as man, Kenya, October 28, 2022.

⁷⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 7, 2022.

⁷⁹For literature overviews, see Jordan Timmons and Jodi Dworkin, 'A Literature Review of Family Engagement with African Immigrant and Refugee Families', *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension* 8, no. 2 (2020); Katharina Heilmann, 'Familie und Flucht aus geschlechtersensibler Perspektive: Ein Forschungsüberblick', *Zeitschrift für Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung* 6, no. 1 (2022).

members often being dispersed across different countries – if not continents – due to the experience of conflict and flight. For instance, one interlocutor shared how much peace she finds in receiving support from her family in Iraq transnationally, particularly from her mother, who encourages her to enjoy the freedoms and opportunities in Germany which were unavailable to her as a woman in her country of origin.⁸⁰

Herewith, families are symbolic of relational peace, and conversation partners frequently narrated how they created peaceful moments or spaces with their families even amid war and structural violence. Receiving comfort from older family members through hugs or helping children with their anxiety allowed for peace to exist even as violence rages. For instance, one individual from Syria spoke about her mother and recounted how her comfort and support created peaceful moments during times of war.⁸¹ Similarly, another from Syria explained how violence, bombings and constant worrying affected her and her family, yet they perceived their togetherness and everyday routines, such as conversations during shared meals, as peaceful.⁸² Likewise, a person from Nigeria experiencing gender-based violence as a child was embracing the new chances offered in Germany to raise her own children with education on sexuality, gender identities and equality, peaceful religious beliefs and mutual respect between children and parents. For her, fostering peace in the next generation meant being ‘truthful’ as a parent and enabling children to enjoy and accept themselves.⁸³

Also friendships can grow very tight and become deeply meaningful, akin to family-like social systems, therewith carrying much value for the well-being and coping of individuals after experiencing conflict and displacement – as also reflected on in the literature.⁸⁴ A conversation partner from Syria stressed how he needs to be with his friends as often as possible outside of work, seeking comfort in their company to push away sad and anxious memories from wartime.⁸⁵ For him, being with his friends is synonymous with feeling at peace. Similarly, one interlocutor from South Sudan highlighted how the exchange with friends helps her to change perspective and find peace: ‘I find friends that make me smile and laugh. I discuss about new things other than those that trigger my emotions so much’.⁸⁶ Friendship can also serve as a catalyst for overcoming conflictive relations, as a South Sudanese conversation partner in Kakuma explained. Her friendship with a woman from another ethnic group – both are at arms in their country of origin – has made her understand their shared humanity and how they have much more in common than what keeps them apart. Growing up together in the camp and attending the same school has deepened their bond. They visit each other, stay in each other’s homes overnight and have thus hereby contributed not only to their own peace but also to that of the wider community.⁸⁷

⁸⁰Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, June 18, 2021.

⁸¹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 14, 2022.

⁸²Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, December 23, 2020.

⁸³Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, June 19, 2021.

⁸⁴Rachel Hoare, ‘Friends as Family: Using Composite Psychotherapy Case Material to Explore the Importance of Friendships for Unaccompanied Adolescent Refugees Coping with the Challenges of Resettlement in Ireland’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 35, no. 2 (2022); Graeme Rodgers, ‘Friendship, Distance and Kinship-Talk Amongst Mozambican Refugees in South Africa’, in *The Ways of Friendship: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Amit Desai and Evan Killick (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2010); Emilie L. Mortensen, ‘Being Care-ful Among Friends. The Ambiguities of Friendship in Exile’, *Etnofoor* 31, no. 1 (2019).

⁸⁵Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, September 5, 2022.

⁸⁶Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 11, 2022.

⁸⁷Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 31, 2022.

