Children in peace-building and violence during political instability in a Kenyan informal settlement.

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CHILDREN IN PEACE BUILDING AND VIOLENCE DURING POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN A KENYAN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Despite increasing attention to a wide range of actors in conflict in the scholarly literature, the roles and experiences of children have been largely considered only in terms of their victimhood. Similarly, in global policy discourses, children and youth are predominantly understood in relation to their vulnerability and the protection of their rights, or alternatively as a threat to security (as is notable in ideas around the so-called youth bulge and violence). In this paper, we contribute to the emerging literature within peacebuilding that considers children both as actors in conflict and as potential agents of change. In particular, we link these arguments to debates about individual and community resilience in settings of regularised or long-term violence and how children navigate through challenging relationships.

Drawing on recent semi-structured interviews with community members who were classified as children during the events and older CBO youth leaders in Kibera, Nairobi, we examine perceptions and understandings of children's involvement in peacebuilding and in violence during the contested elections of 2017 in Kenya. Our findings highlight how children connect with interethnic resentments and aggressive behaviour or develop higher levels of agency, in terms of overcoming such social learning and of peacebuilding activities. How children behave during the period of election tensions is being shaped by differing relationships and experiences, which are interwoven within ethnic, gender and place identifications. The paper concludes with considerations of children within peacebuilding and violent processes in the forthcoming 2022 elections.

'Youthing' peacebuilding

Despite increasing attention to a wide range of peacebuilding actors in the scholarly literature, the roles and experiences of children have been largely considered only in terms of their victimhood. This is mirrored, in global policy discourses about children and youth, by a focus on vulnerability and the need for protection from aggressive behaviour (McEvoy-Levy 2011). In line with this perspective, young people are often rendered passive in discussions of violence that affects them and of possible solutions towards peace (Berents 2015, Dixon 2012, Podder 2015).

The binary opposite to this vulnerability lens is a vision of young people as dangerous and a threat to security (McEvoy-Levy 2011, Podder 2015). Within academic work and subsequently in global policy, this has been expressed in the idea of the so-called 'youth bulge', which links fast growing youth populations with pressures on infrastructure, education and jobs and concomitant political instability and violence. Since the inception of the term, youth bulge studies in a wide range of contexts have demonstrated that such demographics, while not making revolution or rebellion inevitable, increase the risk of political instability under certain conditions, particularly where there is economic decline or stagnation (Kimari, Melchiorre, and Rasmussen 2020). Moreover, in the particular context of post-conflict societies or those experiencing chronic political violence, young people represent significant conflict legacies, for example in terms of health and mental health, education and economic development (Podder 2015).

It is important to appreciate that young people's experiences of conflict and their potential roles in peacebuilding are more complex than suggested by the above positions. Recognising the agency of youth (see for example Jeffrey 2012), but rejecting the victim-perpetrator binary, in this paper we adapt the youth-inclusive framework for theorising peacebuilding developed by Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) to incorporate children. This theoretical framework is based on three spheres of youth enquiry that we extend to include children:

- how peacebuilding is 'youthed', that is to say, socially constructed around age-based divisions, interests and ideologies
- how peace is narrated by or through youth
- how local and global power structures enable or hinder everyday youth peace building practices.

Berents and McEvoy-Levy's (2015) framework is grounded in recent arguments around the so-called 'local turn in peacebuilding' and, more specifically, debates about everyday peace. This literature posits that peacebuilding often involves externally designed and elite driven interventions in national peace processes that exclude the voices of marginal and subaltern groups. Over the past decade or so, critical peacebuilding scholars have begun to question this so-called 'liberal peace' paradigm, recognising that sustainable peace needs to include the agency of local and communal actors and involves bottom-up and everyday processes (MacGinty 2014, MacGinty and Richmond 2013, Brewer et al 2018).

While this literature has demonstrated that free markets and good governance, among others, are inherent to a universalising western liberal model of peacebuilding, the values of protectionism and adultism are just as essential to the liberal peace, but far less frequently critiqued. Dixon (2012: 5) draws attention to the significance of such discourses to peacebuilding:

> *Liberal childhood is defined by protection, vulnerability, and subordination to adults. It constructs a narrative of a childhood that presents young people as 'not fully formed yet' in relation to adults and as such can be used to justify the imposition of external, 'expert-led' interventionism in liberal peace where young people are involved.*

These discursive framings matter, firstly, because they obscure the socially and culturally contingent definitions of children and adults and the complex experiences of young people that are affected by conflict and violence. Secondly, they shape whose knowledges are seen as legitimate in peace processes

(Dixon 2012). Finally, as highlighted by recent literature on the child in global politics in the field of international relations, children and childhood are used for political and military purposes as an 'emotional sphere against which to normalise and legitimise violence' (Brocklehurst, cited in McEvoy-Levy 2011: 162). Consequently, when children are discovered to be fighting within conflicts their actions are considered to stem from coercion with little or no agency (Klaus 2020). Children's passivity often tends to be interwoven with women's experiences inside paternalist narrative. This is noticeable in Kenyan examples such as when the Kenyan President Moi claimed in 1991 that his opponents intended to destabilize the country and 'women and children would suffer the most in the event of chaos' (cited in Haugerud 1997: 27). The victimhood of children is also noticeable throughout key stages in Kenyan development. During the struggle for independence children were killed during attacks by Mau Mau on families of perceived collaborators and in attacks on Mau Mau groups which, wa Kinyatti (2010) claims, included sexually assaulting girls and boys. Children were also held in special British detention centres for those suspected of taking the Mau Mau oath (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966).

