

“Peace starts within the house”

A Case Study of Female Peacebuilders in Local Peace and Security Processes

Challenging Patriarchy in Kisumu County, Kenya



The Women Volunteers for Peace office in Kisumu

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“I feel it is still my duty to bring my community back together so that we can still coexist peacefully. There is this saying:

Umoja ni nguvu.

Oneness is strength.”

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Abstract

This qualitative thesis research empirically explores the role of female peacebuilders in local peace and security processes in Kisumu County, Kenya, through a feminist lens. A thematic analysis of sixteen semi-structured interviews with local peacebuilders, participant observations of peacebuilding activities and small talk with staff members of the host organization produced knowledge about three main themes. It is uncovered how female peacebuilders experience conflict, which shows how they feel insecurities and tensions close to home. Economic hardship, political demonstrations and gender-based violence (GBV) are the three areas where female peacebuilders in Kisumu see insecurities arise. Thereafter, findings outline how female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes, from which it becomes clear that they focus on the areas of economic empowerment, political representation and gender equality. The concept of everyday peacebuilding proves to be relevant to uncover how women deal with daily insecurities in their communities. Besides, reflections of female peacebuilders on their role in local peace and security processes are discussed. Here, the narratives of the informants demonstrate that female peacebuilders still face gendered hierarchical working conditions due to the patriarchal society. Female peacebuilders try to minimise these challenges and create legitimacy for themselves and their peace work by instrumentalizing feminine characteristics and skills, networks of women's organizations and previous successes. Listening to and understanding women's lived experiences in everyday peacebuilding contributes to a much-needed discussion about the complexities of conflict. The documentation of these local efforts does not only contribute to understanding how conflict and peace on the ground feel like but is also relevant to bridge the gap between local, national and international policies on Women Peace and Security.

Keywords: Local Turn in Peacebuilding, Everyday Peacebuilding, Feminism, Gender Norms, Patriarchy, Lived Experiences

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List of abbreviations

GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
IO	International Organization
IR	International Relations
KNAP	Kenya National Action Plan
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WOVOP	Women Volunteers for Peace
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association

1. Introduction

In a small room with yellow walls, furnished with only a table and two chairs, a Kenyan woman sat across from me. I found myself in a social justice centre in Nyalenda slum in Kisumu, where the woman just told me she had cared for a young female who was mistreated by her husband. “Peace starts within the house” (02), she said. This exemplifies the key message that the findings of this thesis research brought. It emphasizes that peace is a personal feeling of security and safety which is experienced on a day-to-day basis. In turn, it shows that peacebuilding efforts on the local level by this informant and other women are focused on creating security in and around homes. These and other revelations are described in this final thesis report, where every step of my research of the role and experiences of female peacebuilders in Kisumu County are presented.

Kisumu County in Kenya proved to be an interesting case for research on this topic. The county experienced periods of ethnic conflict and post-election violence which become visible in for example cattle rustling, conflicts over boundaries in Kibos, Miwani, Muhoroni and Nandi communities (Ombeck et al., 2019), political motivated violence and urban violence in Kisumu city (Kabongah, 2011). Even though most of the border conflicts have toned down and the 2022 general elections did not result in the usual post-election violence, tensions still pose threats to peace in Kisumu County. Previous research shows that women play a significant role in mitigating those threats (Okech, 2022). For example, Gichohi (2016) outlines in her thesis that women in Turkana county in Kenya were the driving force behind local peacebuilding processes. Kilonzo (2021) demonstrates that even though state-led efforts failed to create peace in communities in the North Rift region in Kenya, women-led initiatives were successful. In Kisumu County, women discovered mutual understandings between warring parties and set up effective dialogues for a border conflict where men could not (Kabongah, 2011). In sum, female peacebuilders have been indispensable in local peace and security processes (Angom, 2018) and women’s skills have been instrumental for eradication of fear and reconciliation (Anderlini, 2007). It is thus known that women play an important role in the creation of peace on the local level. However, it is not known how women exactly instrumentalize their skills to build peace or how they experience their role as peacebuilder.

In addition, existing literature by amongst others Awed (2019) and Okech (2022) focuses mainly on the challenges that women in Kenya have to bear in their quest for peace. Their findings present the obstacles that women face because the patriarchal society dictates assigned gender roles, for example women as traditional caretakers of the family and men as peace negotiators. By crossing the line from the private sphere to the public domain of peace and security, female peacebuilders challenge these gender norms (Angom, 2018). Therefore, this thesis aims to uncover the gendered inequalities at play for female peacebuilders, thereby contributing to existing academic scholarship. Especially feminist scholars urge for more attention for the position of women in peacebuilding (Kaufman & Williams, 2015; Ochen, 2017). Feminist theory was helpful in this thesis to reveal marginalities and power hierarchies (Hudson, 2021). In sum, instead of merely locating the challenges that women face in their peace work, it is questioned in this study how these challenges are informed by gender inequalities. Therefore, this study takes on an inclusive feminist perspective to reveal the reflections of female peacebuilders on both their gendered challenges as well as their opportunities and strengths. A gender lens therefore creates an additional layer in my research to peacebuilding efforts.

1.1 Problem statement

While it is known that women in Kenya hold valuable positions when it comes to building peace on the local level (Gichohi, 2016; Kabongah, 2011; Kilonzo, 2021), it remains unclear how local women secure

their day-to-day being in times of insecurity (Roberts, 2012). This knowledge gap also seems to be present in Kenya as little research is done about the exact role of female peacebuilders in local peace and security processes, hence the academic relevance of this thesis. How women execute and experience their newly acquired role as peacebuilder and how they reflect on their contributions in their community is not studied by academia yet. It is thus problematized that the actions of female peacebuilders on the local level are largely undocumented, especially since women form key actors in attaining and achieving sustainable peace (Angom, 2018). This study therefore looks beyond the successes of Kenyan women at the decision-making table during periods of ethnic conflict and instead questions how female peacebuilders experience and reflect on their daily peacebuilding efforts on the local level.

Moreover, it is problematized that common theories of peace and conflict are unable to explain local types of peacebuilding. Traditional peacebuilding is top-down, standardized and technocratic, conducted by formalized international organizations (IOs), political leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or conflict resolution ‘professionals’ (Lederach, 1997), which do not take into account local actors. Conflict theorists understood direct violence for long to be the only type of conflict (Galtung, 1969), which is shortcoming in explaining local insecurities or structural inequalities. Consequently, this research uses alternative perspectives to view peacebuilding, such as the local turn and everyday peacebuilding, and discusses less traditional ways to view conflict.

1.2 Research questions

In this research, I examine women’s everyday peacebuilding in Kisumu County in Kenya. I document the experiences of women in local peace and security processes and their reflections on their newly taken position as peacebuilder. For this, it is necessary to take into account how women experience and identify threats to peace. In sum, this study will answer the following question:

How do female peacebuilders experience, shape and reflect on local peace and security processes in relation to traditional gender norms in Kisumu County, Kenya?

Sub questions guided the research, which are:

1. How do female peacebuilders experience insecurity and threats to peace and how do they think traditional gender norms play a role?
2. How do female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes and how do they transform traditional gender norms?
3. How do female peacebuilders reflect on their role as women in local peace and security processes?

1.3 Societal relevance

This thesis research informs on a larger context of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2000. The WPS agenda emphasized the need for equal participation of women in peace and security decision-making (Basu, 2010; Cohn et al., 2004; Curtis et al., 2022). To spread the WPS agenda, multiple resolutions were adopted. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was the first, which underlines that women should be included in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping and humanitarian reconstruction (UNSC, 2000). These ambitions are integrated into national-specific contexts with use of National Actions Plans (NAPs). For Kenya, the Kenya National Action Plan II (KNAP II) of 2020-2024 has been adopted, which for example recommends to strengthen awareness and implementation of the KNAP II at the local level (Government, 2020). However, critical feminist scholars question the gap that exists between

international, national and local efforts of peacebuilding. It is doubted whether international agreements such as this one can be used by women on the ground as an effective vehicle for their own organizing, mobilization and political action because significant rules and institutional gendered practices are still in place (Cohn, 2008). A distance between local and (inter)national efforts can be assumed. This was underlined by a review at the 15th year anniversary of the UNSCR 1325, which showed weak monitoring of the implementation of the NAPs (UNWOMEN, 2015), thereby confirming the gap between international and national efforts. The KNAP II also aims to locate the implementations of the WPS agenda on the ground (Government, 2020).

As a result, this study finds itself in the field of tensions between local realities and (inter)national policies. This grey area is relevant to study as an understanding of the efforts and experiences local peacebuilders can inform inclusive policymaking. This research will contribute to the provision of information to the KNAP II and, broadly, on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 as it informs on local forms of peacebuilding by women. With more clarity on what conflict and peace on the local level means as well as documentations of the actions that are taken on the ground by female peacebuilders, (inter)national initiatives can develop more relevant programs to assist in the local turn of peacebuilding. An inclusive gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding can be adopted.

Moreover, local initiatives on peacebuilding can use the obtained information from this research to invigorate their mission. By acknowledging the undocumented experiences, activities and reflections of female peacebuilders, this research makes a positive contribution to their efforts. I strived to depict the narratives of female peacebuilders on the local level in Kisumu County as true as possible, in order to do their stories justice.

1.4 Research objectives

This thesis seeks:

- To identify insecurities and threats to peace from the perspective of female peacebuilders on the local level in Kisumu County, Kenya.
- To record activities that female peacebuilders undertake to build peace and security at the local level in Kisumu County Kenya.
- To document the navigation and reflections of female peacebuilders in gendered working conditions in Kisumu County, Kenya.

1.5 Chapter outline

This report begins by presenting the theoretical framework on which the thesis is based. I give an overview of existing literature on different forms of peacebuilding and various understandings of peace and conflict. In addition, feminist theory will be introduced, which provides insight in gendered inequalities and power hierarchies. Chapter 3 sets the scene of the context of Kisumu County and the studied population. Thereafter, Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for this research to be conducted, including ethical considerations and positionality of the researcher. After this, the findings of the research are presented in three chapters, whereby every chapter ends with theoretical reflections on those findings. Chapter 5 deals with the experiences of conflict and insecurities of female peacebuilders, Chapter 6 is concerned with the ways in which female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes and Chapter 7 presents the reflections of female peacebuilders on their peace work. In Chapter 8, the conclusion and discussion can be found, where I summarize the findings and reflect on their broader implications. At the end, a literature list and appendices are included.

2. Theoretical framework

This study finds itself in the interface of the large themes of peace and gender. Therefore, the theoretical framework discusses theory about peacebuilding, both the older state-focused ways of peacebuilding as well as the local turn and everyday peacebuilding. On the other side, feminist theory will be discussed. Most importantly, this section will discover where the realm of peace and gender interrelate and intertwine. The aim of this chapter is to synthesise the main ideas around the theories in order to later be able to discuss the findings with theoretical reflections.

2.1 Peacebuilding

2.1.1 *Traditional peacebuilding*

Traditionally, around the 1990s, peacebuilding was categorized under International Relations (IR) theory and seen as external interference which sought to transform war-shattered countries into liberal market democracies. Their interference was top-down, standardized and technocratic, conducted by formalized international organizations (IOs), political leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or conflict resolution ‘professionals’ (Lederach, 1997). Their attempts at creating peace in conflicting nations was often subjected to Western peace agreements, drafted according to Eurocentric rationalities (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). They, however, underestimated the destabilizing effects of a fast liberalization process in fragile states (Paris, 2004). There is little evidence of democratic practices after liberal peacebuilding, and violence too often returned after peacebuilders left (Roberts, 2012). Hence, this approach to peacebuilding proved to be ineffective to reach its goal of establishing sustainable peace. Failures of these attempts can be attributed to too centralized implementation of peacebuilding and neglect of the local context (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Lederach (1997) saw this shortcoming as well, and pioneered in proposing a holistic approach to peacebuilding. Where mainstream peacebuilding at that time aimed to mobilize actors in the higher regions, he argued that three layers of actors need to work together to establish a successful situation of peace (see: Appendix 1). The first level of peacebuilding actors are highly visible, key political, military and religious leaders. Middle-range leadership, such as political leaders, IOs and NGOs form the second layer of actors that are crucial in effective peacebuilding. Thirdly, local actors form an important layer of peacebuilding actors. They are for instance leaders of local communities, grassroots organizations and members of small NGOs. This last layer of actors is what this research focuses upon.

2.1.2 *Defining peace*

In line with the research questions, it is necessary to lay out the perspectives on how to look at conflict and peace. This will aid me in how to make sense of the current situation in Kisumu County. Johan Galtung’s work on concepts and theories surrounding peace shaped the founding of peace institutions around the world and taught thousands of people in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. His main concepts, such as direct, structural and cultural violence as well as negative and positive peace, form a solid basis to interpret the experiences of female peacebuilders regarding conflict, insecurities and peace.

Direct violence, or overt violence, is intentional, directed at a specific group of people or person and involves hurting or killing people. In contrast, Galtung (1969) designed the term ‘structural violence’ for acts of omission that are unintended or indirect, for example exploitation, marginalization or repression. Structural violence can take place in a gender context as parts of patriarchy can be labelled as such oppressing mechanisms (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Later, Galtung (1990) added the concept of

‘cultural violence’, which is the intellectual justification for direct and structural violence through, but not limited to, nationalism, racism or sexism. From understanding different forms of violence, we turn to defining peace. Galtung (1969) argues that negative peace occurs when direct violence is absent; other forms of violence can still occur under the surface. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) defines negative peace as ‘the absence of violence or fear of violence’. Positive peace, in turn, is understood as to be associated with many other characteristics that are considered desirable, for example better economic outcomes, well-being, inclusiveness and environmental performance (IEP, 2022). Or, as Galtung and Fischer (2013) put it, it includes mutually beneficial cooperation on an equal basis and mutual learning to heal past and prevent future violence. In a situation of positive peace, all three forms of violence are absent (Galtung, 1969). From these definitions, my research treated the question whether female peacebuilders experience Kisumu County to be peaceful. Linking their memoirs to previous literature about positive or negative peace created a better overview of their experiences. Important to add is that it is not an either-or choice, but rather as a scale, where peace and insecurity can exist next to each other.