Beyond families and friends, interlocutors ascribed central importance to their communities as well in invoking notions of peace like the ‘wing beat of a butterfly’.⁸⁸ With this metaphor, the person reflected how learning with and from each other and good spirits help peace flourish in and through the community. A Somali interlocutor in Kakuma stressed the importance of different nationalities living together peacefully: ‘Peace is harmony between different tribes. Like me, I am a Somali Bantu. I can be with a Sudanese. When we meet, then there is peace. I can meet with a Congolese, when we come together, then there is peace. Burundian, when we come together there is peace. Peace is harmony’.⁸⁹ Such a sense of togetherness, appreciation and respect was also discussed by a Sudanese conversation partner who emphasised that ‘people live together, Muslim, Christian, people just living together, and life goes. And then you just feel happy’.⁹⁰ Another one from South Sudan further underscored the value of harmonious everyday neighbourly relations: ‘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’.⁹¹ These reflections on the significance of community harmony emerging among diverse groups reveal how peace perceptions are also shaped by the intersection of different identity categories like nationality or religion.

Social collectives thus serve as a vehicle for individuals to experience peace in their everyday lives. Although this is complicated by the prevailing issues and uncertainties borne in exile, interlocutors noted contributing to it. One interlocutor who had fled Somalia due to the endemic violence there referred to a ‘smooth life’ in the community, with one without precarity being essential for peace: ‘[P]eace is not only absence of war, of conflict or any of that but having a smooth life’. While recognising the manifold risks in the camp and noting ‘I don’t think there is a lot of peace in Kakuma’, she stressed the importance of being ‘able to live peacefully’, have good relations with neighbours and ensuring ‘there is a respect for each other’.⁹²

In line with that, many associated a peaceful life with social acceptance, freedom and religiousness: ‘For salaam – so, for peace – humanity is important’, one person from Syria said.⁹³ Such emphasis on religious values and beliefs aiding mutual recognition, respect and ultimately peace is not least rooted in experiences of violent conflict between religious groups in countries of origin. Another conversation partner from Turkey remarked how her Muslim community and their Christian counterparts avoided contact with each other in daily life due to ‘prejudice against the other religions’. She and her friends as well as colleagues thus decided to visit churches to get to know the Christian faith and its communities: ‘We want there to be a lot of peace everywhere’.⁹⁴ Similarly to how she narrated creating togetherness to experience peace, many interlocutors explained feeling at peace when practicing their religion or enjoying everyday life in their respective faith-based communities. However, a lack of social acceptance vis-à-vis one’s religion can also impact

⁸⁸ Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 2, 2021.

⁸⁹ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 26, 2022.

⁹⁰ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 8, 2022.

⁹¹ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 11, 2022.

⁹² Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 13, 2022.

⁹³ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 14, 2022.

⁹⁴ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, December 23, 2020.

the perception of collective peace existing. One person from Egypt shared how in her understanding of peace and freedom of speech this included wearing her hijab. However, anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in Germany threatened this freedom, causing her to lose a sense of safety to speak freely while engaging with non-Muslims in the country.⁹⁵ These personal encounters underscore the intersection of religious markers and beliefs with discriminatory practices, as deeply influencing one's peace perceptions.

Peace as individual dimension: seeking happiness, hope and healing

'I believe that peace starts within us'⁹⁶ and 'I have peace in me'⁹⁷ – with such expressive statements, interlocutors explained how they found peace to be something they lived, felt and practised. Peace is thus not only about external circumstances, in the sense of structural conditions or social interactions, but also perceptions of the self. This concept of 'inner peace' being related to one's own well-being and emotions is nothing new in the scholarship; studies in Psychology especially have explored this in connection to spirituality and religiosity or integrity and resilience.⁹⁸ Yet, few studies have focused specifically on emotions and feelings vis-à-vis peace in the Social Sciences and Political Science,⁹⁹ or the inner peace of people with lived experiences of conflict and displacement.¹⁰⁰ This dimension is central to our research as many displaced people we spoke with in Kenya and Germany addressed their emotions and ascribed relevance to 'feeling' peace – with some denoting this 'inner peace',¹⁰¹ 'inner balance'¹⁰² or 'peace of mind'.¹⁰³ Accordingly, the categories of body and mind are crucial to well-being here, as connected to one's religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Interlocutors associated inner peace with feelings of contentment, happiness, joy and/or satisfaction in life. This is strongly tied to their dreams of the future, as well as to being able to deal with past and present issues alike. The hope of attaining (more) inner peace was mentioned as a particular motivation for fleeing violent conflict and discrimination in countries of origin. One interlocutor from Zimbabwe narrated the difficulties she had encountered in the past and stressed being in Germany meant 'I feel peace'. In her country of origin, she had 'wanted to look for revenge, [but it] would cause more harm than good. So, I just thought me running away is the only peaceful thing that I can do'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover,