Alongside these events, reports can be discovered of children becoming more proactively engaged. For instance, Mau Mau organised political sessions at schools, advising on discipline, commitment and sacrifice and High School children took the anti-colonialist oath. Children aged between 12 and 17 have been claimed to have 'participated in great numbers in every aspect of the armed struggle' (wa Kinyatti 2010: 140). The involvement of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys in rebel groups and other participants who were described elsewhere as being largely aged 16 to 30 are also recorded in Anderson (2006). There is further documented evidence concerning the involvement of those who today would be considered children. Wa Kinyatti (2010: 216) refers to a letter, addressed to the leader Dedan Kimathi, from a 17-year-old girl who had joined the armed struggle in order to avoid a marriage to an 'enemy of my country'. Some of the under 18-year-old

children appear to have aroused attention principally because, after being caught for alleged activism, they were imprisoned rather than executed. The reasoning provided for the lesser penalty has been that the perpetrators were aged less than 18 years old. For example, the male leader of an attack on three young women, who were considered collaborators, was aged 17 as was a male who participated in an attack on the colonial forces (Anderson 2006). In a separate case, a female fighter was reported to have been imprisoned rather than being executed, like her caught comrades, because she was under the age of 18. Younger children were also reported such as a 12-year-old girl who stood trial alongside four older males for having brought food to their hideout (Anderson 2006). Other accounts fit the victim narrative, such as a sixteen-year-old female student who describes being abducted by Mau Mau (Anderson 2006). Therefore, historical evidence of involvement of children in violence within Kenyan politics exists. Since the independence struggle, such details of children's participation in past or present peacebuilding or in violence are lacking. Locating children in recent peacebuilding processes and violent activities becomes the central challenge to this paper.

A bottom-up and everyday perspective might be particularly useful in analysing young people's, including children's, encounters with violence and their roles in peacebuilding because, while structurally marginalised and often unable to affect broad change, 'their experiences of insecurity, violence and risk are mediated by their ability to affect small changes in their everyday lives' (Berents 2015: 195). Mainstream discourses of children and peace are unlikely to address questions of young people's own agency and their (everyday) contributions to peace. Conversely, recent research from a range of conflict/ post-conflict contexts demonstrates the active and critical involvement of youth, if not children, in peacebuilding activities.The research also draws attention to oppressive nature of power structures in which young people are situated in conflict and beyond and that hinder their actions (see for example the Special Issue in Peacebuilding 2015, Vol. 3, No. 2). Such analysis should not exclude the agency of youth. For instance, Turner's (2015) study of everyday politics of peace in a rural traditional community in South Africa examines the ways in which youth activists have sought to tackle multiple forms of violence, both structural and direct, to empower community residents and to promote justice. Similarly, Berents' (2015) research with conflict-affected young people in a peri-urban barrio community near Bogota, Colombia, develops the concept of embodied everyday peace, which she understands as securing practices of everyday resilience in the context of ongoing violence. Such practices serve to minimise risk and provide mutual support for young people and they constitute 'meaningful actions towards bodily security and community endeavours for peace' (Berents 2015: 196).

In the aftermath of conflict young people are often a driver of regime change but do not necessarily have adequate opportunities to fully participate in politics. Research on youth political citizenship in Guatemala and Timor-Leste distinguishes three factors that influence specific patterns of youth participation in democratic systems, encompassing civic and political engagement: context, control and challenge (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). Context refers to the different issues in which youth are participating politically or in a civic capacity, for example community service, environmentalism, cultural activities, sports or human rights. Control is the extent to which youth activity is controlled or guided by adults, such as youth wings of political parties, labour unions or religious groups. Such organisations are typically very hierarchical and aim to integrate youths into existing forms of participation, as Kurtenbach and Pawelz (2015) note. Challenge refers to ways in which horizontal, autonomous, self-organised youth groups question and contest the structures and age-based hierarchies of adult organisations. Although challenge does incorporate autonomous youth organisations, the overall framework adopted is more formalised than the community peace groups operating in Kibera. Consequently, in our adaption, outlined below, we

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extend the factors to incorporate more informal, looser and spontaneous groupings across community and children's activities.

This brief summary of recent studies on youth in peacebuilding reflects the focus of the local turn literature on the power and legitimacy of younger people directly affected by conflict and violence. It is problematic to employ an uncritical or simple notion of 'the local', however: it can be conflated with professional civil society or liberal NGOs (Paffenholz 2010), and it can be romanticising resistance against 'liberal' international actors while underplaying the power of local and national elites (Paffenholz 2015). When 'the local' is seen as automatically more empowering, there is a danger that issues of power are neglected, not only in relation to age dynamics but also to gender dynamics or politics. Youth peacebuilding programs can potentially challenge existing norms around achieving gender equity in participation and perhaps improve options for building peace (Pruitt 2015). However, girls remain a typically more excluded group from peace processes and formal political participation, with youth programmes often male-dominated, while women's organisations are usually led by and aimed at older females (Sommers, cited in Pruitt 2015). It has also been shown, in research on peacebuilding projects in Australia and Northern Ireland, that girls' actual contributions to peacebuilding tend to be overlooked and that they might find greater barriers to recognition and participation in youth-led social movements, such as sexism, exclusion and attempts to '"fix" girls by teaching them to engage with boys on their terms' (Pruitt 2013: 59). Research on participation in more general community youth activities demonstrates that activities, though aimed at all, eventually become appropriated and dominated by boys (Baker and Cohen, cited in Pruitt 2015). Pruitt's (2015: 169) study of youth peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia, is unusual in that their leaders were mostly girls, finding that gender norms place limitations on participation in peacebuilding, but that programmes can be adapted in sensitive, reflexive and culturally relevant ways to become more inclusive by 'developing an everyday, gender-inclusive hospitality'.