2.1.3 *Local turn in peacebuilding*

From understanding peace, peacebuilding can be further considered. It has become clear that traditional peacebuilding is often ethnocentric, unable to deal with insecurities on the ground and not solving issues in deeply divided societies (Mac Ginty, 2010). Peacebuilding done ‘from above’ does not automatically result in positive peace at local levels (Hudson, 2021). Consequently, here has been a shift towards a more inclusive framework which sensitizes historical, local and cultural contexts (Clarke, 2017). The field of development has coined the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding and humanitarian aid (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). This means to emphasise local ownership, new modes of partnerships with local actors and cooperation with local counterparts. Local lived experiences in knowledge production about the causes of conflict and possible solutions have become more important (Julian et al., 2019). Therefore, this research sees local lived experiences of female peacebuilders as centre of the study. ‘The local’ is then not seen as a binary opposition of ‘the international’ because that risks producing an asymmetric power relationship. Rather, a critical reading of localization is needed to capture the complex dynamics at play and reflect on existing ideologies, paradigms and assumptions that inform local practices (Roepstorff, 2020). Focus on the local then refers to a means of emancipation by acknowledging voices from below and criticising international peacebuilding agendas for ignoring the local in policy (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

The inclusion of local agencies in peacebuilding processes can be seen as an effective approach to build peace as it is believed to increase access and legitimacy, promote inclusion and participatory approaches and promise sustainable, cost-effective cultural-sensitive solutions (Roepstorff, 2020). The proposition to include actors from all levels by Lederach (1997) was acknowledged in the local turn. As his model is dated, Angom (2018) modified it to a gender-sensitive framework to evaluate the participation of women in the three levels of peacebuilding (see: Appendix 1). She identified women indigenous NGOs, women grassroots organization and women in local political office as local female peacebuilding actors (Angom, 2018; Lederach, 1997). I instrumentalized the updated model to locate the study population in the field and prepare myself on what to expect from local peacebuilding actors.

2.1.4 *Everyday peacebuilding*

As the first-mentioned literature about traditional peacebuilding was unable to explain the narratives of female peacebuilders in local peace and security processes in Kisumu County, I came across the concept of ‘everyday peacebuilding’, which could substantiate what I encountered in the field. Everyday

peacebuilding deepens the local turn in peacebuilding and places emphasis on a more personal and daily approach to peace (Mac Ginty, 2014). Everyday peacebuilding highlights daily practices and mundane interactions that people engage in to minimise violence in their everyday lives (Blomqvist et al., 2021). Through these people-to-people activities and everyday diplomacy, society can move towards conflict transformation (Vaittinen et al., 2021). People mobilise themselves to secure their day-to-day being, which is unfamiliar to most policymakers in the field of peacebuilding (Roberts, 2012). In interpersonal relations and dialogues, everyday peacebuilding scholars uncover tactics, strategies and values of peace in action (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015). Therefore, it is argued that everyday activities are categorized as political acts. However, alternative perspectives would suggest that everyday activities might contribute to peace in a more unintentional and organic fashion. Supporters of this argument argue that not every act is politically motivated and can even be unconsciously be made (Millar, 2020).

Everyday peacebuilding is a space where the marginalized and those who are excluded from formal political discourses negotiate. It becomes a space where power is renegotiated and re-organized by daily engagements of the community (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015). These power relations are gendered. Thus, it is argued that “to understand everyday peace, it is essential to understand how experiences and practices of peace are conditioned by the ways in which gender structures everyday life” (Blomqvist et al., 2021, p. 224). Consequently, theorizing everyday peacebuilding links to feminist peace research, which demonstrates that women practice peace in the mundane space of homes, families and communities, invisible to the public masculinized spaces of conventional politics. Everyday peacebuilding sheds light on these unrecognized types of peacebuilding and underlines the importance of acknowledging women’s practices as central to everyday peace, limited conflict and survival of families and communities (Blomqvist et al., 2021).

In addition, Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) argue that youth should also be included as actors in peacebuilding projects, especially because critical IR literature categorizes youth as actors in international politics. Therefore, besides the gendered nature of conflict and peacebuilding, they present that peacebuilding has a youth-ed dimension. As young women and men negotiate their space in the peace and security domain, there is a constant negotiation and sometimes a transgression of expected norms. Taken together, this thesis threatens dominantly the gendered dimension of everyday peacebuilding, but also takes into account the age of informants to get a complete perspective of the analysis.

2.2 Feminist theory

Feminist theory should be considered in this research, as this not only uses gender as a lens to uncover inequalities, but also pays attention to the effects of power relations during and after conflict (Hudson, 2021). This perspective is rather new because, before the local turn in peacebuilding, ending violence was often prioritized above addressing inequalities and underlying causes. As a result, gender-sensitive topics tended to be marginalized during peace processes and major causes of inequalities remained unattended and unresolved (Pankhurst, 2003). A feminist analysis exposes inequalities, relationships of power, dominance and subordination. When applied to the domain of peace and security, it can uncover the gendered hierarchies of conflict and peace, which often show ignorance towards the efforts of female peacebuilders (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). Therefore, it helps me to understand the structural underlying inequalities that the study population in this research has to deal with as inhabitants of a patriarchal society.

Before addressing the connection between feminist theory and peace further, the foundations of feminist theory ought to be clear. Therefore gender and sex need to be defined, whereby sex is a biological term,

and gender a psychological and cultural one (El-Bushra, 2000a). The masculine gender has been associated with objectivity, reasoning and autonomy while femininity has been related to subjectivity, feeling and dependency (Angom, 2018). In common speech, gender and sex blur together as it is taken for granted that feminine characteristics correspond with the female and male characteristics are embodied by men (El-Bushra, 2000a; Tickner, 2001). This results in an ongoing inequality whereby male is the dominant sex, and female the subordinate. In other words, men are seen as the norm and women are measured against the norm. This dichotomy is present in everyday life where men are represented in the public, political sphere, while women are diminished to the domestic and private parts of society (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). These differences between women and men are also present in conflict, which makes it a gendered event (Bradshaw, 2015). The dichotomy is strengthened, as men are viewed as brave warriors or protectors and women as in need of protection (Tickner, 2001). Even when women carry out combatant roles, they are titled ‘dependents’ or ‘camp followers’, which shows reluctance to acknowledge their contribution (MacKenzie, 2009). Female passivity and vulnerability are extended to the peace process as well, where masculine men are seen to be the heroes and decision-makers while women are for most part excluded from formal peacebuilding processes (Angom, 2018). In line with this, men are seen as securitized, therefore essential in the transition from conflict to peace, while women are de-securitized and de-emphasized in post-conflict policymaking (MacKenzie, 2009).

Feminist theory provides two stands of how women experience peacebuilding. On the one side, Blomqvist et al. (2021) found in their study of everyday peacebuilding by women in Myanmar that women often benefit less from post-war transformations like economic development and political reforms. This can be attributed to the gendered dynamics of peace. Gendered power hierarchies that are present prior to the conflict, can remain to be in place after post-conflict transformations. The concept of ‘gendered peace gaps’ helps to uncover gendered inequalities before and during a period of conflict can spill over into post-conflict situations. In their article about Bosnia-Herzegovina, Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2014) present that gendered peace gaps keep structural constraints for women in place in the long-term construction of the post-conflict order.

On the other side, conflict can function as a window of opportunity for women to gain access to the public realm and exert influence. In that regard, women can experience peacebuilding as a new beginning of societal norms, which might be in their benefit. Women’s participation in post-conflict peace processes creates a form of agency for women, whereby they are able to exercise transformative, critical and creative solutions towards peace (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). For instance, research by Clarke (2017) shows that women took on new social positions that contested patriarchal structures of power in a post-conflict context. Social norms for men and women break down as society fragments under the pressure of conflict (El-Bushra, 2000b), or as Turshen (1998) puts it: “War also destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings” (Turshen, 1998, p. 20). This means that there is a potential for transformation of gender relations during and after conflict. It might result in a gender-just peace, as described by Björkdahl (2012). This can be understood as a positive peace, providing equity, social justice and recognition of women’s needs. This is similar to the positive peace that Galtung (1969) envisions, which includes more than just absence of violence, but wider social and economic justice, human rights, political pluralism and development.

3. Setting the scene

This chapter functions as background information for the research to be embedded in the local context of Kisumu County. It draws a picture of where conflicts are prone to arise in Kisumu County and situates the studied population in this context, aiming to create a totality for the reader.

3.1 Context of Kisumu County

Kisumu County is one of 47 counties in Kenya and situated in the west along Lake Victoria (see: Figure 1). It is bordered by Vihiga and Nandi counties to the north, Kericho county to the east, Homa Bay county to the south and Siaya county to the west. The county is divided into seven sub-counties of Kisumu West, Kisumu East, Kisumu Central, Muhoroni, Nyakach, Nyando and Seme. Communities of Luo, Luhya and Gusii inhabit the county predominantly, while Kikuyu, Somali and Indian groups make up the minority. Conflict issues have occurred as a result of historical injustices, lack of access to resources and conflicting ethnicities. Aside from border conflicts, these tensions become most visible during electioneering periods, when political marginalization, devolution, corruption, police harassment and political patronage drive conflict (Padda, 2015).

Figure 1
Location of Kisumu County



3.1.1 *Post-election violence*

The contested elections on 30 December 2007 resulted in a second term for president Mwai Kibaki in Kenya, after which Kenya went straight into its worst political crisis since independence. Supporters of the opposition party Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and its leader, Raila Odinga, started demonstrations against the theft of the vote. Kisumu was one of the worst affected towns, as it is the heartland of Odinga. Many Luo youngsters took the streets in support of Odinga, in rage after the election results, looting and burning buildings and cars. As a result, the police tried to crack down the protests violently, resulting in 60 confirmed deaths at Nyanza general hospital. The number is likely higher due to the burning of bodies. In the slums of Kisumu, the protests turned into revenge killings targeting ethnic minorities. Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities were violently evicted from the Luo and Luhya-dominated areas of Kisumu. Kofi Annan and a team of other African leaders mediated between Odinga and Kibaki to search for common ground and acceptance of the results, with pressure from the international community (ICG, 2008).

Kenya again approached a difficult time before, during and after the elections on 4 March 2013. When Uhuru Kenyatta was declared as the winner, his closest opponent, Odinga, challenged this victory in court. Although he eventually accepted the ruling of valid elections, Odinga and his supporters still questioned the democratic election's shortcomings. Despite some clashes, the political elite, international community and civil society aimed to reduce the chance of civil war, taking pre-emptive action to prevent violence. In Kisumu, this meant that police presence was scaled up in hotspots. Nevertheless, there were clashes between police and demonstrators, injuring 24 people, including a number of gunshot wounds (ICG, 2013).

On 8 August 2017, the elections were comfortably won by Uhuru Kenyatta. Although widespread conflict was prevented, isolated outbreaks of violence followed allegations of election fraud made by Odinga (ICG, 2023). Under the slogan 'Uhuru must go', supporters of Odinga took the streets in

Kisumu, amongst other counties. The police responded with excessive force: shooting and beating protestors. In the slums in Kisumu, house-to-house operations took place, whereby police officers broke down doors, beat residents, stole money and sexually harassed women. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that police killed at least ten people in Kisumu by 12 August. Hospital staff in Kisumu confirmed that at least 100 people were brought in with serious injuries due to beatings and shootings. Another 92 people did not seek any medical assistance, according to the Kisumu County Disaster Management Centre. According to HRW, police are not held accountable for their actions, even after a history of police brutality during previous elections (HRW, 2017).

Elections on 9 August 2022 were won with 50,49% by William Ruto, former deputy of Kenyatta. The route towards, during and after the vote was relatively peaceful. Even though Odinga made claims towards ballot stuffing and external interference, the concluding elections were called valid by the court. The judgement outlined those elections had followed a transparent campaign under the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), which was a significant achievement for a country with very low public trust in electoral institutions. Another reason for the peaceful elections was the focus of the presidential candidates, who did not base their campaigns on ethnic differences but rather on unemployment, rising cost of living and how to solve these issues. Lastly, the public played a large part in the peaceful electoral cycle, as, despite some tensions on 15 August, no communal violence was reported. This can also be attributed to efforts by civil society who advocated for peaceful elections (ICG, 2022). Concluding, even though Kisumu is prone to politically motivated conflicts, it was largely peaceful in the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023.

3.1.2 *Kisumu-Nandi border conflict*

Ombeck et al. (2019) present that Kisumu County is prone to electoral conflict, followed closely by ethnic conflict. This was found between Luo and Nandi groups, straddling the 103 kilometre borderline of Nandi County and Muhoroni subcounty in Kisumu County. As many female peacebuilders refer back to the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict, it is necessary to provide the reader with some background information on this topic. The border area is known for sugar cane farming, which is the largest economic output that serves the needs of both communities. Due to contestations about the exact location of the boundary between the two counties, there are questions about the ownership of the highly valued sugar factories. On top of this, livestock keeping is another form of livelihood along the border and both ethnic groups breed cows. Intolerant attitudes towards the ethnic other therefore becomes visible in cattle rustling or livestock theft. The Shalom Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (Shalom-SCCRR) monitored six cases of livestock theft, seven cases of injury, three cases of massive forced migration of families and fourteen cases of loss of property in the year 2019 (Abonyo, 2020).

A group of key influential leaders from both Kisumu and Nandi County in cooperation with Shalom-SCCRR have initiated two local peace committees with 40 ethnic leaders from each side. Through mediation and negotiation, the two sides worked towards conflict resolution. Nevertheless, speakers from the affected population also demanded to be heard in the decision-making process (Abonyo, 2020). Particularly grassroots women contributed to the local peace infrastructure in community dialogues where concerns and possible approaches were discussed (UNWOMEN, 2022). Research by Okech (2022) points out that more than half of the households living along the border felt they were involved in the inter-ethnic conflict management. Specifically grassroots women worked more effectively in creating a peaceful community in the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict than men (Okech, 2022).

3.1.3 *Structural insecurities*

Despite the fact that post-election violence was absent during and after the elections of 2022 and the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict is largely solved, Kisumu County remains with underlying structural issues. Overarching systemic drivers of conflict are for example, the culture of impunity, resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), high unemployment, ethnic tensions, socio-economic inequality (ICG, 2013). When these economic, political and cultural issues keep piling up, a small fire can trigger physical violence. More on these structural insecurities and how they are experienced by the population of Kisumu County can be found in the analysis of the narratives of female peacebuilders.

3.2 **Host organization: Women Volunteers for Peace**

I was hosted by a young women-led community organization in Kisumu called WOVOP. It started in 2019 as a student project, whereby university students held a dialogue about peace. Specifically, the founder of the organization initiated student talks at her university in Kisumu, where she brought together students who worried about the state of peace in their school environment. Together, students identified threats that undermined peace in learning institutions, such as strikes and school fires, and how to mitigate potential threats. As demand to join in these dialogues was high, the initiator founded WOVOP to facilitate the gatherings. Several years later, WOVOP has grown to be a well-known organization within civil society in Kisumu and has spread its focus from students to women and communities in conflict. Its aim is to support and promote the role of young women and girls at risk in peacebuilding through advocacy, psychosocial support, security education and peace education. During my visit, the staff was made up of nine young professionals. Moreover, WOVOP maintains a larger network of volunteers all through the Lake Region Economic Bloc in Kenya.

The organization is active in multiple areas of interest, all connecting to peace. Primarily, WOVOP is on the one side engaged in education about peace in the form of Peace Talks in conflict-threatened communities. On demand, WOVOP brings together members of a community to create cohesion, talk about threats to peace and seek context-specific solutions. WOVOP works together with community mobilizers to organize these dialogues in different communities every month. WOVOP organized Peace Talks in Kisumu West, Kisumu East, Nyando, Kisumu Central, rural parts of Nyakach and Seme. I attended a Peace Talk in Nyando subcounty during my fieldwork. On the other side, WOVOP involves professional trainers to educate grassroots women in mediation and negotiation skills. Every year, 60 young women are trained to become mediators to spread transformative peace.