⁹⁵Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 20, 2021.

⁹⁶Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, June 19, 2021.

⁹⁷Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, December 21, 2020.

⁹⁸WHOQOL SRPB Group, 'A Cross-Cultural Study of Spirituality, Religion, and Personal Beliefs as Components of Quality of Life', *Social Science & Medicine* 62, no. 6 (2006); Juan Xi and Matthew T. Lee, 'Inner Peace as a Contribution to Human Flourishing', in *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities*, ed. Matthew T. Lee, et al. (2021).

⁹⁹Katrin Travouillon et al., 'An Emotions Agenda for Peace: Connections beyond Feelings, Power beyond Violence', *Cooperation and Conflict* 59, no. 2 (2024).

¹⁰⁰E.g. Jane E. Lawson, 'What happens after the War? How Refugee Camp Peace Programmes contribute to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Strategies', *New Issues in Refugee Research* No. 245 (2012); Kathrin Maier et al., 'Spiritual Needs, Religious Coping and Mental Wellbeing: A Cross-Sectional Study among Migrants and Refugees in Germany', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 6 (2022).

¹⁰¹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 14, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, 20 August 2022.

¹⁰²Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 2, 2021.

¹⁰³Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, September 22, 2022; dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya October 5, 2022.

¹⁰⁴Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 7, 2022.

inner peace provided some individuals with strength and perseverance during flight; as a person from Syria noted ‘it helped me at that time to manage the way after all, because you always knew, yes, okay at the end of the way it will be better somehow’.¹⁰⁵ These narratives reflect how peace goes beyond the imagining of how conditions should or could be, as related to ideational peace postulated by the varieties of peace framework. Instead, it reveals an encompassing feeling which serves as a vehicle for coping with presenting issues.

While directed at oneself, intersectional ascriptions regarding forms of inner peace were also stressed. Feeling peace is linked to influences from the outside – thus to situational and relational experiences. Interlocutors explained how living in a ‘peaceful country’,¹⁰⁶ as evoking structural connotations, or feeling ‘content with everything that is happening around you’¹⁰⁷ impacted their sense of inner peace. As such, one person from Syria envisioned her peace to be a constantly changing picture varying in its level of completeness depending on the socio-economic and political conditions in the places she lived. Her inner peace was intertwined with overcoming chronic pain resulting from stress, and the happiness and health of her loved ones.¹⁰⁸ One South Sudanese interlocutor similarly highlighted the importance of prioritising oneself as a prerequisite for peace to unfold. She explained: ‘So peace means being at ease, being in good terms or be[ing] with your own self first cause if you know what you want, if you know how to live with other people, then you are peaceful and you won’t disturb you neighbours and you won’t give them hard time’.¹⁰⁹ The focus on peace as something individual was further stressed by a conversation partner from DR Congo: ‘First peace is something that a person gives themselves. I cannot wait until you give me peace’.¹¹⁰ Herewith, she emphasised the individual responsibility one carries for ensuring the well-being of both oneself and of others.