A further relevant consideration in the literature on youth in contexts of conflict and violence is around resilience. It is well documented that exposure to war, adversity or trauma has adverse direct effects on young children and young people, including physical and mental health impacts. Childhood trauma associated with war disrupts young people's senses of safety and self-worth and increases levels of shame, emotional stress and propensity to engage in destructive behaviours (Atkinson et al., in Massad et al. 2018). However, trauma exposure does not necessarily have such outcomes, and resilience frameworks can be used to identify what makes children who grow up with long term political violence resilient and have healthy psycho-social functioning. Importantly, a distinction can be made between 'passive resilience', focusing on recovery and reconstruction, and 'transformational resilience', which adds value by addressing underlying risks and vulnerabilities. Massad et al (2018) examine the United Nations Community Mental Health Project in the West Bank, Palestine, that transitioned from using a medical model (implying that pathological effects of war can be 'cured' via the individual treatment of a child) to a psycho-social one (where children have the capacity to adapt or bounce back despite threatening circumstances). This resilience model was seen as helpful, especially when actors were open to mobilising social and community capital that already exists in Palestine, essentially leveraging community resilience (ibid: 288).

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Youth mobilisation in Kenya

Turning now to the specific context of Kenya, the country is an example of the demographic trends described earlier: 70% of the population is below 30 years of age and those aged between 15 and 24 account for 20.3% of the population (Kimari, Melchiorre, and Rasmussen 2020). The age classification of young people and children

varies across countries and international organisations with boundaries shifting. In Kenya, childhood reaches 18 years of age. Wamucii and Idwasi (2011) describe the differences that exist within the same age group according to gender, ethnicity, education and socio-economics. Moreover, there are physical ambiguities concerning the size and physique of older children and youths which has been highlighted in our 2022 fieldwork and is explained below. In the interviews, a male youth leader highlights these difficulties when physically identifying the ages of people participating in demonstrations. The tendency is to assume the demonstrators are youth. However, 'you can find someone who's 14, but he has a big body. You think he's a grown up but still young'.

Ambiguities are compounded by disruptions to previous rites of passage and accompanying roles and responsibilities (ibid). Moreover, the extension of schooling and delayed economic independence creates different expectations for these students compared with children who leave school early and are expected to enter the informal economy to help support families. The early school leavers are adopting adult responsibilities which are most noticeable, as Wamucci and Idwasi (2011) explain, for children living on the streets or during times of war and, we add, electoral conflict.

Conversely, residents of Kibera characterise many of these older boys and young men both as 'idlers' and 'idleness' and as one of the main drivers of electoral violence. This perception of young men as dangerous, although not necessarily accurate, is 'an often-heard repertoire in Kenya when it comes to explaining political violence and other social ills' (Van Stapele 2016: 309). For example, there had been a raft of short-lived programmes targeting unemployed youth in the wake of the 2007/08 post-election crisis, evidencing this very argument of young unemployed men as perpetrators of political violence (Lynch 2018). Contrary to people's widely held perceptions around 'idleness', young men in Kibera often spend long days out on the streets looking for work. They make themselves available wherever economic opportunities arise, as a growing literature on 'hustling', economic uncertainties and survival in Nairobi's informal settlements demonstrates (Thieme 2016, Thieme 2018, Van Stapele 2021). Rather, this scholarship argues, the 'hustle' can be understood as an expression of the struggles and agency of urban youth in Kenya (and elsewhere in sub Saharan Africa) and their practices of belonging, resistance and hope (Thieme, Ference and van Stapele 2021).

In Kenya, young people have been increasingly marginalised in the multi-party era (Kagwanja 2005) and generational tensions have existed since independence. For example, Kagwanja (2005: 53) details the rise of the Mungiki movement as a 'tragic story of the powerlessness of Africa's young people' and its descent into violence, as an example of generational struggles over power and youth identity.

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part of student movements, human rights-based grassroots organizations, or vigilante groups and criminal gangs' (Kimari, Melchiorre and Rasmussen 2020: 695). This ties into the above-mentioned global discourse around the menace of the youth bulge and local and global securitisation (ibid., also see King et al. 2020). As a result, the narrative of power-hungry politicians outsourcing violence beyond state agencies to marginalised poor youth is obscuring how

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'state-sanctioned neo-patrimonial logics reproduce youth politics as radical' (Rasmussen and van Stapele 2020: 724). Rasmussen and Van Stapele's (2020) ethnographic work in two informal settlements in Nairobi demonstrates that youth politics in these locations is more heterogenous and agentic. Focusing on political mobilisation around the 2017 elections, complex dynamics of participation, redistribution and recognition are discussed in terms of Kupona ('recovery' or 'healing' in Kiswahili). Used by young people in the study to highlight their marginalisation ('being sick or unwell') in relation both to Kenyan politics and the state, youth groups used the term to reflect on their role of agents or security providers for local politicians as well as their wish for inclusion, recognition and re-distribution.