In addition to this, WOVOP runs programs in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Lack of adequate information about SRHR and stigmatization are factors that contribute to 'sex for pads', early pregnancies, girls dropping out of school, and subsequent gender inequality. In a campaign, WOVOP targets young girls in slums around Kisumu County, Bandani, Kibos, Obunga, Manyatta and Nyalenda, for the distribution of menstrual hygiene products and puberty education. Moreover, in Girls Talks, WOVOP holds dialogues with girls in schools to successfully transition to higher levels of education. Lastly, WOVOP hosts a weekly mental health campaign online, whereby mental health experts share their journey and key message to peace of mind. They encourage open discussions on mental healing to break the stigma surrounding mental illness and depression.

To conclude, this empowering organization with expertise in the area of peace, education, gender, SRHR and mental health hosted me during my time in Kisumu. I assisted in their office work, which meant writing proposals, drafting budget and starting a fundraising campaign to raise money for menstrual hygiene products. In return, WOVOP did a wonderful job by planning interviews with female

peacebuilders in their civil society network, making it possible for me to do participant observation and to hold small talk with colleagues.

3.3 Civil society network

WOVOP forms part of a network of civil society in Kisumu County that works on the topics of gender and peace. In order to understand the stories and experiences from the study population, it seems crucial to sketch a picture of the background of civil society of which most female peacebuilders are part. Their close-knit network consists of individuals, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, NGOs, social justice centres and others. Firstly, individuals that are included in this network are for example human rights defenders or community workers who often have a central role in advocating for the improvement of circumstances in slum areas. Secondly, organizations that are part of the network of civil society are for example Winam Grassroots, which is a regional-wide organization that aims to create safe, empowered and self-sustaining grassroots communities, or the YWCA which aims to ameliorate the living standards of women and girls in Kisumu County. On a smaller scale, Slum Women Foundation aids young women and adolescent girls who have gone through gender-based violence. The list of organizations in civil society in Kisumu County is endless and cannot be listed here in its entirety, as much as they deserve to be named. Lastly, social justice centres can be found in numerous places in the slums in for example Nyalenda, Manyatta or Nyando subcounty. In these centres, social workers assist the community with legal advice, but they have expanded their mandate to include providing menstrual products or giving guest lectures at schools. Some even include an orphanage or run a safe shelter for women who face domestic violence.

As Padda (2015) argues, civil society is extremely valuable to maintain peace because violent conflicts will reoccur if peace efforts do not continue. Therefore, the above named civil society network active in the topics of peace and gender is of high importance for peace in Kisumu County. From this network, WOVOP has aided me in selecting a sample study population whom I have conducted semi-structured interviews. More can be read about this in Chapter 4: Methodology.

4. Methodology

4.1 Qualitative research design

This study followed a qualitative research design, which is useful to describe experiences and reflections of women involved in local peace and security processes. In contrast to a quantitative study design, it is not about generalizing patterns nor finding one ‘truth’ but instead interpret the field by investigation of narratives and observations. Qualitative research excels in obtaining in-depth information from a real world perspective (Bernard, 2011). My aim was to produce contextual, real-world knowledge about the role and social structures of everyday peacebuilding by women in relation to gender norms. Triangulation was used to enhance reliability and validity of the data, which means to collect data via multiple methods, thereby crosschecking the sources. In my case, it means to cross-check observational data with information from interviews. This is useful as reliance on one method can bias the researcher’s picture of the investigated subject. It is argued that “triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour, by studying it from more than one standpoint, and/or using a variety of methods” (Burns, 2000, p. 419). The methods applied were small talk, participant observation and, most prominently, semi-structured interviews. Despite the effort to enhance reliability and validity by triangulation, qualitative research methods remain dependent on the interpretation by the researcher. This means that sufficient reflexivity was required.

4.2 Study population and sampling

This research uses the term ‘informants’ because “respondents respond to survey questions, subjects are the subject of some experiment, and informants... well, informants tell you what they think you need to know about their culture” (Bernard, 2011, p. 196). The study population can broadly be described as young peacebuilders, human rights advocates, peace ambassadors and champions for gender equality¹ below the age of 30 in civil society of Kisumu County. Even though focus was put on young female peacebuilders at the local level in Kisumu County, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with older and male informants and informants from the national level due to sampling by the host organization and chain referral. The selected study population proved to be relevant to help answer the research questions of this thesis as the informants experience the dynamics of peacebuilding on the local level themselves. Moreover, they provided insights in how assigned gender roles are changing in their society as they are often the ones challenging the boundaries of these gender norms.

Nonprobability sampling was used to select informants, which is appropriate for in-depth studies on sensitive topics and when collecting data from cultural experts. The host organization, WOVOP, was helpful in sampling informants, consulting their network of peacebuilders. The nonprobability sampling methods that were used in this study were purposive sampling on specific characteristics and chain referral (Bernard, 2011). The number of informants was not set before-hand, but was decided on by saturation, which is the moment that information gets repeated after time (Bernard, 2011). Even though new details were added by new informants, the broad narratives were repeated after approximately eight interviews. Aside from this, data collection ended as I had to leave the field due to family circumstances.

4.3 Access to the field

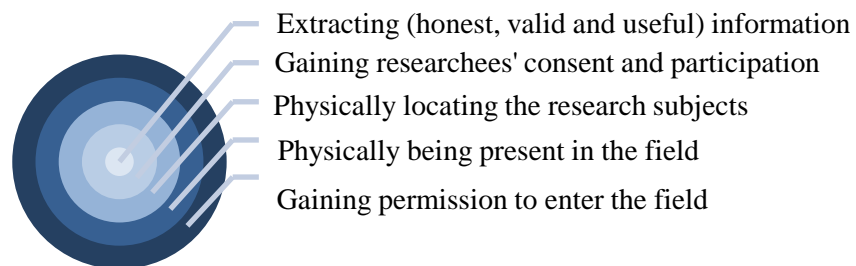
To gain access to the field, I used the five concentric levels of access (see: Figure 2), proposed by Yacob-Haliso (2018). The process of access is multi-layered and progressive, meaning that one can only enter

¹ These titles are often used by the female peacebuilders themselves.

the inner circle by passing through the outer layers first. Initially, it was necessary to gain official permission to enter the field, which meant purchasing a visa and receiving permission from the university to travel. The second step was to appear physically in the field, for which I booked a return flight from Amsterdam to Kisumu. Thirdly, I was hosted by an organization called WOVOP, a young women-led organization in Kisumu County. Fourth, I asked all informants for informed consent before semi-structured interviews took place (see: Appendix 2). The last challenge in the layers of access was to extract honest, valid and useful information. This takes considerable effort and the researcher can never be completely sure about the quality of the data obtained in the field as objectivity is never reached in qualitative research (Yacob-Haliso, 2018). I tried to gather authentic information by gaining trust through an open attitude and respect for the stories of the informants.

Figure 2

Five concentric levels of access to research participants. Source: Yacob-Haliso (2018).



4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 *Small talk*

The first method that was applied in this research was small talk, characterized by a total lack of structure and control, as it consists of small conversations during the day (Bernard, 2011). It established bonds and fieldwork relations between me and for example my colleagues at WOVOP. These relationships allowed me to ask sensitive questions about the context of conflict or underlying tensions in society. It made it possible for me to unravel cultural norms and habits as well as local ways of interaction, according to what Driessen and Jansen (2013) argue. I jotted notes after small talk and structured these into full fieldnotes.

4.4.2 *Participant observation at local peacebuilding activities*

Data was also collected via participant observation, which involves getting acquainted with the study population in order to understand them better. It allows the researcher to record everyday activities and enables the researcher to get a sense of the physical environment and interactions between people. Traditional observation by cultural anthropologists involves deception and impression management, which comes with ethical considerations, as the observed population does not know they are being studied (Bernard, 2011). I minimized the ethical downside of observations because my field of observation was demarcated by peacebuilding activities where I informed the organizers of my presence and purpose. As intern at WOVOP, I observed the planning and management of peacebuilding activities during office days. More specifically, I got the chance to do participant observation at a Peace Talk event organized by WOVOP in Nyando subcounty, known for land-related conflict, where the community was brought together to hold a dialogue about challenges to peace in their region and roadmaps towards maintaining peace.

4.4.3 *Semi-structured interviewing*

The third method applied in this research was semi-structured interviewing, which provides insights and in-depth understanding of the informant's perceptions, motivations and social structures. In total, I held sixteen semi-structured interviews, of which fourteen took place in the field. I aimed to interview women below the age of 30, but also I held some interviews with older people and one male because sampling was done by WOVOP and chain referral. Nevertheless, these interviews provided additional insights and answers to the research questions, which is why I used them as data. All informants are founders, leaders or active members of one or multiple civil society organizations, social justice centres or community-based organizations. Two of them work in organizations operating on the national level, five work Kisumu County-wide, two primarily work in Nyando subcounty and five focus on the informal settlements of Nyalenda, Manyatta, Obonga and Nyamasaria in Kisumu city. The interviews lasted about one hour and followed an interview guide of topics (see: Appendix 2) where questions were skipped or added depending on the conversation flow (Bernard, 2011). After I left the field, the political situation and related peacebuilding processes changed due to political protests, which encouraged me to hold two additional semi-structured interviews with a male and female peacebuilder, both below 30 years of age.

All interviews could be conducted in English, which is one of the official languages in Kenya. Naturally, open questions were asked to give space to the informant to answer with his or her own words. In addition, follow-up questions were asked and probing was used to encourage the informant to talk more, which is, according to Bernard (2011) the key to a successful interview. Every informant gave permission to record the interview. Informants were compensated for their time by gifting a box of Dutch cookies (stroopwafels), instead of financial means, as this brings ethical concerns such as undue inducement, exploitation and biased enrolment (Resnik, 2015).

4.5 Data analysis

The collected data consisted of full fieldnotes of small talk, participant observations and semi-structured interviews. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were transcribed via the method of intelligent verbatim, which adjusts literal sayings to a readable text. All data was stored on the online drive following security standards of Wageningen University and Research. After the data collection in the field, the interview transcripts and full fieldnotes were analysed via a thematic data analysis, which offers a useful approach to analyse qualitative data as it enables the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within the data (Bernard, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2006) present the six phases of a thematic data analysis. Important to note is that a thematic data analysis is an iterative process, with constant moving back and forth between the data, the codes and the analysis. Therefore, writing becomes an integral part of the analysis itself, according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

Firstly, I familiarized myself with the data, which included transcribing, reading and jotting initial ideas. This process started in the field, where most interviews were transcribed the same day that the interview took place and headlines of the interview were noted down. Secondly, I deducted interesting features of the data, creating data-driven codes manually with a highlighter. During this process, I kept the research questions in mind, therefore creating theory-driven codes as well. Thirdly, when all data was coded, I arranged them into potential themes, considering how different codes may combine into an overarching theme. Next, the themes were checked and reviewed, meaning I read all the coded extracts for each theme, considering whether they appear in a coherent pattern. After that, themes were defined and named, identifying the essence of what each theme is about. For each theme, an informed and detailed analysis was written. Lastly, the report was produced, creating the final analysis of the extracts, producing three concise, coherent and logical findings chapters, accounting for the narratives told by

the data. I selected vivid and compelling quotes from the transcripts and embedded those in text to place the words of the informants at the centre of the report in order to do them justice. Moreover, I aimed to bring their stories to life.

4.6 Six ethical guidelines for research in post-conflict environments

Throughout the whole research process, I considered the six ethical guidelines for research in post-conflict environments, presented by Hilhorst et al. (2016). Firstly, I made sure to respect the informants, their culture and the environment. As informants are people with their own norms, values and understandings of the world, it is for the researcher to respect this and engage in open dialogue (Hilhorst et al., 2016). In line with what Swartz (2011) calls ‘going deep’ in feminist and emancipatory research, I aimed to consider their perspectives seriously by taking the time to listen to their experiences and represent the informants respectfully in analysing and writing. In addition, Swartz (2011) argues that ‘giving back’ in a reciprocal relationship with the informants is important. To ensure that I ‘gave back’, I carried out internship duties of proposal writing and fundraising for WOVOP with care and enthusiasm. Moreover, WOVOP wished for me to publish a short version of this thesis report on their website, by which I literally ‘give back’ the knowledge I obtained. Secondly, security is important in all stages of research and should be considered especially when research about sensitive topics is being carried out in difficult environments (Peter & Strazzari, 2017). To prepare for and ensure this, I did a context analysis, followed by a risk assessment and risk mitigation strategies. Thirdly, I took great care to avoid doing harm to the position and reputation of the host organization. I made sure to exchange mutual expectations before entering the field and did my best to create a mutual beneficial relationship during my stay. Fourth, I abided by the code of conduct of the Wageningen University and Research, which follows the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, which meant that I was guided by the principles of honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility (KNAW, 2018), by always being open and honest about my position and purpose. Moreover, I kept my promises of confidentiality and anonymity. For those informants who wished to be acknowledged, I included their names in the acknowledgements section. Fifth, I acted responsibly in the storage and dissemination of research findings. Informants were aware of the recordings and informed about the mode of dissemination of the final thesis. They could indicate to receive the final report via email. Lastly, Hilhorst et al. (2016) argue that the researcher must be aware of the dynamics of being part of the research situation. This means that the researcher may influence the researched environment by their presence as a broker. Therefore, I consider my positionality while doing fieldwork in Kenya below.

4.7 Positionality

Ethnographers are never neutral as they are part of the research process. Collecting information, building a relationship with the informants and interpreting the data is all subjected to the positionality of the researcher (Lønsmann, 2016). Within my positionality I considered the topic choice, theory construction, methodological disclosure, development of the data and writing a polyphonic text, as suggested by Chiseri-Strater (1996). First, I acknowledge that the initial drafting of the research plan was subjected to my interests in Africa, feminism and peacebuilding. Secondly, when I started the data collection, it was paired with initial prejudices, for example, I thought that peacebuilding was mainly focused on mediation between large groups of people in armed conflict. During data collection, my bias was shifted as I learned that local peace and security processes happen very close to home on a domestic or community level between individuals or small groups. In addition, data collection was coloured by my positionality as asking follow-up questions was dependent on my interest in what the informant shared, the connection I felt to the informant and time management. For instance, when an informant

was rushed, I tended to ask short, to the point questions, but when an informant enjoyed telling stories, I was prepared to ask follow-up questions about side topics as well. Furthermore, data analysis was also reliant on my interpretations, for instance, on how memorable the interview was. Lastly, the process of writing was also dependent on for example, advice from my supervisor as well as choices I made regarding the built-up of chapters. Instead of trying to minimise the researcher's positionality throughout the research processes, ethnographic research stimulates to acknowledge it and present it as strength.