A sense of normalcy in life and the realisation of ‘normal routines’,¹¹¹ – eating, sleeping, drinking, working, dreaming, studying, playing, learning, grocery shopping – were noted to play a vital role for stable peace by those spoken with, in influencing both mental and physical health. Such normalcy not only requires peaceful surroundings but also individuals having the means to pursue associated routines. Interlocutors stressed the intersectional importance of both having and lacking the social, economic and political capital to enjoy peace. They often referred to suffering separation from loved ones, political restrictions, legal constraints and economic deprivations, all of which hinder them from engaging in daily routines they described as ‘normal’. One individual from Syria mused that she could not imagine feeling at peace ‘without those basic daily requirements’.¹¹² Given how widespread and acute such social, legal, political and economic precarities are among displaced people worldwide,¹¹³ actively holding on to the feeling of peace – and therewith

¹⁰⁵ Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 16, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 31, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 7, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 18, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 11, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 3, 2022.

¹¹¹ Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, December 29, 2020.

¹¹² Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, February 10, 2021.

¹¹³ E.g. Abdi, ‘In Limbo’; Naohiko Omata, *The Myth of Self-Reliance. Economic Lives Inside a Liberian Refugee Camp* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2017); Ulrike Krause, *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp. Violence, Gender, and Coping in Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Madhubalan Viswanathan et al., ‘Extreme Exclusion and Relative Deprivation in Subsistence Marketplaces: A Study in a Refugee Settlement in Nakivale, Uganda’, *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 55, no. 1 (2021).

also remaining hopeful and creating normalcy – is key. This is particularly evident in how important feeling like ‘normal people’,¹¹⁴ a ‘normal human’¹¹⁵ or having a ‘normal life’¹¹⁶ was asserted to be for achieving a sense of peace. This was equated with being able to sleep peacefully without stress and interruptions, and one interlocutor from DR Congo recounted here: ‘I sleep without fear and I wake up in a good state. I am safe and secure’.¹¹⁷ In Kenya, however, many emphasised how such an environment is found wanting in the camp despite them having established ‘normal’ routines; instead, they long for places of refuge in the future. One person from DR Congo referred to such a state as ‘peace of mind’, explaining how she is ‘just living a normal life’ in the camp but that she does not ‘feel’ peace. Both her memories of war and the killings as well as the ongoing risks continue to affect her.¹¹⁸ Notions of normalcy and good health, accordingly, seem inextricably linked to experiencing more peace within oneself.

The connection drawn between optimism and mental health corresponds with research debates on coping and resilience.¹¹⁹ Those we conversed with stressed particularly how they needed and thus cultivated inner peace to aid their healing process and help deal with traumas in their past to be able to experience peace both now and in the future. One person from South Sudan described peace as: ‘When I’m free, when my mind is completely free from negative things. When my body is free from harm. Very free from harm. And then when I’m free from some psychological, emotional tortures. I feel I’m peaceful’.¹²⁰ Another who had fled Syria as an unaccompanied minor said she enjoyed ‘a little peace’ because she was ‘coming to terms’ with the past. Her wish for the future was to be able to handle the fact ‘that I grew up as a child without parents’.¹²¹ Here, coming to terms with past experiences is linked to the desire for a healthier and more content future through the attainment of inner peace. Interlocutors highlighted how conversations – especially with people having made similar experiences – on trauma and mental health supported their healing process and increased their sense of peace by alleviating feelings of loneliness.¹²²

Concluding thoughts

Based on experiences of violent conflict, displacement and ongoing adversity in exile, interlocutors’ statements such as ‘[p]eace is not up to me and you. That comes from above’,¹²³ ‘[p]eace is much larger than the individual’¹²⁴ or ‘[p]eace is a process [...] it is not a one-day thing’¹²⁵ illustrate both hope but also powerlessness, doubt and

¹¹⁴Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, December 29, 2020.

¹¹⁵Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, February 10, 2021.

¹¹⁶Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 28, 2021.

¹¹⁷Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 3, 2022.

¹¹⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 5, 2022.