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Kibera during violent election times

Fieldwork for this study was carried out in Kibera, approximately three kilometres from the centre of Nairobi, which is Kenya's, and one of Africa's, largest informal settlements. Population estimates range from 177,000 according to the Kenya Population and Census Report and 2.6 million according to some local residents (Barosa 2011). Kibera was one of the places where conflict that followed the contested 2007 Presidential elections was particularly damaging with many lives lost, people displaced and properties and businesses destroyed (Barasa 2011, de Smedt 2009). For Barosa (2011: 43), examples in Kibera showed, Kenya was 'reaping the fruits of ignoring its youth' in particular their unemployment, poverty and economic marginalisation which 'makes them susceptible to recruitment into gangs that are often used in political and electoral disputes' (Ndung'u and Wepundi 2012: 7). When applying the youth's involvement to Kurtenbach and Pawelz' (2015) factors that influence participation, it is apparent that some challenging activities were beyond adult control. Activities such as attending rallies, disrupting rival events and confronting opposition groups are often under the control of political leaders (de Smedt 2009). Nevertheless, although youths were encouraged to disrupt and be mobilised in opposition to either the election result, retaliation or in defence of the outcome, these actions appear to have extended beyond the control of the politicians.

Intersecting with age distinctions are notions of masculinity and femininity that have informed gender behaviours and attitudes in many places in Kenya, including Kibera, during times of conflict (Kihato 2015). Sexual violence is, for both security forces and ethnic gangs, a fundamental part of targeting a particular community (Robins 2011). For instance, in addition to looting, displacement and attacks on rival ethnic groups, there were widespread reports of women and girls being raped (de Smedt 2009). While a far larger proportion of victims of postelection sexual violence have been female, forced circumcision and male castration were reported during the periods of electoral violence, with Luo

men who are from an uncircumcised ethnic group being particularly targeted (Krause 2020). Mungiki were reported to have subjected rival males to forcible circumcision and genitalia mutilation (Barosa 2011). And by circumcision or mutilation, the male victims and their ethnicity were feminized. Attacks of this nature connected into the ethnic beliefs of the attacking Kikuyus that the uncircumcised Luos were 'boys' irrespective of their age as witnessed by some of the references to the then 62-year-old Presidential challenger and Luo Raila Odinga (Kihato 2015). These actions challenge the dominant societal and community perceptions of gender roles more generally and victims of post-election violence specifically. Stereotypical challenges can also be found in the roles of women who are either invisible in reports or perform gender related roles. Kihato (2015) identifies how women were actively involved in different ways during the conflict ranging from more expected support roles such as feeding the fighting men to spying, identifying 'enemy' homes to target and attacking opponents. It has also been common for women to publicly shame men who are reluctant to fight (ibid.) thus encouraging men to perform hegemonic masculinities.

Study Design

The fieldwork built upon a 2018 project into peace building during the 2017 elections in Kibera (Gibson et al. 2021, Vertigans et al. forthcoming). The 2018 fieldwork was carried out in different phases based around the qualitative methods of photovoice, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Through such methods nineteen participants were enabled to share their experiences initially through capturing photographs and then through semi structured interviews in the words of 30 participants. A third phase incorporated 11 additional in-depth interviews with women in Kibera with greater focus on how they had experienced the period of electoral tensions. Key findings included the significance of messages of peace, place attachment to Kibera, the reinforcement of the past, peace in the everyday and the interweaving nature of relationships and activities in peacebuilding.

In the 2018 participants' accounts, aside from the need to be protected, children did not feature within experiences of either violence or peacebuilding. The 2022 research was more directive in the questioning to consider whether the youth inclusive framework can also incorporate children in peacebuilding. Conversely, we also wanted to explore the involvement of children in violent protests to better understand the range of experiences and to determine whether the peacebuilding and conflict literature needed to be more cognisant of the proactive roles of children.

Our 2022 fieldwork into reflections about the experiences of children, their anxieties, involvement in peacebuilding and engagement in violence was carried out in January, during a visit to Nairobi, and early February 2022. Six female and ten male participants were interviewed, using semi structured questioning. The 16 were also divided into two categories: 'child' at the time of the 2017 elections and youth leader. Six 'children' and ten youth leaders were interviewed. The 'children' consisted of four girls and two boys, while the youth leaders were two females and eight males. Participants had been living in four of the 13 villages in Kibera at the time of the elections: Laini Saba, Olympic, Silanga and Soweto. Two of the youth leaders had previously lived in Katwekera. Ethnically, the participants were from Kalenjin, Kamba, Kikuyu, Luhya and Luo backgrounds with one participant not wanting to be associated with tribal identification. No discernible differences were noticed according to ethnic identification although this may have been a consequence of the low numbers interviewed for each ethnicity. The one exception was from two Luo community leaders who were able to provide rich insights into Katwekera and Luo activities that other participants lacked. Because time constraints did not allow for all the interviews to be carried out by the authors in January, four

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of the youth leaders, after following the necessary protocols, interviewed each other. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Research findings: 2018 Phase

During our 2018 fieldwork, peace work in Kibera during the run up to the 2017 elections included a wide range of activities, spanning interethnic dialogues, workshops and forums, training and capacity-building, sports, arts, competitions and tournaments, door-to-door peace education, work programmes and road shows. For example, sporting activities such as football, boxing and dance involved young people, bringing together different communities and creating a space for organisers to talk about peace after tournaments or competitions. In relation to the arts, drama groups, poetry and live music established spaces for interaction in which non-violence could be promoted: 'the message from the music was teaching you to forget about the past and the importance of togetherness' (Participant in 2018 study). Study participants spoke about the value of seminars, fora and workshops in bringing together people from different villages and political and ethnic backgrounds,

> *We put youths together in groups, we talk to them the importance of bringing peace because, without putting them together, they have different thinking. They can even kill, but if you put them together, you teach them the importance of bringing peace, they really understand.*

Between August and November, at various crises points between and after the two Presidential votes, study participants were moreover actively involved in early warning and rapid response activities and some of the women we interviewed in phase three of the 2018 study organised peace vigils.