As part of their linguistic analysis of positionality, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) present three levels of identity: macro-level demographics, local culturally-specific positions and interactionally specific stances. The first level of macro identity refers to fixed categories as age, gender and social class. For me, this refers to my position as a young, female, white, Dutch, university-schooled student. In the field, I placed emphasis on my identity aspects of being a young female, to find common ground and gain trust from the informants to make them feel at ease. For instance, before the interview, I would ask informants about their well-being or how their weekend was. One time, it appeared that me and an informant went to the same restaurant and dance party over the weekend. This coincidence created a bond between me and the informant, resulting in a smooth and open conversation.

Secondly, local culturally-specific positions are fluid and refer to, for example, my position at WOVOP, while at the same time being a student-researcher. I would always be straight-forward about my affiliation with WOVOP. As the organization is well-known and has a good reputation in civil society in Kisumu, this resulted frequently in positive reactions from informants. I noticed my affiliation with WOVOP created trust in my capacities and performance. More than once, an informant offered to come to the WOVOP office for the interview, combining it with a visit to the staff. This showed the reputation of the organization and the willingness of informants to cooperate with WOVOP.

Lastly, my positionality was influenced by the temporary roles informed by interactions and relationships in the field. This means that every time the researcher meets a new informant, the process of negotiating positionality starts anew (Lønsmann, 2016). As an outsider to the Kenyan culture as a Dutch student, I aimed to create collaborative partnerships with local informants, as advised by Jenkins (2018). My affiliation with WOVOP certainly helped in this process. It was successful in the sense that I could establish a trusty relationship with staff members from WOVOP as well as prominent civil society members in their network.

5. Conflict and insecurities in Kisumu County

Before examining the role and experiences of women in peacebuilding, I deem it to be necessary to investigate the type of conflict that is currently present in Kisumu County. Starting at where and how insecurities are located in society will provide a basis upon which peacebuilding processes are carried out. Therefore, this chapter will dive into if and how local peacebuilders experience insecurities and threats to peace in Kisumu County based on their own perspective. The first section will present general experiences of (threats to) peace in Kisumu County. Secondly, it is shown that female peacebuilders identify tensions on the ground. They outline that economic hardship forms a basis for conflict due to financial instability, food insecurity or land issues. After that, political violence is addressed, speaking about both the peaceful elections as well as the protests that erupted after I left the field. Thereafter, a section is dedicated to gender-based violence (GBV), arguing that patriarchy enforces gender inequality and gender-based conflict. Lastly, the findings will be reflected upon with relevant theory and literature.

5.1 Peace?

I asked the informants how they would describe the current state of peace in Kisumu County. On the one side, some informants stressed that Kisumu County can be categorized as peaceful as there was no physical violence at the time of the interviews. This could be explained with different arguments by the informants and my observations. For instance, the rural areas along the border between Kisumu and Nandi County were largely peaceful after having experienced physical conflict. One informant voiced what others also said, namely, “there were huge fights in those areas between Luo’s who have cows and Nandi’s who also have cows” (07). Informants also stressed that these conflicts are not physically present anymore, due to mediation by, amongst others, female peacebuilders. “There are some areas that are peaceful because we’ve not heard anything about border conflicts” (06).

In addition, one informant argued that Kisumu County can be categorized as peaceful because people are too busy to fight: “they don’t have the strength to complain, underlying it is just there, but they don’t have the energy because they are struggling. You know, when you’re hungry, you’re not going to demonstrate, you’re going to look for food, you’re not going to complain” (04). Another argument to categorize Kisumu as peaceful is that the general elections on the 9th of August 2022 were the most peaceful compared to the previous years. One informant said “We can say, this time, it was peaceful. There was a fight here and there, but it was peaceful. Other years, it was really bad. If you look at the year of 2008, it was terrible, also the year 2013 was a struggle. This time, it was solved very easy” (09). More informants named that they were pleased with the lack of physical violence during the elections of 2022.

On the other side, the majority of the informants answered that Kisumu County is not peaceful due to underlying tensions. Even though the county may look peaceful from the outside, according to a young peacebuilder, “people are like at the break of losing it” (06). “Kisumu is not peaceful. We are pretending that it is, but it is not” (02), said the head of a social justice centre in Nyalenda. “It’s a balloon that has blown to full capacity that just waits for something to pinch it and its bursting” (13). “For now, we are waiting for a trigger and then it burns, it will easily go violent. The young people are easy to cause any violence because of a lot of underneath issues, root causes that have not been addressed” (14). These unaddressed root causes of tensions can be found under economic hardship, political pressure and gendered issues.

5.2 Economic hardship

One of the situational tensions is economic hardship. Multiple informants stressed that the economic situation, of for example economic instability, food insecurity or land issues, can trigger overt violence. In short: the lack of economic stability leads to a lack of peace. Even though informants stressed the great influence of economic instability to breed conflict, economic issues are not to be seen as separate from contextual problems as they are linked to political tensions and gender-based conflict as well. Moreover, gender plays an important role in how economic tensions are described by informants. Gender inequality can lead to economic inequality and vice versa. Moreover, consequences from economic hardship are gendered in the sense that women experience different economic issues than men.

First, financial insecurity is strengthened by unemployment. “If the unemployment levels are rising, the security is at risk” (05) said a staff member of the gender sector department of Kisumu County. Unemployment is especially high amongst youth, but also adults do not always have a job. The lack of money in the household is worsened by rising prices due to inflation. “We do not have a stable economy because most prices of many products that we use daily are too high for citizens” (12). As a result of decreasing purchasing power, food insecurity and tensions on the domestic level arise. More than half of the informants stressed that they see conflicts in the household arising in their communities due to economic issues. “You find people fighting a lot, even within families, their homes, because there is no money for food” (06). “We are having tough economic times. So, you will find that, back in the village, especially in our area [Nyando subcounty], I cannot say there is peace. The man is working hard to the point, not on payroll, and the wife is sitting at home caring for the babies. You know this woman must eat and the children must go to school. So, most of the time, even the cases that we receive, there is intimate partner violence, but if you go deep, you will find that they fight for food” (11). Not only does decreasing purchasing power cause physical hunger, but people also have a hard time to cope with the financial pressures mentally. “When your mind is not stable, when I am not sure about tomorrow because I cannot put food on the table, I will not have peace” (12).

Another result of economic difficulties, specifically of decreasing purchasing power, is mugging and robbing, which have become prominent issues in the communities. “Everyday, everyday there is mugging, there is robbery, so we cannot say that there is peace now” (02). This increases general insecurity on the streets, even to the extent that criminality may rise. “Crime rates have increased due to the high cost of living” (06). Specifically young people do not see other ways to provide. “Their daily needs, when that is lacking, people tend to be very aggressive, they are not peaceful, and the young people now get into these groups that are not legal because they are trying to come up with ways on how to survive” (12). Economic hardship in Kenya creates especially difficult financial situations for women. Mugging and robbing is targeted against women. “When we have insecurity in Kisumu, the most affected are women because they are the vulnerable” (02). As a result, women who own small businesses have a more difficult time to pursue their jobs fulltime. “A woman is supposed to be home by seven, so if you live past that time, you want to be safe” (03) said a peacebuilder who patrols nights in Nyalenda. The shorter working days due to the fact they have to stick to hours of daylight decrease the daily income of women. “It means they have to leave those markets to reach their home safely, which means they’re coming home with their goods without money because of issues of insecurity” (02).

Informants describe how it is difficult for women to receive their own income, therefore creating dependency on their husbands. “Then my husband doesn’t want me to go and work because he was saying: ‘you’re beautiful, the other men will see you and grab you from me’” (03). Even if women have

the chance to generate income by themselves, it may be difficult for them to benefit from it. One informant sketches an example: “Even if the wife goes to work and the man remains at home, there will be economic violence. The man wants your money: ‘give me the salary’. So even when the woman is the breadwinner, she will give up her money” (06). This challenges peace on the domestic level as tensions between wife and husband may arise over time.

On the other side, recently, there are more single women households to be found throughout Kenya, in Kisumu County as well. Some of these single women households are created by choice, by women who wish to be independent. With this, they are challenging patriarchal norms of dependency and a traditional family set-up. However, these households are also created unintentionally, when young women are the victim of rape or sell sex due to economic hardship. One informant experienced that professional aid is sometimes only provided in return for sex. “Those people who wanted to help me, wanted sex in return” (03). When no other opportunities arise, women might take this chance. As a result, the number of single women households rises, where women might face financial issues and food insecurity. In addition, they might not be able to finance health care. “Women in the slum areas cannot take care of themselves while living financially, because we have women who give birth, they don’t have the financial ability to take care of childbirth issues, like fistula” (03).

In addition, single women households are also formed when the husband passes. However, it might be difficult for the widow to inherit the house due to the patriarchal system. “It is based on our traditional system of patriarchy. Women cannot inherit land because the traditional practices in the traditional society do not allow that” (05). At this point, land conflicts might arise whereby multiple claims are placed on a piece of land. “You will find that the in-laws know the weaknesses of widows. They will start interfering with you and start pushing you slowly by slowly to see how weak you are. The next thing they will throw you out of that place” (02) said an informant who runs a safe shelter for victims of these issues. Women are treated unequally in these cases and receive little legal assistance from local administrators. “In the issues of land, we have no peace, no peace, because of the local administration. The chiefs and the assistant chiefs should help us in handling these cases, but at time we find that they are being corrupted” (11), says one informant from a social justice centre. There are even cases where “they can own the land but now accessing and using it becomes a problem” (06) as the family in-law or the husband, when still alive, might withhold her access from the land. This denies her access to income generating farmland, in turn creating food insecurity. In short, land issues might erupt into conflict on the domestic or even community-level if not mediated in the right way by for example legal assistance.

Lastly, one informant stressed that economic hardship of small traders is increased by the renewal and regeneration of Kisumu city which has been implemented in the last two years to clear up the image of the city. During the renewal and regeneration of the city, small traders, for example street vendors, are removed from the scene, chased away by local law enforcement. As the majority of the population, around 70% of the people in Kisumu city, is employed in the informal sector, many people are affected. One informant from a county-wide organization stresses that “the regeneration of the city creates victims and suffering because people are no longer able to access their business places [...] It puts pain and a lot of challenges, especially to the vulnerable population” (10), for example people who work in the informal sector. As women make up a large part of the informal sector, they are disproportionately affected when they are displaced from informal marketplaces. As a result, many people feel disadvantaged and dissatisfied, which can result in conflict. “If people are thrown out, that is a big ground for conflict” (10).

5.3 Violent political demonstrations

Female peacebuilders said that they have experienced political tensions in Kisumu County. Informants describe that these tensions are not new. Everyone I spoke to had experienced the post-election violence of 2008 and 2013. “Other years, it was really bad. If you look at the year of 2008, it was terrible, also the year 2013, it was a struggle” (09). One informant described post-election violence using a metaphor. “The best political disruption of peace would be an election of Kenya. [...] If there are lions, the lion that has won is happy because it has food. The one that loses can run away, or it can come back and try to fight for its food” (09). Informants say that the leader of the opposition, Odinga, has frequently opted for the last option, and has accused the winning party of unfairly taking the win. “There is the accusation of the stolen vote” (09). This has resulted in different forms of conflict and violence, as peaceful demonstrations were shut down with police brutality, and revenge on supporters of the other party resulted in killings and forceful evictions. “In each and every election period, that place [Kondele] is normally worse. People fight and people are being killed” (10).

During the time of the fieldwork, in February 2023, informants said that the last elections of 2022 were surprisingly peaceful compared to previous years. Female peacebuilders stressed they did everything they could to maintain peace before, during and after the elections of 2022, due to which no large eruptions of violence took place. Nevertheless, “we still have a divided community. There's still a huge division. But at least on the day of elections, there was peace” (04), according to an informant from Manyatta. This shows that there are underlying tensions to be felt within the communities. “So, we don't have the national violence, but people have anger, they have a need for revenge” (13). This anger as well as feelings of injustice and unfairness are rooted deeply in people's minds. One informant explained that political preference is something that people are brought up with. The informant explained that a child from the Luo community will hear throughout the upbringing that Ruto is evil, after which “it will grow, grow, grow, grow and now his generation will also do the same thing. So sometimes you are hating a person not even knowing why. But it is because of your environment” (04). The hatred is found everywhere, “when you get into the marketplace during politics [elections], you will hear the kind of what women talk about: a lot of negativity out there against some of these leaders” (10). This anger, hatred and political dissatisfaction are the key ingredients for a conflict to erupt.

After I left the field in March 2023, tensions erupted into physical demonstrations including violent conflict between the protestors and the police. Two additional online interviews with local peacebuilders informed the findings, enabling me to write this section. The informants told me that peaceful demonstrations started in March 2023 as a result of the high cost of living. Even though the president had promised that the cost of living, for example the price of fuel and cooking oil, would be reduced, no change was detected. “The president was fooling around. We waited from September, October, November and December, January, February, but nothing was happening. [...] Everything was now increasing because even the tax rate increased. So, the burden was too much for the citizens” (15). The opposition leader, Odinga, heard the dissatisfaction from the public and called for peaceful demonstrations.

After Odinga had called for peaceful demonstrations, the Luo community in Kisumu answered directly. “Protestors gathered in Kondele, they were marching towards the statehouse of Kisumu County, going to the business office and the County Commissioners Office to report their grievances” (15). However, when peaceful protestors took the streets, “the police officers, they have the mandate to keep law, peace and order and to protect the citizens” (15). The contrary happened as clashes between peaceful demonstrators and police officers occurred, which resulted in physical violence between the two parties.

Police officers used rubber bullets, while citizens used stones. “Six people were injured during the protest by police officers, one was killed. Then there is the other day, the third day, one police officer was stoned by the protestor. [...] There is a student, a Maseno [university] student who was shot dead by a police officer” (15).

All through March 2023, protestors took the streets on Mondays and Thursday, facing police blockades and physical violence. As a result, the whole of Kisumu County was affected. “The business went to standstill, whereby everybody was forced to go back. The market was closed, and the protestors were entering the market and trying to do free shopping whereby they want to take the goods” (15). Businesses, schools, shops and street vendors were not safe on the day of protests, consequently shutting down all educational and economic activities in Kisumu. Due to the fact that Kisumu is largely dependent on imported goods from other counties, for example Kisii or Migori, food insecurity was increased. “This one [import] cannot continue because the transportation sector was distracted because they could not bring the commodities. They do not have their daily business as usual. Travels are postponing their activities because it was not accessible” (15). This shows that the consequences of the protests had a large impact on the daily schedule of people in Kisumu. The political protests had influence on economic activities, transportation, education and food security and they increased insecurity on the streets in general.

5.4 Gender-based violence

Many informants stressed that conflicts occur on a structural basis on the domestic level: within households or between individuals and are created by gender-inequality in Kisumu County. Gender-based issues are not to be seen as all separate issues, as they are intertwined and linked to each other, for example, “why is GBV cases on the rise, it’s because these communities marry their relatives, they do not want to shame their own family trees” (01).