¹¹⁹For literature overviews, see Mary Hutchinson and Pat Dorsett, ‘What Does the Literature Say about Resilience in Refugee People? Implications for Practice’, *Journal of Social Inclusion* 3, no. 2 (2012); Jessica Gladden, ‘The Coping Skills of East African Refugees: A Literature Review’, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2012); Maureen Seguin and Bayard Roberts, ‘Coping Strategies among Conflict-affected Adults in Low- and Middle-income Countries: A Systematic Literature Review’, *Global Public Health* 12, no. 7 (2017).

¹²⁰Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, October 11, 2022.

¹²¹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 20, 2022.

¹²²Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, August 16, 2022.

¹²³Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, March 7, 2021.

¹²⁴Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 31, 2022.

¹²⁵Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Kenya, September 22, 2022.

resignation. While many expressed dreams for not only local peaceful conditions but also ‘peace worldwide’¹²⁶ or ‘peace everywhere’,¹²⁷ others framed this as unrealistic having personally witnessed how insecurities prevail in many parts of the world. ‘There’s just no peace in this world’, one said, referring to political instability as well as religious and gender-based discrimination. She then concluded: ‘So, I got to realise that there’s not much peace’.¹²⁸ Despite and indeed due to these diverse challenges, many expressed their hopes for peace – structurally, collectively and within themselves.

The diverse perspectives shared with us in Kenya and Germany reflect how peace is a complex, sociopolitical and individual phenomenon. All of those we spoke with ascribed great significance to peace – including when they remarked on the absence of peaceful conditions and the manifold challenges they continue to experience in exile. For many, peace is indeed more than a political construct in being the fundamental basis of life. As one interlocutor powerfully shared: ‘Life. Without peace, one simply cannot live. [...] I only want my peace, I want to live in peace with my family. I don’t want money, a house, nothing at all, just peace’.¹²⁹

Conversation partners’ notions of and aspirations to peace, imagining of harmonious social interactions and longing for supportive sociopolitical structures are closely entangled. Dividing out the various meanings they ascribed to peace proved difficult in our research and the writing process regarding this article as their perceptions of structural conditions, social relations and individual feelings are inherently interconnected. This is not least the case because structural conditions influence available possibilities in social networks and contribute also to individual well-being and emotions. Yet, these dimensions reflect distinct scopes to peace across different levels, ones which must be distinguished if we seek to analytically grasp each of them. Navigating the complexities of interlocutors’ narratives and unravelling the intricacies of their peace perceptions help reveal the depth and richness to their multifaceted understandings hereof.

In a time marked by global developments seeing both newly erupting and ongoing violence contribute to displacement and protracted situations, in tandem with increasingly restrictive asylum systems complicating the lives of those displaced, there is a pressing need for more scholarly attention being paid to peace. Instead of primarily focusing on top-down approaches to (restrictive) protection, conflict management and state-centred peacebuilding, the people’s own situated knowledge, lived experiences and diverse approaches should take centre stage. The intersectional analysis of their peace perceptions, as showcased in our article, hence reflects how their challenging life conditions affect them in multiple ways. But also, how they approach and perceive peace beyond these limitations. While the structural, collective and individual dimensions are certainly important, we find a particular need for further research on inner peace and thus how individuals cultivate, feel and use it to deal with experiences both past and present. This also prompts questions about how displaced people’s feelings of (inner) peace are connected to traumatic events, requiring the expertise of psychological studies. Such scholarship will aid deeper insight into how individuals also cope with challenging structural conditions and social relations. It will also help moving beyond binaries of

¹²⁶Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, August 2, 2021.

¹²⁷Dialogue, self-identified as man, Germany, December 21, 2020.

¹²⁸Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, September 7, 2022.

¹²⁹Dialogue, self-identified as woman, Germany, February 27, 2021.

conflict versus peace towards relational, dynamic and sometimes ambiguous ideas hereon – as ultimately paving the way for recognising multifaceted and multiple peace(s).

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