This, peace work ahead of the 2017 elections both explicitly (through targeted activities) and implicitly (through peace messaging and a generalised discourse about violent masculinities) addressed this group of Kibera residents in their peace work. Being 'idle', as outlined above, was frequently identified as making (young) people susceptible to violence:

> *The best thing was, make them busy, organize seminars, workshops get them into some activities which they can do just for them to pass their time and forget about destruction because you know the devils mind is the devils workshop and the other time [during PEV of 07/08] they were doing that because they were totally idle and they were being paid to harass people by the big politicians.*

2022 Findings

Following analysis of the 2022 research into children's experiences and activities, a number of common themes were identified during the preceding literature review across the participants, namely organisation, insecurities, context, control and challenge and resilience.

Organization

Resources, or lack of, were reported by youth leaders to be fundamental in determining whether peace programmes should be developed and, if so, what the scale of activities could be. This 2022 phase of the fieldwork highlighted the local level of peace building with community organisation arranging events and meetings. Although some community leaders did refer to the background and funding roles of NGOs, the community members rarely mentioned international organisations. Within the 2022 recollections about organisational involvement in the 2017 elections, a couple of leaders made a notable addition when outlining the coordination of some activities by the National Cohesion Integration Commission. Overall, though, participants emphasised the contributions of multiple local institutions in peacebuilding events that were organised for or included children. For instance, they referred to the role of community workers and schools, where children were told 'we should just concentrate and pray … . And we were told … that during the election, people should stay at their home' (Female, 'child' during election).

Despite their involvement, resources were reported by community leaders to restrict whether activities occurred and, if so, how extensive. As a male youth leader explained,

> *Sometimes they don't have the resources because in order to create a peaceful event, you have to have some resources that includes money, include papers, pens and also those children, they'll be there like six to seven hours. You have to provide them with lunch. It is difficult for the school to organise it.*

Another male leader outlined how,

> *These things also need some kind of financial organisation. You cannot just walk into 10 schools … it is always good when you're going to those schools you buy them maybe a small milk packet. So as they drink, you are passing your message. The school head might also be happy to see our children having some milk … it works like that.*

Experiences of Insecurities

When asking about the peacebuilding events, the recent history of electoral violence in Kibera was said to inform emotions and activities for the 'children' and 'youth leaders'. Levels of tension and stress were mentioned by most of the participants with some describing the continuing impact across the elongated 2017 Presidential elections. With the election approaching, 'we feared that the war may start again' (Male, 'child').

> *The children don't feel safe … they.. always see the atmosphere changing. Things are no longer peaceful the way they used to be. Each candidate is trying to press up. Some of the language they use is scary. So these children … some of them are not peaceful (Male, youth leader).*

Al-Shabaab has particularly distinguished itself as one of the most advanced users of communication technology in terrorism and violent extremism.

Some of the fears at the time explicitly concerned gender-based violence against girls. These fears were largely expressed by youth leaders and a male 'child' whose sister stayed at home 'until the election period was over. Because we were feeling like girls are very vulnerable. They can be raped.' Incidents concerning the forced circumcision and castration described above, were not mentioned by any participant.

When asked why boys were allowed outside and their sisters had to remain indoors, a male youth captured the essence of the responses when saying, 'Because in African culture, we believe boys are more strong, if anything happens they can run away. But a girl child, if anything happens she can fall down because she is weak and maybe secondly she can be raped'. And reinforcing gender roles, such as the acceptability for boys to form protection gangs, contributes to them feeling, 'like they're now the big bosses. They feel like everyone is scare[d] of them.'

Alongside reporting the violence, some participants mentioned consequences such as closing schools which created mixed responses. As one male youth leader explained,

> *As much as in there was fear, you would meet these kids heading home or at home and playing and ask them why they're not in school and they would happily actually respond … when kids don't go to school they are happy.*

Other participants, including this female, who was a child during the elections, mentioned, 'we preferred to be safe than education. So by that time the academic syllabus went behind … And we wasted a lot of time.'

The past and expectations around village hotspots also led to different activities and tensions for children. For those living in predominantly Luo opposition supporting areas, where election results have been most contested, the atmosphere was reported to be angry with violent outbursts that incorporated some children. By comparison, in the non-Luo areas where most of the participants lived, there was fear of being attacked by Luo groups. A female who was a child at the time recalled thinking 'what goes on if those people [from Katwekera, the village most populated by Luos] now decide to

come to this other side? … Because they used to burn houses, fight, kill each other…. I had a lot of tension'. These fears were initially compounded as rolling news reports provided updates on Luo activities and only subsided when these attacks were reported to have ended and peace was emerging.