GBV can be defined, from the definitions that the informants proposed, as violence that occurs with no other reason than your gender. “There are sometimes that women get themselves in environments where they are facing violence just because they are women” (13). Important to note is that ‘gender’ in GBV applies to both the male and female gender. However, from the interviews, I can conclude that most of these gender-based issues affect women disproportionately. Women are often the victim of GBV, intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies. “Peace with regards to women and gender, I’ll talk about no peace because women and girls continue to face GBV, both physical violence, verbal violence and cyber bullying, which is very rampant” (13). Informants argue that GBV is the central issue that makes women vulnerable, “when you’re vulnerable when it comes to access to sanitary towels, you can get sexually violated to get that sanitary towel” (06), also in line with what I analysed regarding economic insecurity. Another informant told me a similar story. “You can go somewhere, then we have these older men. They see you as a sexual object. So, you find out that if you refuse to sleep with one of them, the [job] contract is being terminated or you’re being threatened” (11). Nevertheless, the victim role should not be generalized to the female sex only, as some informants also stressed that women can take the role of the perpetrator, while men are being abused.

I analysed from the interviews and small talk that patriarchy might be one of the reasons that conflict may arise. From the experiences of the informants, cultural traditions of patriarchy might infringe the rights of women. The patriarchal system causes an inequality between genders, whereby this gender bias leads to GBV. A lot of examples of GBV were proposed by the informants: “there is a lot of GBV in terms of physical violence, intimate partner violence and also sexual violence in my community” (13).

One form of GBV can happen specifically between wife and husband. As explained by the informants, intimate partner violence includes psychological or physical violence. One informant spoke from experience: “rape in marriage is when my spouse tries to force me into sex when I don’t want it or without my consent” (03). I conclude from the interviews that intimate partner violence is, as GBV, strengthened due to the patriarchal system, whereby the husband is seen as powerful and the wife as subordinate. Moreover, these issues have become more frequent due to isolation during COVID19, “when a husband, wife children are at home, getting conflicts might be too much. When we are together most of the time conflicting issues might arise most of the time” (08).

Not only is peace on the household level threatened by abuse between wife and husband, more than one informant highlighted that children are also the victim of incest. “Conflict is not only for women, married women, but adolescent young girls are facing abuse at the household level, at the community. It's insecurity all over” (05). Cases of incest are both to be found between parents or grandparents and children, as well as within forced marriages. However, the latter was only named once, as the number of forced marriages is decreasing in Kisumu County. Nevertheless, the number of cases of incest is remarkable, as many informants put this topic on the table. “The rights of young girls are being violated and incest in this area is very high. Many, many fathers sleep with them. They are all kids, very young, five years old maybe, and then their grandfathers and their grandchildren” (11). Another informant said: “there's also rape for a girl child. You find girls as young as nine years old. They're not even safe with their fathers. Insecurity is still high” (03).

Consequently, the number of early pregnancies is rising. “There was an issue of early pregnancies. Especially when young girls get pregnant, you will find that either the parents tend to send them away, not supporting them or you will find that immediately a girl gets pregnant at that age, the parents will leave the girl and not even talk of her furthering her education” (08) said an informant who mentors girls who face these situations. This quote shows there might be grave consequences for girls after early pregnancies. It is the start of a downward cycle, because without education, unemployment is potential, leading to poverty and food insecurity. “A young girl may be lured into sex. [...] They bring their children up in the same environment, and it happens to children and the cycle goes on” (12).

Eventually, the above-named forms of GBV, such as intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies are rampant issues in Kisumu, especially due to the fact that local law enforcement is of little help to solve these issues. More than one informant argued that corruption of local administrators withholds victims from reporting. “So, the police has been very, very, very difficult in any case of defilement. Cases of sexual harassment are made difficult by the police; they don’t take it as a serious offence. They work together with the perpetrators and at times you find yourself very, very demoralized” (11). On top of that, victims are refusing to report due to the participation of local administrators in the crimes themselves. “In Kisumu East, there is a place called Mamboleo. There is a National Youth Service station there and the girls have reported several cases of sexual harassment from the officers. The police are participating in these crimes, so tell me, will you report?” (05).

5.5 Theoretical reflections on conflict

This chapter presented the findings and analysis of how female peacebuilders experience insecurity and threats to peace and how they think traditional gender norms play a role. From the perspective of the informants as well as the observations, I can conclude that, in this case, it is necessary to not only look at direct violence (Galtung, 1969), but rather follow how female peacebuilders identify insecurities at the local level. While discourses on (in)security in academics are often concerned with metanarratives of the state, it is important to uncover everyday insecurities because they can disproportionately affect

the lives of people living in that society (Berents, 2015). The majority of the informants argued that Kisumu County is not peaceful due to underlying tensions in society, which can be theorized with the concept of structural violence (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Female peacebuilders identified small-scale personal insecurities, that happen on a structural, local and personal level. This is a crucial acknowledgement as these everyday experiences might be fundamentally different than those who guide conflict resolution on a higher decision-making level (Julian et al., 2019).

One of the areas where local female peacebuilders see insecurities arising is economic hardship which fosters violence. Similar to findings of Hyder et al. (2007) and Mannell et al. (2021), poverty and economic stress might translate into a need by men to exert control over women. As a result, conflicts and violence might arise between or within families. Moreover, research in Afghanistan finds that losing the closest male relative does not ensure financial independency for women, but rather transferral to other (male) guardians in the family (Mannell et al., 2021). This also seems to be the norm in the patriarchal society in Kisumu, although some women are resisting this tradition by claiming their late husband's land. As a result, land issues of inheritance may arise, whereby the land conflicts particularly affect women.

Secondly, despite the peaceful elections of 2022, political and economic tensions led to demonstrations and physical conflict after I left the field in March 2023. This shows that there might have been a 'negative peace' at the time of my fieldwork. Galtung (1969) defines negative peace as absence of direct or overt violence. However, he argues that relapse to an unpeaceful situation is likely, as structural and cultural violence might be present underneath the surface. This seemed to be applicable to the situation in Kisumu County, as structural violence could be found in marginalizing and oppressing structures. What is for sure is that the physical eruptions of violence brought Kisumu County further from positive peace than before, as the violent protests had influence on economic activities, transportation, education, food security and increased insecurity on the streets in general.

Lastly, informants experienced insecurities in the domain of GBV, which is reoccurring, according to them, due to structures of gender inequality. This is one of the structural violences that Galtung and Fischer (2013) refer to when speaking about marginalizing structures of patriarchy. Due to these unequal gendered structures, intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies are common insecurities in Kisumu County. These issues become very difficult to solve as local administrators often do not take them seriously or are guilty of the crimes themselves. In those scenarios, local peace and security processes become even more important.

6. Female peacebuilders shaping local peace and security processes

This research includes a first-hand perspective of how female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes. In other words, this chapter presents how local women deal with the above-named conflicts, violences and insecurities. Female peacebuilders strive to build a peaceful society whereby peaceful coexistence in their community is the norm. Peace, in their perspective, relates to all aspects of society and should be felt close to home. Therefore, while women are working on improving the economic situation of their community, on reducing political tensions or on minimising cases of GBV, they use the WPS agenda to give their local peace work legitimacy.

The first section will outline how and why women take more prominent roles in local peace and security processes. Secondly, it is shown that female peacebuilders place emphasis on economic empowerment of grassroots women and whole communities. After that, a section will outline how female peacebuilders deal with political unrest and how the events of March 2023 changed their peace work. Thereafter, a section is dedicated to how female peacebuilders minimise GBV, as they focus on gender equality as overall goal. Lastly, the findings will be reflected upon with relevant theory and literature.

6.1 Local female peacebuilders

Traditionally, people who headed local peacebuilding processes were religious leaders or men, but from experience, this proved to be ineffective in some cases. “When these things [mediating the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict] are left to the men only, it’s like you are stagnating somewhere” (08). From this point, around 2019, female peacebuilders were advocating to be included. “Before, men were the ones who are solving issues, but right now, women are also venturing into the peacebuilding issues initiatives, and they are working very perfectly.” Female peacebuilders are still trying to create more space for them to spread peace. “We create our own room, it is not created for us, we are pushing” (04), said an informant who leads a community-based organization in Manyatta. They try to enter in local peace and security processes because they know where the conflicts and insecurities in society are located. This is perfectly summarized by a young female informant who said that “women are important in this job because we found that women are the people who are faced with these challenges” (11). Moreover, once women got a role in the shaping of peace and security processes, peaceful coexistence returned, which strengthened their legitimacy. “So, the successful stories will even make you to access more within the community” (02).

In Kisumu County, many female peacebuilders and related organizations work together in the Gender Technical Working Group. This network of civil society which works on gender and peace was founded by the regional gender office of Kisumu County. I got the chance to speak with one of the founders, who said: “I managed to bring together all these aspects under the umbrella of the Gender Technical Working Group. We brought in all players that were relevant to this, independent groups, faith-based organizations, churches and the rest” (09). This group shows that female peacebuilders are part of a larger network and try to create legitimacy. A member of the group said: “we also have the Gender Technical Working Group of Kisumu County. Me being one of them. They normally come together as different organizations whether, big, community-based, they don’t discriminate. They recognize us as one of the key stakeholders in the community” (11). This exemplifies that female peacebuilders, such as this young female informant, are recognized as important actor on the local level.

Informants at regional or national level peacebuilding organizations find strengthening the capacities of the local communities very important. One informant from a country-wide organization argued that local communities know best what solutions to conflict are, “we just need to ask: ‘so what do you guys think?’

Where do we go next?’ They will tell you. Like here [at a Peace Talk organized by WOVOP], we’re just having a conversation here and the community members were actually sharing how they solve their own land issues. There was an expert here, but they have their own solutions. We just need to ask: ‘so where are the gaps?’” (01). Whether it is female peacebuilders on the national level, based in Nairobi, or the regional level, focussing on Kisumu County, all organizations strive to build grassroots movements. Listening to the needs of the specific community is not only effective but also highly necessary as they need context-specific peacebuilding approaches. “It wouldn’t be a blanket answer for people in different spots in Kisumu County, because the rural parts also have their different needs” (07). More specifically, female peacebuilders on every level wish to empower grassroots women in the communities to broaden the peacebuilding network. The leader of a community centre said they had “decided to have our own peace and security grassroots movement, where women could watch one another” (02). Empowering locals to be able to implement peacebuilding activities is one of the pillars of almost every peacebuilding organization in Kisumu County. “We teach women on how to live in a peaceful environment, peaceful community. [...] So normally, such a negotiation, mediation, dialoguing, we take it back to the grassroots to enable our young women to know what peace is” (08).

This logic is applied to all peacebuilding efforts of female peacebuilders. They claim that peace starts within the house. “For me, I think that if a man and a woman, children, everybody in their house are living in peace, they are able to transfer that peace outside” (13). Once there is peace in the sense that there is no economic hardship, no GBV or political pressure on the household level, one has the peace of mind to spread peace on a local level in the community. This is carried out in peacebuilding activities, where they teach fellow community members to live in peace within the household. They work on prevention of conflict, mediation when conflict in the family arise and advise on legal cases when conflict escalate.

As peace work should start in the house, men are also included in peacebuilding activities organized by female peacebuilders. “There are some programs where we involve them, especially on issues around lands, issues around peacebuilding [...] because men still have a say in our communities” (10). More than one informant mentioned the importance of the inclusion of men in peace work led by women. “When I want to have a sensitization meeting for women, I sensitize the men first and bring them to understand that women must have their space” (02). Nevertheless, female peacebuilders know that just focussing on the household level will not create a widespread peace in their communities. As a matter of fact, to create an effective positive peace, you need everyone from the community on board. “Most of the time when we are doing community outreach and community sensitization, we tend to try to reach out to the chiefs, the local leaders, the local assistant chiefs, the elders, the community health workers, volunteers” (05). In addition, multiple informants explained the concept of *nyumba kumi*² to me, which creates safety and security in the neighbourhood. Therefore, I can conclude that peace starts within the house, but should be spread throughout the community.

6.2 Economic empowerment

From the economic hardship described in the previous section, conflict may arise in the form of food insecurity, mugging or land issues. In reaction to this, I analysed that female peacebuilders give attention to economic empowerment in local peace and security processes. When there is economic instability,

² Nyumba Kumi literally translates to ‘ten houses’. It is a system proposed by the government of Kenya to guarantee peace and security at the local level in the community. It is a strategy designed for citizens to know their neighbours and call out any suspicious or unusual behaviour. Kenyans are brought together in clusters of ten houses based on their physical location and look out for each other.

there will be no stable ground for peace. As a result, multiple informants stressed that economic empowerment is a basis upon which communities can start to become more peaceful. Consequently, many programs of civil society organizations, social justice centres or community-based organizations concentrate on the economic empowerment of women in the communities because “I feel empowering your women financially reduces a lot of crime issues [...] So I feel just the economic aspect of empowerment around women issues is going to help a lot and it reduces a lot of conflict as well because when you have something, there's no way you're going to get into someone's space. When I have my own things, it will reduce the level of disrespect and the level of conflicts arising” (06). As women are most severely affected by economic instability due to their vulnerable status as dependent of the husband, there were many informants who addressed the importance of economic independent women in order to reduce insecurities for them.

Hence, I inferred that economic independency is highly encouraged and seen as a peacebuilding practice. Once women become economically independent, there will be for example less conflict on the household level about food insecurity as women are able to provide for themselves and their families. “Even if they are married, they must have something that they are able to do with their hands and earn their own money and take care of themselves, live alone their family” (08). Multiple organizations in Kisumu’s civil society are setting up systems for women to receive small loans. “We do economic empowerment for young people where we do savings and loaning, supporting businesses” (13) said the head of Young Women Christian Association (YWCA). In addition, some informants mentioned ways in which women can encourage each other to become economically independent. On one side, the organizations stimulate women to work together in order to receive loans and start their own businesses. “We also encourage women to seek women enterprise funds. We say: ‘find yourself a group of ten women who are very serious, and they know they want to do a certain project’. They want to rear chicken or cows. Ten women register as a group, if you are serious with that women enter for enterprise, funds will always give you resources” (11). Women can stimulate economic independency of fellow women as well as wider economic growth of the community via competition. “Let me say that I'm rearing chickens. When they see that she can rear chickens and get money, the other one will be like, ‘what can I do so that I be better than her?’ You see, when they are competing, it's like they are competing but progressing. The community is progressing” (08).

The fact that women are generating income, will decrease crimes on the street, for example mugging and robbing. “When your mother can put food on your table. There is no way a child is going to go astray and start stealing from the neighbours when the mother can provide” (06). One informant, working in the Nyalenda slum, already sees large progression in terms of these crimes. “The Nyalenda I grew up in and the Nyalenda now are very different. Nyalenda was a hub of violence, killings, mugging. The Nyalenda now, as a result of a lot of us doing peace work, it made it really safe. You can walk with your phone, and no one will snatch it from you” (07).