After establishing the largely passive nature of children's experiences, especially girls, during the elections, our attention shifts to position their more proactive activities within peace building and processes of violence. To provide structure to the nature of those involvements and shifting relations with adults, Kurtenbach and Pawelz' (2015) three factors of context, control and challenge are applied to help inform how the youth participation model can be adapted for the next generation.

Context

Multiple ways of participating in peacebuilding were reported for children during the 2017 elections. The participants referred to music festivals, singing, swimming, dancing, art, drama, football and boxing events that had been organised for boys and girls aged between 10 and 18. These activities were similar to the findings in the 2018 fieldwork concerning events organised across Kibera for communities. Peace was promoted in multiple ways through artwork with children encouraged to draw peace scenes and singing songs while cultural dancing showcased the different styles of ethnic groups within common themes. Competition was also introduced across the sporting and cultural tournaments with winning teams and individuals. Spectators were united to 'support the talent that is there. Even if they win or they lose, they'll be gifted with something. So that brings parents not to fight or argue' (Female, 'child'). How children were to be involved in events was considered within the planning phase. Different methods to engage children have been employed within the events. This variation is because,

> *A lot of times children do not like lectures … they'll say 'it is boring' Instead there are different models that are being used to spread peace. Children, as you know, they are playful … If you use different techniques to get them, then they're all going to show up (Male, youth leader).*

Despite these activities, there was recognition that programming for children were much fewer. A male leader believed that,

> *Even before election, people speak of peace, but they speak of peace to adults. They don't mind kids. It's like they don't care. They don't think that kids can see and can understand some of these things. Sometimes we open our televisions and watch news when, who is insulting who on tv and our kids are there. Not forgetting when they go back to school, they start calling names … you are that person of Raila. They're just connecting you next to your tribe (Male, youth leader).*

Control

In relation to control, the second factor for Kurtenbach and Pawelz (2015), adults were organising the above events and tournaments. They were also instrumental in transmitting messages of peace. For instance, school principals were instructing children to stay at home during the time of the results, to avoid being outside 'because anything might happen' (Female, 'child'). Staying indoors also required parents 'who are taking care of us and telling us to stay indoors' (Female, 'child'). This instruction tended to be applied mostly to women and daughters, as discussed below, who, with the exception of using washrooms, stayed indoors for a few weeks.

Combining enjoyable pastimes with peace messages led to children participating and being exposed to information they may not otherwise have experienced. Therefore,

> *When you start teaching kids on peace building, those are the things that you were able to fix from a young person understanding where and how to live with one another. It all begins there. If you don't start moulding a child on peace building, you'll never mould that person when he's holding a stone after the election (Male, youth leader).*

With many events accommodating people of different ages, towards the end of the activities some organisers separated adults and children. Messages were adapted according to audience. A number of the activities were also designed to provide children with the skills and interest to disseminate the peace messages which enabled them to take greater control of the messages. One male community leader captures this awareness raising role, when explaining how the different groups have played sports peacefully without fighting and they can live together,

> *Those activities were to teach kids that they are ambassadors of this. When they're taught about peace, when they become peaceful, they can go back home and preach the same peace to their families and even society at large.*

Another male youth leader outlined how someone with his level of experience may be unsuccessful in communicating messages with children. Consequently, 'I look for someone maybe among them, then I coach him or I tell him what to do. So by the time he relays that message, they say like that is coming from one of them.' The children selected were considered role models with those thought controversial not chosen for the role.

Socialising within homes was identified as fundamental in processes of children both becoming involved in peace and violence. When discussing how tribal hatred is transmitted, 'The parents kept telling kids, "this tribe, that tribe"' (Female, youth leader), 'my mom told me not to speak with you' (Male, youth leader) and parents say 'Don't go play with that kid because he's from such a tribe. You should only play with those ones because they are from our tribe' (Male, youth leader). The consequences of parental socialising fed into schooling, with experiences of children adopting their parents' views and singing party slogans on the way to school. Another participant recalled, an incident when at school a child 'went like, "I cannot sit down with a Kikuyu. This Kikuyu has to be moved from where I'm sitting. Kids were used to spread tribal hate'.

Some children were believed to be:

> *Living with your paranoid parents who are still beating you like shit, because the President did not become the President who they expected. … they come and argue in the house. Who did what? Who did that? They hate who? That is directly transferred to that child. When that child goes to school, what do you expect? 'I don't like you because you voted a Kikuyu' (Male, youth leader).*

When discussing the predominantly Luo village of Katwekera, a male youth leader explained that,

> *Whenever violence breaks out, the women are always there. Throwing stones, their husbands. The children are no exception. Because they tend to see, if my mother and father are picking up stones and throwing at the other person, then I should also go the same … if that thing is not tamed there, then these other children of the lower part, will also copy when they see their fellow friends throwing stones.*

The emphasis on the transmission of violence is picked up within wider familial relations with punishments including the denial of food and spanking from parents who are reported to be constantly angry, 'A question will provoke a slap' (Male, youth leader). Moreover, within one-room living accommodation, little is hidden from children such as 'domestic violence where your dad is just beating your mom and being very unloving to them' (Male, youth leader). These divisive and aggressive messages within familial socialising processes were often reinforced within social interactions occurring within place-based relationships that had geographically and ethnically narrowed over recent years. Youth leaders commented on the demographic shifts that followed the 2008 violence, which resulted in some previously mixed villages now being largely ethnically homogenous. After the population movements,

> *It's no longer a cosmopolitan idea, whereby you can have one village having all the tribes. Now like Kikuyus, Kambas, Kisiis, are in Laini Saba. You go to Lindi its Nubians, Makina Nubians, You go to Silanga and Undugu people from the Western. You go to Katwekera, people mostly from Luo. I think when people divided themselves in the villages in that manner brought all the difference down to the kids. The kids are affected by how the setup is at present (Male, youth leader).*

Children also have very different experiences in the extent of their involvement in demonstrations and political violence. Participants referred to some children aged 14 to 17 who were reported to have been hurt, tear gassed and who act as security for politicians, bringing chaos, stealing and throwing stones. 'They start manipulating people there asking them if you can't vote for this person, then you're supposed not be here' (Male, youth leader).

Rather than discourage children from becoming involved, these boys were reported to participate after being offered KES50. Some of the consequences of their involvement were 'a few casualties, children being shot, injuries. … generally our politicians use those young people because they know they are strong, they're energetic, they're chaotic' (Male, youth leader).

And street children were considered to be the most likely both to participate and be targeted by the police. These children were reported to be 'used by people … they don't have food … you may find that this person [politician] … might give them food. So he tells them, can you do this, this for me so I don't lose … sometimes you might find them fighting' (Female, 'child').

Generally, the police are believed not to be aggressive towards children which led one male community leader to consider that this approach was manipulated by 'adults [who] also use kids sometimes as a problem. You realise police will be soft on you if you have kids on the road.' Street children are more vulnerable 'because most of the time they don't have a place to go live in. So like you find those police, some just have a heartless heart. So you may find some beating them, accusing them of things they didn't do' (Female, 'child').

Challenge

Applying the fieldwork data to the third factor of challenge follows the above patterns of involvement in peacebuilding and participating in violence, except this time the children are taking the lead. Hence while not necessarily challenging the system, some participants questioned the sense that children inevitably follow their parental instructions and tribal loyalties. As one male leader explained,

> *Children are innocent … when you tell your [child] that person is such a tribe, don't talk to him or her, the child won't listen because he doesn't understand the language because he's still young.*

When asked for more information concerning the time period when children lose their innocence and become more tribal, the participant estimated around the age of 10. At this life stage, tribal identification becomes stronger and 'I have to avoid this person because he's such a tribe then have to talk with this person because he's such a tribe'. Ten was also identified, by another male (Luo) youth leader, as the youngest age when predominantly Luo boys 'are always there throwing [stones] with the big people … People are just marching screaming. And then you see small boys in-between them'.

Older children were considered by some participants to critically analyse peace talks in schools. Classes aged between eight and eighteen engage with presenters, asking questions and then have the maturity to take forward peace messages into their homes and friendship groups. Moreover, as the earlier example about coaching mentors highlighted, children become empowered, able to connect to their peer audiences through language, behaviour and credibility in ways that older generations cannot. The topics by which children become the voices for the generation includes peacebuilding and daily challenges such as hygiene problems for girls and drug abuse for boys. And with children taking the lead, the community groups realised that messages would be spread within different fora and could permeate into other groups across Kibera.

The importance of friendship groups within processes of pacification was emphasised by participants including this female 'child' who described how tensions arose surrounding the cross-cutting nature of tribal identification and politics. When it is felt 'like we are reaching to a point of maybe fighting or bringing that hatred, sometimes we just say like, okay let us put politics behind us. And we bring that friendship together' by changing focus such as watching a movie.

And two 'boys' (one Kikuyu and the other Luo), who were interviewed together, mentioned that being part of a group together on the streets during the tensions. When asked why instead of following their parents' instruction not to remain friends with 'rival' tribes, the boys had chosen to be part of the same group, they referred to their friendship bond. In particular, 'these elections, they're things that come and go. And this election cannot temper our friendship.'

These male participants described being in groups of between three to ten boys who were on the streets. Reasons provided for why they were outdoors, when girls were staying indoors, drew upon distinctions in gender associated behaviour outlined above and also practicalities such as, 'you just stay close to each other. Don't be alone at that time'... while another male child described how 'we were anxious. Because we feared that maybe even where we were [the village of Laini Saba], that place could be burned up or we beaten by those who were making those demonstrations.'

The belief that children were protesting because they had been told to or had been manipulated, as discussed above under the control factor, is countered by some other 'children' and community leaders. Two male 'children' referred to two orphans who had been their friends who became supporters in political rallies at which they were throwing stones. These street children 'knew what they were doing'. A male community leader outlined how 'the kids were on the streets demonstrating … Did anyone tell the kids it was wrong … No one. Is there anyone who showed up to tell kids that it's wrong to go burning tires on the roads? No one did.'

That no one told the children is challenged by another youth who believed that adults tend to 'push the children away'. Nevertheless, 'there are those children that are very tough headed. They'll still follow the crowd regardless. I have not seen children start like violence in the crowd, but they could be involved in that process where it has already started.' Such differing views of children challenging highlights multiple experiences and activities that under 18-year-olds encounter in Kibera. The myriad of experiences means that seeking to apply a generic understanding of children during electoral tensions would be unfounded.