Similarly, female peacebuilders work on cases of land issues in terms of prevention and mediation of conflict. In regard to prevention, women try to avoid land issues from occurring by creating awareness in the community via sensitization meetings with both men and women. “When it comes to disposal of land, they leave the women out and that's why we are coming out very strongly and telling: you cannot go to a woman and dispose the land” (10). Some female peacebuilders I spoke to assist women to create the legal documents in order to inherit the land they share with their husband. Consequently, women can opt for full ownership of the land, once their husbands pass away. These processes challenge the patriarchal system of inheritance. “We empower women, but we do it gradually. Let men understand that these are cultural practices that are overtaken. We used to have a lot of issues of wife inheritance in

our community, something that is now dying” (02). In sum, this example shows that female peacebuilders create a more peaceful society, which starts with creating a gender equal society. Once women in the communities are empowered to inherit and own land, there will be less conflict on land issues. “They can stand and say: ‘this is my piece of land; this is the property that my husband left me’” (02).

6.3 Political representation and political peacebuilding

Female peacebuilders have engaged in a lot of political peacebuilding, during years of post-election violence as well as conflict at the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict. Women describe that assisting in mediation at the border conflict was difficult for them, as this type of political peacebuilding happens at a higher level. While economic empowerment or mediation in regard to GBV can take place at the community level, female peacebuilders need to enter decision-making rooms at the county-level to have a say in the political peace talks. However, due to the patriarchal system, men are seen as the ones who should enforce peace in political conflicts. A young female peacebuilder said, “when I was there one day, I noticed the women who were invited, they were listeners. They're not talking. [...] The women who were there were not to represent their interest, the opinions were not taken up. They're just to signature” (14). Despite their efforts, the traditional peacebuilders, namely men and the church, did not come to agreement. “At the mediation table, in the last years, they were all men, and they were talking and trying to sort the issue, but it was not solvable. There was nothing that they could do. So that's why it has never been addressed because they lacked sensitivity, when it comes to representation, especially the women” (14). Since this has become clear, female peacebuilders took action. “So, at this point I can say to some level, women are being allowed to be in these decision making spaces to make decisions, however, you find that where there's three men, there's only one woman” (06). At the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict, female peacebuilders were successful in finding common ground after they were allowed to participate. “When they brought in women into their peace committees, we are seeing a lot of changes. The fires that have been in the border are no longer there, and when they occur, the women will call a meeting with the other women, fellow women. They sit down when they go back, they have a discussion with their male counterparts back in their counties” (02).

Although female peacebuilders have a difficult time to have influence at the higher decision-making level, they talked about the many successes due to political peacebuilding at the local level. After the elections of 2022, “we managed to report zero violence during the last elections. Kenya, for the first time, elections were done and people did not fight” (13). This can be attributed in part, according to the informants, to the efforts of women in local peace and security processes. According to one informant, “we were engaged in peace building during last year's political time. Kisumu was really in the forefront of trying to advocate for a peaceful election process, which is something that we experienced for the very first time for a very long time. We were able to have a peaceful election because of those very many advocacy activities” (12). Those advocacy activities are for example educational meetings, where informants educate the public about acceptance. “Let's just accept the result. Moreover, elections will not last forever. You have your life to live, and the politicians also have their lives to live” (11). This message was not easy to get across, according to one informant. “It was very difficult because I felt I cannot convince these people otherwise because this thing [the hatred against politicians] is rooted” (04). Therefore, female peacebuilders held conversations with youth, women and men in the communities. A lot of the informants were engaged in these activities, which was summarized by one informant: “we were trying to talk to people and encouraging them to have a peaceful environment during before elections, during nominations, during campaigns and after elections” (12).

At the time of my fieldwork, the informants were proud of the results of these meetings and conversations. “So, we did our advocacy. Doing that, at least we achieved something during that election period. There was high tension, but people were not going to the roads and burning up tires” (11). This shows that the elections of 2022 were a large milestone. “Now, Kisumu is improving, the security issues are decreasing. In the sub-countries, there are decreasing pressures. I think that the campaign around the election played a role, because, for once, Kisumu did not have violence around the elections” (05).

However, as outlined in the previous chapter, tensions spread through Kisumu when Odinga lost elections again, erupting into physical conflict after I left the field in March 2023. Civil society was also affected by the demonstrations and the use of violence on the streets. In the additional online interviews I held in March 2023, the informants told me that even the organizations preaching for peace could not continue their work on the days the protests were planned due to safety concerns for staff members. “Those two days, the Monday and the Thursday, we had problems about the use of violence and the peaceful demonstrations, because nothing could now continue” (15). As a result, peacebuilders could only engage in physical talks about peace on other working days, which made their job more difficult.

As a result, most peacebuilding activities in reaction to the protests were organized online. “Our civil society was, during the time of the peaceful demonstrations, busy advocating for peace. We were using our social media. We were trying to advocate on social media, Facebook, Twitter, and engaging in the community about the issue” (15). These online platforms were already in place, as several informants stressed, they used online platforms previously to counter online violence such as body shaming or verbal abuse. Therefore, through these channels, local peace organizations tried to reach their communities and urge them to stop the conflict.

6.4 Gender equality

Conflict related to GBV, intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies are directly linked to the traditional system of patriarchy, as argued previously. Therefore, peacebuilding in regard to these issues focuses on strategies to address the root cause of gender inequality. In this line of thought, gender equality will eventually lead to a peaceful society. Female peacebuilders take on this challenge in two ways. First, they challenge patriarchal norms by entering peace and security processes themselves. As said, local women stood up and founded social justice centres or community-based organizations or they became active members of organizations striving for peace, which was previously a realm inhabited by men or the church. Secondly, their programs target grassroots women to create a gender balance.

First, informants named that female peacebuilders address GBV by organizing prevention events. In these sensitization meetings, awareness is created within the community. “We do community dialogues, community awareness and sensitization trainings. We do a lot of radio talk shows to enlighten the community on prevention” (13). On one side, women are educated on the roadmap of dealing with insecurities and injustices as well as reporting these crimes. “As we deal with young women, young girls, we talk about emotions control, stress control. So at least when you are provoked, you will know how to go about the provocation” (08). On the other side, men are educated on the prevention of abuse, “because when you empower men that they are not supposed to abuse women now, it makes it easy. When this man goes to the house, he remembers before hitting his wife, he remembers what he was told. As opposed to when you just talk to the women and leave the men, you talk to the girls and leave the boys” (13). This creates a wider positive impact amongst men, as “some are accepting the awareness and they are changing and they are advocating towards the same” (13).

In addition to prevention of abuse, female peacebuilders organize multiple types of educational trainings to mediate conflict, teach about human rights and create awareness about GBV. These educational meetings are held by multiple organizations that the informants are part of. For example, one organization holds community engagement forums on “sexual gender-based violence issues because those are some of the issues that conflict might arise in because when a perpetrator messes with your family, your wife, your child” (06). Another community organization trains grassroots women in psychosocial support as part of their grassroots movement. “They've gone through basics in trauma counselling so that when they meet a case in the community, they are able to take up the case” (02).

Secondly, I deduced from the actions and stories of female peacebuilders that they are active in conflict mediation on the household level. A large amount of the cases of GBV, intimate partner violence, incest or rape happen within the family. As mediators, female peacebuilders hear the story of both quarrelling sides, often for free. According to more than one informant, it is important to listen to both sides of the story because “sometimes the victim becomes the perpetrator. Yeah, the women have been empowered, they are the ones who beat the man. [...] So when you bring the men on board, you hear from different perspectives. [...] So the man fought back in self-defence. So, you find that the woman is the one who started the war” (06). Via these mediating roles, female peacebuilders aim to create peace on a household level. They are actively looking for middle ground or assisting in legal steps.

Nonetheless, when mediation or legal support does not do the job, conflict on the household level might become physical. In that case, female peacebuilders engage in trauma support for survivors of all forms of GBV. “We talk, it's like a safe space where we talk with the young women to end domestic violence” (03). One informant even showed me a safe shelter in Nyalenda for women and girls who face domestic violence from their husbands or in-laws, where more than five women were staying at the time of the interview. These services create a peaceful environment for victims of mental and physical conflict.

In addition to this, female peacebuilders set up SRHR programs to create gender equality. They try to counter the lack of menstrual hygiene and stigmatization on the topic. “I carried them [2 bags of pads] to the school in the rural where there are kids with poor backgrounds. Their families are not providing. So, I go there, talk to them, dance with them, then I distributed the pads” (11) explained a young informant from a social justice centre. Instead of missing classes monthly due to their period and eventually dropping out of school, these programs try to make sure that young girls get access to sanitary equipment and receive education about SRHR. The programs also counter the rising cases of ‘sex for pads’ and subsequent early pregnancies. Consequently, participants of the programs are able to stay in school longer and pursue higher levels of education.

Lastly, female peacebuilders organize mental health sessions within their communities. From this, I deduced that mental health is related to peacebuilding activities in their perception. “You cannot talk about maintaining of peace if people are not emotionally stable” (10). I got the chance to observe two online mental health sessions of WOVOP, whereby male and female advocates for mental health preached the importance of selfcare, peace of mind and security of the body. Here, I learned that mental health is connected to peace as a vicious circle. If people are mentally unstable, they will easy pick a fight and conflict will erupt, whether in the household or at work. One informant stressed that those people will be effortlessly persuaded to join violent protests on the streets. On the contrary, once people are mentally stable, they are able to spread peace from their house to the rest of the community.

6.5 Theoretical reflection on peacebuilding

The findings and analysis above present how female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes in relation to traditional gender norms. Studying these ‘ordinary people’ in their strategies to create safety and security around them provides an insight in what Julian et al. (2019, p. 216) categorizes as “far from ordinary, but [...] courageous, creative and extraordinary people who have interwoven relationships and protection into their everyday lives in order to deal with the fears, insecurities and threats they face.” Female peacebuilders are trying to claim more space to shape peace and security processes on the local level. They adopt a community-specific approach and include the grassroots population in their efforts. Peacebuilding activities by female peacebuilders are similar as the actions that Angom (2018) identified in Uganda, namely setting up dialogues, reconciliation events, capacity building workshops or advocacy trainings. Through social justice centres, community-based organizations and broader civil society, female peacebuilders engage in multiple peacebuilding activities. The actors who try to spread peace resonate with the third level of the model proposed by Angom (2018) and Lederach (1997) (see: Appendix 1), whereby community developers or women grassroots organizations build peace. From the interviews, it also became clear that the network of civil society around gender and peace is well-connected via the Gender Technical Working Group.

I can conclude that female peacebuilders engage in the mitigation of insecurities in their daily lives, as outlined by Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) in their definition of everyday peacebuilding. From the analysis, it might be concluded that their everyday efforts contribute to peace in an unintentional and organic fashion, in line with Millar (2020), as they strive to build peaceful relations within their communities. However, one can also see their activities as politically motivated, striving to change the whole society for a gender equal and peaceful one. In that sense, female peacebuilders try to re-organize power relations through their daily peacebuilding engagements. Power and patriarchy are renegotiated because female peacebuilders in Kisumu County claim a previously male-dominated domain. Starting from peacebuilding in the private spaces of their families, homes and communities, female peacebuilders become more and more visible, also entering public peace and security processes, for example the negotiations of the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict. As a result, they challenge power relations, gender norms and existing patriarchal structures.

Female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes by organizing activities of economic empowerment, political peacebuilding and creating gender equality. Findings show that informants perceive a strong connection between peace and economic empowerment. As conflict can arise as a result of mugging, food insecurity or land issues, it is important for peace workers to focus on the creation of economic stability in the community. Blomqvist et al. (2021) argue that it is important to see the linkages between these unrecognized types of peacebuilding and regard them as women’s practices that are crucial to peace on the ground. Local organizations engage in economic empowerment programs in the form of loans for small businesses, which generate income, create economic independence and subsequently decrease food insecurity. According to the informants, the programs mostly target women due to their vulnerable status as dependent of the husband. This dependency is also noticed by feminist theorists, who identified that femininity is linked to dependency or submissiveness (MacKenzie, 2009). In Kisumu County, female peacebuilders challenge these gender norms by assisting grassroots women towards independency in terms of income as well as landownership. For the latter, they are organizing sensitization meetings to create awareness about land issues, assisting in signing of legal ownership documents and aiding in legal procedures once inheritance goes sideways.

Secondly, in regard to political peacebuilding, female peacebuilders argue they were previously excluded from peace negotiations about the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict. After failing to solve the conflict by male peacebuilders, women were brought in and claimed significant successes. This resonates with feminist theory on agency, whereby women take on roles with more responsibility in post-conflict peace processes (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). These auteurs also argued that women, when given the opportunity, might be better able to come up with transformative solutions to peace. Concluding from the effects of their actions, this claim might be proven to be true.

Lastly, this chapter presented that female peacebuilders engage in activities to create gender equality to counter issues of GBV. In this research, female peacebuilders as well as my analysis of their narratives, have identified key points of inequality of intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies. When these inequalities keep existing, there is little chance for a gender-just peace, which includes equity, social justice and recognition of women's needs (Björkdahl, 2012). Female peacebuilders are addressing these inequalities by creating community awareness about prevention of crimes, educating on mediation skills and teaching psychosocial support. Most of them are trained as mediators to moderate between conflicting individuals, own safe shelters and assist in legal processes between quarrelling parties. These activities are similar with what Vaittinen et al. (2021) found in their research: "They saw violence in their own homes and sought to protect each other by locating safe spaces, legal support, and health and counselling services" (Vaittinen et al., 2021, p. 10). With the same motivation to counter gender inequality, female peacebuilders shape peace processes in setting up SRHR programs, which can prevent stigmatization, 'sex for pads' and early pregnancies.

7. Reflections of female peacebuilders in local peace and security processes

Female peacebuilders reflect on their peace work in different ways. They unravelled the importance of women in peacebuilding, opportunities they got and challenges they faced. Moreover, informants also argued for the relevance of local peace and security processes in itself, because “if there is peace in an area, there is development, but if we fight, there is loss of life or die. We as a community, we will stagnate because of violence. There is no activity that will take place” (11). Another informant argued the same. “We know that if there is no peace, then of course stability can never be there and the women cannot be able to reach their goals and get to their potential” (12). From this, many women stand up and take matters into their own hands. As leaders or staff members of organizations or social justice centres, they strive to enhance peace in Kisumu County.

What has become clear from the previous chapters, is that local peacebuilding aims to build stability close to home. It is important to create peaceful coexistence in the community, for example, they strive to improve the economic situation, reduce political tensions or limit cases of GBV. Their reflections on how they create the envisioned peaceful society are personal. In this chapter, I first present the challenges that female peacebuilders face in their peace work. Secondly, I outline what they think they add to local peace and security processes. Lastly, theory and previous literature are used to interpret the findings.

7.1 Gendered hierarchical working conditions

When female peacebuilders reflected on their role in local peace and security processes, they outlined multiple challenges. Overall, one young informant argued that doing peace work is challenging because the target population of peace work is not cooperating or not accepting the help. “So, at times when you mentor, when you impart knowledge, they feel like: ‘why have they not given us money?’ It's like if you go somewhere, just talk to them and leave them there, they don't feel that you have done anything” (08). Some communities which cope with conflict do not recognise the importance of mediation, awareness raising or other intangible aid. Moreover, female peacebuilders experience other challenges such as lack of representation, recognition and resources, whereby the challenge of gender inequality is present throughout all the obstacles.

Firstly, female peacebuilders reflect on their peace work by stressing the lack of representation in decision-making spaces. As they want their issues and solutions to be represented at the policy-level, female peacebuilders aim to be engaged when policies are shaped. However, an informant at the Kisumu County regional office said she rarely works with women, “especially women are in places of advocacy and civil organizations, but barely at the policy formulation and implementation” (05). This gendered hierarchical division is also found within the boardrooms, where the position of chair is most frequently claimed by a man. As a result, a gender agenda is frequently not included in policy-formulation. “We are still in the society whereby women are the second. For a woman to really get that political position successfully, it really involves a lot of struggle and support from external organizations of people” (13). Another informant stressed that gender norms withhold women from entering in these spaces. “Traditionally, they believe that women are weak emotionally, so they can never participate in any decision-making process and they can never be taken seriously” (14). Therefore, I conclude that patriarchal norms sedate their inclusion. “Actually, even if you find a woman on the mediation table, you're seen like a flower girl. Maybe you're supposed to take notes, you're not supposed to participate fully. You're not supposed to say things you know. Men are the ones to say: ‘this is the issue and we feel we can do this and that.’ But you as a woman, you're left behind” (04). From the interviews, I analysed that this leads back to specific roles that are attributed to women. Informants told me that women “are supposed to be seen, but not to be heard” and that “you should be humble. You should sit

down. You should keep quiet when the man is talking” (06) or that “most women are afraid that when they speak up, they will be attacked for their gender” (06). This shows that feminine gender roles withhold women from speaking up in decision-making spaces in peace and security processes.

Aside from gender inequality and patriarchal norms, the lack of representation of women can be assigned to their level of education. “When you put them in a space where we have people who are educated, who are speaking English, then they fail, they won't speak. I think the illiteracy levels, the level of education still stops women from speaking up and showing their full potentials and owning themselves in these places. But when you go back to grassroot levels, women are really working. [...] Women are leading in local peace and security activities. You can say that women's comfort zone is in their communities, and as soon as they take it a step further, they will refrain [from talking]” (06).

Secondly, the efforts of female peacebuilders in peace and security processes are not recognized. This, again, can be ascribed to the gender inequality in Kisumu County. Female peacebuilders are seen as inadequate at their job by for example men in their communities. “So, women do a lot of work around with peace in their homes, in their communities, but it's never recognized” (06). Instead of being recognized as peacebuilders by profession, they are diminished to only their gender. “One thing that I know really cripples our role is that they say you are a weak person, you are a weak gender” (03). For example, one informant described how she was humiliated when trying to talk about peace in a conflict-threatened community. “Men are just looking at you and describing you sexually just because you're a woman. You stand somewhere to talk and they're just booing at you or making funny comments just because you are a woman. You are defenceless” (13). Informants stress that women who lack confidence, have an even more difficult time to act in peace and security processes. This is exemplified by a young female peacebuilder who said that the “confidence level is low and it all comes from that man that says: ‘you leave, you're not going to tell us anything valuable’” (04).

Specifically young women experience a lack of recognition for their local peace work. More than half of my informants was below the age of 30 and explained several difficulties in their working conditions that had to do with their age. For example, when the social justice centre in Nyando subcounty is called to mediate in marital issues, the efforts of unmarried young female peacebuilders are not taken seriously. For instance, a 29-year-old informant said: “You know I'm a woman and I'm young and I'm not married. So sometimes when we are going to these marital issues, they'll ask: ‘you're not married? What are you telling?’ It's being a woman. It is also tougher because you're young” (04). The lack of trust in their abilities limits the execution of their work. For example, a young female peacebuilder of 27 years old told me how her organization was called to mediate in a conflict. “When you get to the place for assistance, they will say, I didn't call you. So, there are a lot of challenges. There are negative attitudes of people towards you. They won't take it positively that whatever you are doing is for their own good” (08). It even goes to the extent that young female peacebuilders are not supported by their own community, as outlined by a 27-year-old informant: “For especially a young woman or a girl, these are things that we are not supposed to do, but I'm doing so, meaning that the community is always waiting for me to fall” (14).

By following their path as young female peacebuilders, they challenge traditional gendered and hierarchical norms that surround peacebuilding. “So, peacebuilding has always been associated with the church, religious leaders and most of them are men. So, they only listen to you if you are a church leader or a religious sponsor. They only listen to you if you are a man. Maybe if you are not a man and not a preacher, then maybe you are an old woman” (14). As young female peacebuilders enter the peacebuilding domain, traditional actors shift. As a result, men feel threatened by women who take on

new positions in society. “We have challenges because men feel a bit inferior to peace ambassador women, because men fear women who are empowered” (02). This was confirmed by the male informant: “The strength of women has become stronger, sometimes to an extent that we think that we fear their gender is overtaking” (09). The fact that female peacebuilders are expanding their domain of influence is threatening traditional actors. Not only men feel threatened, older women are also withholding younger female peacebuilders from exercising their potential. “What I noticed a lot is that a lot of older generational women are starting to become gatekeepers” (07). Arguments for this behaviour are jealousy or the hierarchal position that older women maintain in society. However, young women still feel they need to pursue peace work and are not all withheld by these gatekeepers.

Lastly, female peacebuilders have a difficult time to build peace as violence seems to be inherent in the patriarchal society. “Most of the time they [men] are the ones that started throwing the first stone. Kondele is the place that is violent during the elections. You don't find women there burning tires and throwing stones. It's men” (13). This can be retrieved to masculine gender norms, “They did not want to stay away from trouble. They wanted to join in to participate because that is manly” (04). In such cases, female peacebuilders try to convince men not to act violently. However, “it was very difficult to convince them that they should try to maintain peace. ‘If you find people on the road, you should not join them. If you can't bring peace, hide, hide until they go.’ Now this man is telling me: ‘how can I hide? I am a man. I am supposed to die like other men are dying’” (04). This quote shows that female peacebuilders have taken on the difficult and ambitious task to change these ascribed gender norms and minimise violent masculinities in Kisumu County.

7.2 Strengths of female peacebuilders

Female peacebuilders take on the ambitious task to act in local peace and security processes because they want to address the conflicts and insecurities in their communities, for example economic hardship or GBV. At the time of the fieldwork, informants argued that more women were getting involved in local peace and security processes. “Now we have women like me doing peace building, so we are rewriting the narrative of young women. We are showing that peacebuilding is for everyone” (14). This is an important development, according to the informants, because women add greatly when they are involved in local peace and security processes. This section pays attention to how female peacebuilders reflect on their strengths and importance in these processes. On one hand, they argue that women are more aware of issues in society, because they experience insecurities from up close. On the other hand, women have specific abilities that contribute to peacebuilding.

First of all, informants say they are close to local conflicts and insecurities. “Because we are based in the community, we know the problems and people, so we know everything that is the community” (11). As women are the ones who suffer most from for example GBV, they know where and how to target to root causes of these issues. This is the reason why female peacebuilders are most fit to address these insecurities. One informant said that “aside from the trainings I've attended, the networks I have built, I believe I have what it takes to create change and bring peace in my community because it's something I've lived in” (03). Another informant says she excels in mediation about marital problems, because “I have lived it, I've been married, I left. When there have been cases, you tend to take a perspective, but having had that experience, I bring a different perspective in” (03).

In this line of thought, female peacebuilders bring in a gender agenda in local peace and security processes. One informant from the Kisumu County gender department said that men focus on the enforcement of peace, while women look at conflict resolution, which includes solutions that are beneficial for the whole society. “If women were at that table, they would come up with different

solutions. [...] We don't just come up with blanket policies, but we come up with informed solutions" (05). In this sense, female peacebuilders are important in the creation of durable, sustainable peace because they add an inclusive perspective. "The women perspective will be wholesome. It will cover a variety of issues, including the reproductive health of girls. Men would never think about that because they don't even know what that means. That is why women need to be involved in peacebuilding" (14). However, reflecting on their role in policy-formulation, informants see room for improvement, because "there are policies that do not take into account women's issues, we are still not there" (05). Nevertheless, female peacebuilders are able to address the issues that women face on the local level.

The fact that female peacebuilders are building peace at the local level can be attributed to their position in the communities, as I deduced from their actions and stories. Whereas the previous section outlined the limitations of gender norms, the traditional gender role of the mother, on the contrary, enables her to build peace. Mothers are seen as centre of the household, because "women were there to cook for their children, take care of the husbands, take care of the family" (02). In order to do that, they were supposed to go to the market and fetch water, which are places where the community comes together. As a result, "women are the custodians of peace and stability in the house because we have access to so many things. On the community market, we can access people, so if I had information about something that is crucial, I could reach more people than men" (14) argues a female informant hypothetically. Therefore, I can conclude from the interviews that women utilize their position to reach many people, for example to warn the community about security issues, like protests.

Moreover, many informants brought up that women have a convincing power. "Women have a great role to play because a woman can convince a man, their husband, can convince her brothers, can convince her children can convince all the community. So, women have that convincing power" (13). This exemplifies that women can convince men not to act violently in case of a conflict, and bring peace. One informant explained how women insert their convincing power. "The woman will find a way to package it to say it nicely and to convince the man it is not all that bad. 'Let us just handle this.' So, I feel we have that power of convincing, we have the power of packaging things nicely and helping some people to understand what is actually happening" (04).

In addition, female peacebuilders stress that they have problem-solving skills. "They know which buttons to push. They know how to solve the issues to a point that it doesn't bring chaos afterwards. So, it's a magic that women have" (06). This, again, can be attributed to their traditional gender roles as mothers. One informant also saw this connection, arguing that "mothers are the disciplinarians, mothers are the issue-solvers" (06). The power to solve issues comes with skills to listen to one's problems, to understand them thoroughly and, subsequently, to mediate the issue. In this regard, one informant said that "you need to be neutral. [...] I feel women do it better than men, but not all men do it badly. Some men are also impartial, and some are better at it too. But the ones that I've seen, I must say have been disappointed because sometimes you think, if I'm given the opportunity, I can do it better" (06).

Aside from describing their skills and feminine powers, female peacebuilders reflect on their role in local peace and security processes by stressing that peace should start in their own home. Multiple informants argued that peace starts from within themselves and their households. "The peace agenda has to be something that the women must be singing in their hearts" (02). From there, they spread the peace and gender agenda to their communities, the county and beyond. "You are a peace ambassador wherever you are" (02). By spreading the message of peace, female peacebuilders take up a new position in society, thereby challenging patriarchal gender norms. "I think we are opening up the gender norms to change. [...] It's like a new thing so you want the world to hear about it. It shouldn't be new" (14).

7.3 Theoretical reflections

This chapter presented findings and the analysis of how female peacebuilders reflect on their role in local peace and security processes. Overall, female peacebuilders feel the need to carry out peace work to shape peaceful coexistence in their communities. The peace that they envision is one that creates personal safety and security in and around their own homes, resonating with how everyday peacebuilding is defined (Mac Ginty, 2014). Furthermore, the reflections on their role in peacebuilding are twofold. First, the peace and security domain is a gendered and hierarchical working environment. There are obstacles regarding acceptance of the target population, lack of representation on the policy-formulation level and lack of recognition.

The concept of gendered peace gaps, as proposed by Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2014), can help to uncover the structural constraints that women engage in. For instance, in regard to the lack of representation, women face gendered challenges as they are intimidated by the masculine domain of peacebuilding. Okech (2022) also discovered this gendered challenge in the lack of representation of women in formal peace negotiations in the Kisumu-Nandi border conflict. Thus, women have to face obstacles of gender roles that are nested in society. The gender roles that are outlined by the informants, for example not speaking up, entering public decision-making processes or opposing a man, are also noted by feminists academics such as Tickner (2001) and MacKenzie (2009). It is similar to finding of Angom (2018) in Uganda, where cultural systems withhold women from participating in peacebuilding.

Another gendered peace gap is the lack of recognition of women's peace work. For example, female peacebuilders are not taken seriously due to their gender, youth and un-married status. This is a crucial point according to Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015), who also found that youth is underrepresented in peacebuilding projects. On top of that, men are withholding female peacebuilders from reaching their full potential because proponents of the patriarchal society fear the empowerment of women. If men succeed in their efforts to limit the role of women, the hypothesis of Blomqvist et al. (2021) might come true and gendered power hierarchies before conflict are strengthened in post-conflict transformations.

However, arguing from the narratives of the informants, women also reflect on their relevance, opportunities and successes. In line with what Okech (2022) found, women in peacebuilding provide opportunities towards sustainable conflict management, reconciliation and gender mainstreaming. The latter is supported by the fact that women take on new positions that contest patriarchal structures in society. For instance, by entering the male-dominated domain of peacebuilding, women are challenging traditional actors and taking space to mitigate insecurities that they experience themselves. In that sense, the findings resonate with what Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2014) found, namely that women reimagine structural inequalities with what they call 'transitional justice from below'.

On a higher level, women are using their peace work to enter the public domain of decision-making to spread a gender agenda in policy-formulation, though there is still opposition for this to happen on a large scale. It is still questionable whether what Clarke (2017) claims to be the 'window of opportunity' is to be found in Kisumu. From how I interpret the narratives of female peacebuilders, they have to crack open that window themselves, by claiming space, pushing gender norms and trying to proof their legitimacy in order to be able to exert influence. The informants actively built legitimacy by stressing their knowledge about local conflicts, their wholesome solutions including a gender agenda, mothers' central position in the communities, their convincing power and problem-solving skills. Using these skills and their created legitimacy, female peacebuilders are building peace and security in their communities and aim to spread their gender agenda at decision-making tables as well.

8. Conclusion and discussion

In this study I aimed to answer how female peacebuilders experience, shape and reflect on local peace and security processes in the patriarchal society in Kisumu County, Kenya. To answer this question, fieldwork was done in February 2023 in Kisumu County, where empirical qualitative research was conducted. Data was collected via sixteen semi-structured interviews, participant observations of local peacebuilding activities organized by my host organization WOVOP and small talk with colleagues from WOVOP. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with peacebuilders, human rights advocates and champions for gender equality at social justice centres and community-based organizations in civil society at the national, county, sub-county and local level. Focus was put on young female peacebuilders below the age of 30, who work on the topics of gender and peace on a local level in Kisumu County, but interviews were also conducted with older informants and two male informants. Recordings were transcribed, coded and analysed via a thematic data analysis.