Resilience in Kibera

Our previous studies have highlighted layers of resilience within Kibera across the youth and adult groups (Vertigans et al. 2020, Gibson et al 2021). Similarly, although not the focal point of this project, resilience features within the 2022 research findings. Children, families and community resources enable a return to 'normality' across the participants. Conscious of the past consequences that have accompanied electoral tensions, families prepared, applying tactics to keep safe indoors which also required pre planning and the purchasing of food and other supplies for the anticipated duration of the self-imposed lockdowns. Updates were provided through television and the social media which helped inform emotions that were highest during the greatest uncertainties and threats of violence. Heightened emotions lessened when politicians 'were saying good things to encourage us on television … that we should make peace. We should not fight and we should pray to God' (Female, 'child').

Resilience is also informed by post-election willingness to separate the political and personal. Such a separation is exemplified by a male community leader who described how people would accept payment to chase away their neighbours from a rival ethnic group. 'Then maybe after some few months, we'll meet again and you greet me … they normally believe it's nothing personal. It's just that job'.

A female 'child' expands on this type of observation when commenting that,

> *After the elections we come together and that we're like okay, the President has been elected, so what next from here? So we need to be together to go to the next step. To be like the community we used to be to help one another. That's what really happens.*

Resilience in children is identified in particular by their willingness to move forward and to return to pre-election relationships and activities as this example from a male community leader highlights:

> *But, you see the beauty with kids is that they forget much easily. You will tell them not to speak with them, but after a few weeks they'll go back. Friends even have fun. They're not affected as the adults will be affected because for them it will reach a point they will forget about it. But the adults, it'll remain with them.*

This resilience will inform how children are involved in, and are affected by, the forthcoming electoral tensions.

Children, Peacebuilding and the 2022 Elections

With the 2022 election approaching, a range of similar activities have been organised for children such as music, art sport and different types of competition. Some participants mentioned that politicians were organising activities with community leaders within programmes telling people to practise peace. Some of the participants in the events were then split into age groups including children, as outlined above, where sensitising fora are held. From these interviewees there was a sense that some politicians were being more responsible in the nature of peace messages that were being communicated. And as one female 'child' observed,

> *There are those who are vying for those seats, that are trying to impose the peace. So they bring up like those football tournaments, like that music, like those seminars to bring people together and tell them the importance of peace.*

Awareness of these events was understandably highest amongst the youth leaders with the 2017 election 'children' less informed. Nevertheless, this group of participants also referenced activities with some concluding such as the preceding female 'child' that,

> *This time around … they're really promoting peace because if they bring up those activities, they bring people together … because like the more we interact with those kids from other places, we share idea. We bring that friendship. So I think this time around it'll be better.*

CONCLUSION

By applying Kurtenbach and Pawlez (2015) three factors for youth participation, we have been able to incorporate the engagement of children across context, control and challenge in a way that extends attempts to learn how peace is 'youthed' to how it is also 'childrened', partly shaped by children and their agency. These findings provide both support and opposition to the main bodies of research into both peacebuilding and violence in which children are either invisible or only noticeable in their passive roles as victims. Some children do fit this passive or victim narrative, with their experiences of emotional difficulties and are neither proactively involved in peace making nor violence. Levels of involvement tended to be restricted to attending community events organised by adults principally to experience sporting or cultural activities with peace messages attached. The largely local organisation of these events is indicative of the bottom up and everyday processes which have only recently been recognised within recent debates about peace-making.

Moreover, children are also more proactively involved than the literature suggests. Within peacebuilding, children are spreading messages at events and within family and peer groups. And children are also organising defence groups to protect their village against perceived threats. Against backgrounds that emphasise the divisive and interweaving nature of tribal identifications and political allegiance, children were disobeying adults to continue with inter-tribal friendship groups. There are indicators that the physical blurring of appearances between some children aged between 14 and 17 compared with those 18 and above means that peacebuilding and violence associated with youth also incorporates children.

None of the participants reported being personally responsible for electoral violence. Nevertheless, there were numerous reports of children being involved in violent actions and participation in demonstrations during the 2017 electoral tensions. Aside from the intended community defenders above, the children involved were considered to either be living on the street and/or from particular parts of Kibera. This distinction in groups involved in violence was also noticeable amongst the 'peaceful' children. Our study has highlighted variations within the experiences of children within the same informal settlement. Intersectional analysis has shown important differences in experiences of anxieties, peacebuilding and participation. Most notably boys are more likely to be proactive both in peace activities and demonstrations with the latter also shaped by geographic location and tribal identification. And male children within Katwekera are described at the opposing end to girls in other villages within the victim-perpetrator binary. These males fit the aggressive angry narrative that is widely applied to dislocated youths within conflict studies.

Because the research was undertaken in January and February 2022, the fieldwork is only a snapshot of peacebuilding programmes at that point. There were promising signs that politicians were being responsible in connecting sponsored programmes with combined manifesto and peace messages. It maybe that there has been a recognition of the appeal to voters of peace messages. The electoral alliances may also undermine some of the longstanding tensions within Kibera. However, there are no grounds for complacency. Peacebuilding events continue to rely on funding which creates pressures especially when connected to funder political expectations. Moreover as the political alignments and fragmentations continue to shift villages that have largely avoided previous electoral violence may become more vulnerable. Whatever unfolds, children will be present through their invisibility behind closed doors, by participating in peacebuilding and carrying out violent acts. Their ideas and behaviours are being shaped by this election and these experiences will inform attitudes and relationships in future years. Consequently, we finish by repeating a particularly pertinent quote from a youth leader, 'It all begins there [childhood]. If you don't start moulding a child on peacebuilding, you'll never mould that person when he's holding a stone after the election'.

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