This thesis report outlined all relevant steps in answering the research question: *How do female peacebuilders experience, shape and reflect on local peace and security processes in relation to traditional gender norms in Kisumu County, Kenya?* It has to be noted that there is not one unambiguous answer as individual informants have personal experiences and reflections on their role in local peace and security processes. Nevertheless, from the analysis of the findings, it can firstly be concluded that female peacebuilders identify insecurities in Kisumu County in economic hardship, political protests and GBV. It is clear that violence cannot be reduced to direct violence only, but also includes smaller, structural or personal insecurities. It is noticed by informants that grassroots women are discriminately affected by these insecurities in their communities due to gendered inequalities of patriarchy. Therefore, they shape their everyday peacebuilding efforts accordingly, by organizing activities which create economic empowerment, political representation and gender equality. Female peacebuilders founded, lead and work in organizations which aim to ameliorate the marginalized position of women in their quest for peace. Lastly, female peacebuilders reflect on their peace work by outlining the gendered hierarchical working environment, which poses challenges to them. However, by utilizing feminine characteristics, networks of women's organizations and previous successes, they create legitimacy for their everyday peacebuilding efforts.

This short conclusion can be substantiated by the findings per sub question. First of all, it was outlined how female peacebuilders experience insecurity in relation to traditional gender norms. Starting at where and how female peacebuilders experience threats to peace in their society provides a basis upon which peacebuilding activities are carried out. The narratives of female peacebuilding were central in the analysis, which acknowledges lived experiences in knowledge production, following arguments of Julian et al. (2019). It became clear that the situation in Kisumu County cannot be categorized as direct violence (Galtung, 1969) only, but is rather seen and felt as tensions and insecurities on the local level, which are in part created due to structural gender inequalities. This research therefore adds to literature which mostly focuses on the direct or overt forms of conflict. Consequently, questions arise whether the everyday insecurities that are found in Kisumu County are underexposed in more conflict-affected areas. In turn, feminist theory, by researching the margins, was a useful lens to interpret power hierarchies and insecurities at play (Berents, 2015). From the data analysis, it becomes clear that female peacebuilders see tensions and insecurities in three areas: economic hardship, political demonstrations and GBV.

On one side, female peacebuilders identify economic hardship in Kisumu County because of unemployment and inflation, with decreasing purchasing power as consequence. As a result, they argue there is economic instability, food insecurity, mugging and land issues, which foster ground for conflict.

Women seem to be particularly affected by economic difficulty due to patriarchal norms of dependency on the husband, inability to inherit land and prejudices about single women households. Besides this, despite the fact that elections of 2022 were rather peaceful, political tensions spread through Kisumu due to economic instability and unfulfilled campaign promises. These tensions erupted into physical conflict after I left the field in March 2023. Two additional online interviews with local peacebuilders in Kisumu presented the impact of the violent clashes, police brutality and damaged surroundings. Consequently, the political protests influenced economic activities, transportation, education and food security, and increased insecurity on the streets in general. Lastly, data indicated that patriarchy informs gender inequality, which causes GBV to be a prominent issue in communities in Kisumu County. In sum, female peacebuilders experience conflict mostly as insecurities close to home and see the gendered nature of conflict in the disproportionate effect on women in their communities.

Secondly, the conclusion is supported by findings regarding how female peacebuilders shape local peace and security processes and how they think traditional gender norms play a role. Through the lens of everyday peacebuilding, one can uncover daily practices that people engage in to mitigate threats to peace in their surroundings (Blomqvist et al., 2021). Where the old way of peacebuilding strived for a peace that is large-scale, it did not take into account the mitigation of daily insecurities on a local level (Mac Ginty, 2010). Therefore, the concept of everyday peacebuilding allowed me to uncover how female peacebuilders in Kisumu County deal with the insecurities described. In their eyes, peace starts within the house. The key message is that female peacebuilders strive to build a peaceful society whereby peaceful coexistence in their household and community is the norm. For this purpose, they are pushing to enter the domain of peace and security, replacing traditional actors of the church and men. Then, everyday peacebuilding becomes a space where power is renegotiated and re-organized (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015). An interesting question arising from this analysis is whether the political act of challenging gender norms is their ultimate goal or rather an unintentional bonus effect of their work. Especially young, female peacebuilders use their peace work to challenge hierarchical gender positions.

From the analysis, it is evident that the peace work by female peacebuilders is centred around economic empowerment, political representation and gender equality. Economic empowerment is highly encouraged and framed by the informants as a peacebuilding practice. The organizations in civil society of which female peacebuilders are part support that women generate income themselves, to create food security for their families. By doing this, female peacebuilders are encouraging grassroots women to challenge traditional gender norms of dependency and male ownership. In regard to political peacebuilding, female peacebuilders strive to be included in policy-formulation processes to include a gender agenda in peace and security policies as their representation is still minimal. The gendered hierarchy of “men make peace at the public level and women’s role in peacebuilding is relegated to the private domain” (Hudson, 2021) still seems to be in place in Kisumu County. In addition, despite political protests and subsequent insecurities on the streets, female peacebuilders preach for peace online. Lastly, female peacebuilders strive to mitigate GBV by creating a more gender equal society with a gender-just peace (Björkdahl, 2012). Therefore, they are addressing inequalities of intimate partner violence, incest, rape and early pregnancies by organizing prevention meetings, teaching mediation skills and educating on psychosocial support. All things considered, it can be concluded that female peacebuilders try to shape local peace and security processes by mitigating insecurities and addressing economic and gender inequalities as well as political tensions.

Thirdly, the conclusion is supported by findings on how female peacebuilders reflect on their role in local peace and security processes. In answer, reflections of female peacebuilders show that they continue to push for space to build the peaceful society they envision. As I adopted a feminist

perspective, gendered inequalities of the patriarchal society are uncovered (Hudson, 2021), which show that female peacebuilders are working in gendered hierarchical working conditions. Female peacebuilders struggle in their lack of representation in policy-formulation due to traditional gender norms, similar to what Okech (2022) identified. Specifically young women feel intimidated when entering decision-making rooms. These struggles are in line with the gendered power hierarchies that Blomqvist et al. (2021) found to be in place after post-conflict transformations. In addition, there is lack of recognition for the peace work of women. As peacebuilding was associated with religious leaders and men, young women who try to mitigate conflict are not judged by their competences but diminished to their gender. Recognition of their peace work is thus not a given and female peacebuilders are actively trying to create legitimacy. From their narratives, they built legitimacy through emphasising their knowledge about local conflicts, wholesome solutions, central position in the communities, convincing power and problem-solving skills. Then, they use this created legitimacy to access the public domain of peace and security decision-making. It can therefore be concluded that female peacebuilders strive to take on new positions that contest patriarchal structures in order to spread a gender agenda. Taken together, in their reflections, female peacebuilders argue they have to create their own window of opportunity, mentioned by Clarke (2017), which might finally be cracked open for them to represent a gender agenda.

When discussing the Kisumu context, it can be concluded that listening to women's lived experiences in everyday peacebuilding contributes to a much-needed discussion about the complexities of conflict. Conflict does not exclusively take the form of armed conflict or direct violence but is also manifested in people's personal vulnerabilities and everyday insecurities. By including the perspective of female peacebuilders on daily conflict and insecurities in their own communities, one gets a better understanding of what conflict on the ground entails. From that knowledge, efforts of peacebuilding on a local level can be implemented in an inclusive manner, taking into account the local context and local actors. This everyday and emancipatory peacebuilding may revolve around tolerance and coexistence rather than ambitious forms of conflict transformation, according to Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013).

The insights from this research are instrumental in eradicating the distance between the local, national and international WPS agenda. The UNSCR 1325 is still viewed to be top-down policy drawn up by men, as argued by several critical feminists (Cohn, 2008; Shepherd, 2011), and mostly urges women to join the negotiation table. However, I studied what women on the ground actually deem important in the creation of peace and security. From their perceptions, experiences and narratives, it becomes evident that their form of peacebuilding often does not even involve a so-called decision-making table. Instead of discussions around a table, they use local networks and inter-personal communication to build peace. Instead of aiming for world peace, they wish for security in their neighbourhood. Instead of discussing solutions to armed conflict with military personal, they try to build peace within their homes and their communities, together with the population. By outlining local experiences of insecurities and peacebuilding, this thesis shapes an understanding of local needs in regard to peace and security. This is useful for inclusive gender-just policy-formulation of for example the next KNAP. Focus on the local then creates an acknowledgement of voices from below, which become emancipated (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). In that sense, this research might create what Roberts (2012) proposes to be 'popular peace', which acknowledges, hears and responds to everyday popular needs. Such research can be the basis of a democratization of peacebuilding by rendering it genuinely participatory, so that the will of the society is reflected in the nature of the peace to be built.

8.1 Limitations

The empirical results reported should be considered in the light of some limitations. This thesis research has, similar to all studies, limitations regarding the methodology and my own bias. Instead of being reluctant these limitations, acknowledging and discussing the limitations strengthens the conclusions and informs further research.

First, methodological limitations include a bias regarding sampling. Nonprobability sampling was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with peacebuilders, human rights advocates and champions for gender equality at organizations in civil society. WOVOP, the host organization, has consulted their network of civil society to find informants that fit the characteristics of the study population, thereby colouring the sample. This limitation was insurmountable because locating local peacebuilders is difficult for an external party like myself. Nevertheless, I tried to minimise this bias by visiting different communities, slums and organizations in Kisumu County as well as speaking to peacebuilders who work on the national, county, sub-county and local level. Additionally, the limitation is minimised as my fieldwork experience showed that civil society in Kisumu County is in close contact with each other. For example, when asking informants for chain referral, they often recommended to speak to the same female peacebuilders as WOVOP had advised.

In addition, the primary limitation of this study is the limited time in the field. As I had to leave the field early due to a family emergency, I spend three weeks in Kisumu County. Even though I was able to speak with fourteen informants in person, findings might be time specific. This became clear when the political demonstrations started after I left the field in March 2023. Luckily, I was able to hold two additional online interviews about the pressing situation to make the findings more complete.

Nevertheless, one can question whether the three weeks were enough time to build rapport with the informants. I did my best by following the three actions that Norman (2009) dictates to be crucial when building trust between a researcher and the informants. First, cognitive trust refers to rational ways of getting trusted, for example via my affiliation with WOVOP. Second, an emotional relationship with WOVOP and the informants was established over time. I started the process of building a relationship with WOVOP before entering the field, by having close contact with representatives through videocalls and WhatsApp. This resulted in a very warm welcome when I arrived in Kisumu County and joining them in the office. Building an emotional relationship with the informants was more challenging. Even though I texted or called the informants before and after the semi-structured interview, most of them, I only saw once. As said, I tried to search for common ground between the informants and me by emphasizing my identity aspects of being a young female. For example, I would engage in small talk before the interview and ask about their well-being or how their weekend was to make them feel at ease. Whether this was enough to create emotional openness and connection is unknown. Third, actions of the researcher informed behavioural trust, according to Norman (2009). In the field, I created a trustworthy attitude by showing genuine interest in people's lives and listening to their stories. When writing the report, I tried to capture the narratives of the female peacebuilders as close to their reality as possible, by putting their quotes on the forefront. I hope I did justice to what the informants told me, especially because one of them said: "we see people like you coming out, doing research and putting on the table what is happening. In Europe, the majority of people don't know what happens in Africa and sometimes we see some writings being written about Africa and we think: 'has this person ever been to Africa?' Because you're giving a picture of something that is not real" (02). Therefore, writing up the findings and analysis with the narratives of the informants as central theme was very important to me.

8.2 Recommendations for further research

This study can be interpreted as a first step in research on the role of female peacebuilders in local peace and security processes through a feminist everyday peacebuilding lens. However, the findings of this study should be treated with caution due to the limited time of fieldwork and context-specific research in Kisumu County. Further research could be directed at how the different layers of actors as outlined by Lederach (1997) and Angom (2018) experience, shape and reflect on their role regarding the WPS agenda. That research could therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of how the different levels of decision-making – local, regional, national and international – could work together to create more inclusive and effective policies. It could for example inform the next KNAP, whereby everyday peacebuilding experiences are taken into account in the national peace and gender agenda.

In addition, the findings of this study provide better understanding about how women experience conflict and insecurities on the ground and how female peacebuilders mitigate those. I suggest that further research expands the study population to include more perspectives from the local level in order to get a wholesome understanding. For example, it might be interesting to include the perspectives of traditional peacebuilders, such as religious leaders and men, on how they experience the fact that women are entering the peace and security domain. The male informant I spoke to in person opened my eyes to this perspective, as his narratives were rather different compared to the stories I recorded from female peacebuilders. While the scope of this thesis did not allow me to take into account the perspective of men or religious leaders as traditional actors in peacebuilding, this could certainly add to a wholesome understanding of local peace and security processes.

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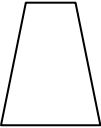
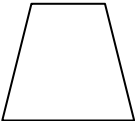
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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Model of peacebuilding participation

Table 2

Peacebuilding Participation Model of Actors and Activities. Source: Combination of Lederach's Pyramid Framework (1997) and Angom (2018).

	Types of actors Lederach (1997)	Types of actors Angom (2018)	Peacebuilding activities
Top leadership 	Military, political, religious leaders with high visibility	Women with visibility	High-level negotiations, mediation, negotiation, emphasis on ceasefire and peace
Middle leadership 	Leader respected in sectors, ethnic or religious leaders, academics, humanitarian leaders	National women civil society organizations, international and humanitarian organizations	Problem-solving workshops, training in conflict resolution, peace commissions, education, research
Grassroots leadership 	Local leaders, leaders of indigenous communities, community developers, local health officials, refugee camp leaders	Women indigenous NGOs, women grassroots organizations, women in local political office	Grassroots training, prejudice reduction, psycho-social work in post-war trauma, capacity-building, local peace commissions, training, documentation

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview guide

1. Introduction of the researcher and the research questions
2. Informed consent

Before the interview, there are some important points to consider:

 - Participation as informant is anonymous, voluntary and not paid.
 - Informants can leave the study and retreat informed consent at any time for any reason if they wish to do so without any consequences.
 - The semi-structured interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to transcribe it. The recording will be stored safely and deleted 5 years after the final thesis report is handed in.
 - The thesis will be published in the thesis library of the Wageningen University and Research and shared with WOVOP. The informant may also receive the thesis.
 - The informant has the opportunity to ask clarifying questions at any time.
3. Creating a safe environment
 - I will ask some questions about personal experiences as a peacebuilder. There are no right or wrong answers – it is about sharing knowledge. Informants are also allowed to refrain from answering a question.
4. Introduction of the informant
 - Name, age, occupation, other relevant introduction
5. Semi-structured questions:
 - About conflict and insecurities
 - How would you describe the state conflict in Kisumu County?
 - How do grassroots women experience these conflicts?
 - About peacebuilding
 - How would you describe local peace and security processes?
 - How do you engage in those?
 - About the female peacebuilder
 - What does peacebuilding mean to you? Why is it relevant?
 - Do you experience challenges in your peace work?
 - Do you see opportunities because you are a female peacebuilder?
 - About gender norms
 - How would you describe gender norms in Kisumu County?
 - How do you deal with those gender norms? Do you see challenges or opportunities?
 - Do you see a connection between your peace work and gender norms?
6. Wrapping up
 - Is there anything else you want to tell me?
7. Snowball sampling
 - Do you know anyone else that might be interested in talking with me?
8. Thank you and gift.