Breaking Bread: Examining the Intersections of Women, Cooking and Peacebuilding

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Dedication

"This…in its own way a feminist manifesto...dedicated to the millions of women who have spent millennia in kitchens creating unrecognized masterpieces"

–Madeleine Kamman; Chef, Author & Teacher

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to the entire village of women who have raised, taught and fortified me. It is dedicated to every woman who has danced, loved and lost in a kitchen.

My heart is indebted to my partner Colin, who uprooted his life and steadfastly supported me this year and to my best friend and brother Luca.

To the women who unknowingly inspired this research, my mother Bianca Savary and my *nonna*, Bambina Di Carlo.

Finally, this is for my loving dad, to whom every achievement in my life is dedicated.

Abstract

Women are often at the center of our lives and our homes, and a large portion of their lives are dedicated to unpaid and unrecognized labor. This labor is a form of emotional, manual, and symbolic care work which is necessary to sustaining life in the everyday. In the absence of direct violence (what some may call "peace"), women shoulder the burden of social reproduction while facing forms of structural violence which makes security more difficult to achieve. The structural obstacles which prevent women from achieving security before conflict, become exacerbated during and after conflict. For women, even when active violence "ends", structural violence continues, creating a continuum of insecurity in their everyday lives. However, women also find creative and resilient ways to navigate this violence. Women often use care practices like cooking to maintain social relations, achieve food security and sustain peace. Cooking therefore is not just mechanical skill, but a practice embedded in gendered, social, cultural and political meaning. In spite of this, food studies and cooking is under-researched in the field of conflict resolution. This niche intersection of academia constitutes the starting point of this research. This research explores the use of cooking as a method of creating "everyday peace" in their households and communities. Central to this investigation was the desire to emphasize women's voices and their everyday lived experiences.

Keywords: peace, gender, women, peacebuilding, food studies

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Introduction

"The significance of food…is often trivialized by researchers…It is because of the very mundane nature of food and its connection to women's work in the home that this arena…is often overlooked. Food becomes taken for granted" (D-Sylva & Beagan, 2011).

Background

The inquiry which piqued the interest of this research began with the quote above. The kitchen is the hearth of our homes. Dinner tables are sites of celebration, mourning, disagreement, and resolution. In kitchens across the world, women are feeding and caring for others. It seems a massive contradiction that food, a material which is necessary for biological functioning, and which holds so much cultural and emotional currency, could be "overlooked" in the field of conflict and resolution. Yet, upon deeper investigation, women's relationship with food carries many similar contradictions. Women perform the majority of household foodwork and yet experience limited access to food resources. Women are responsible for feeding entire households, but it is sometimes at the risk of their own malnutrition. Women perform this daily, necessary, and skilled labor; and it is often taken for granted (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Hedström, 2021). These contradictions are actually forms of everyday violence that are a daily reality for many women; and during conflict, these contradictions are exacerbated (Lessa & Rocha, 2011).

It is widely recognized that women are the most vulnerable and suffer disproportionately during and after conflict (Hudson, 2009; Saad, 2013). As traditional caretakers, women are responsible for themselves, their children, and the elderly, sick, or disabled household members. Post-conflict, women are at higher risk of malnutrition and food insecurity, face structural obstacles in attaining land rights or credit, and often lack autonomous decision-making power (Ivers & Cullen, 2011; Delgado et al., 2021; Forman, 2016; Hedström & Olivius, 2020; Lessa &

Rocha, 2011; Manchanda, 2005; Molnar, 1999; Saad, 2013). Furthermore, conflict shifts household and family structures when men are recruited into violent or armed groups (Delgado et al., 2021). When men leave to participate in violent conflict, women shoulder the burden of survival; "wherever war impacts on family life, women as traditional nurturers are propelled into activism to secure food, shelter, medical care, and education" (Porter, p.633). During and after conflict, women are forced to take on additional responsibilities but are rarely granted the power and access to achieve security in those circumstances (Fuest, 2008). In addition, women in conflict are labeled primarily by their victimhood, which erases the various "invisible" (Hudson, 2009) roles women play in navigating their insecurity. Various forms of structural violence are often at the root of women's daily insecurities.

Solution

In the face of post-conflict reconstruction or the everyday presence of violence, women are left to pick up the pieces and find resilient and creative ways to maneuver their insecurity. With this in mind, this research turns to an under-studied area: food and cooking. "Food has the uncanny ability to tie the minutiae of everyday experience to broader cultural patterns, hegemonic structures, and political-economic processes. Food is material, but also symbolic and literally everyday" (Shepler, p.45). Food and cooking are obviously important necessities of our daily lives. However, cooking has both material and symbolic significance in numerous cultures (Loewen et al., 2021). Cooking can be a vehicle for cultural group identity and is a distinct part of cultural foodways (Wright et al., 2021). Food can be politicized as a form of "soft power" to increase appeal and positive opinion of other cultures (Forman, 2016). Cooking can also be interpreted as a site of local agency and power for women (Adapon, 2008; Trubek et al., 2018).

Food is both an individual and collective experience. Food can evoke powerful memories, and painful traumas (Shepler, 2011).

Recently, academic curiosity in this area has grown, thanks in part to feminist studies. "Without a doubt, feminism and women's studies have contributed to the growth of food studies by legitimizing a domain of human behavior so heavily associated with women over time and across cultures…Scholars have found food a powerful lens of analysis" (Shepler, p.45). Since cooking can embody gendered, social, cultural and political practices, it is striking that the conflict resolution field has not turned its attention to food studies, as it is an area ripe for research. This research begins as a modest contribution towards recognizing women's work in kitchens and situating it in the context of conflict resolution. This paper contends that cooking, embedded in cultural, gendered, and social meaning, can be considered an act of everyday peace. This contention, along with gaps in these areas of study allow me to ask the following research question.

Research Question

RQ: "Can cooking performed by women be considered an act of everyday peace?"

In answering this question, this research attempts to frame women's cooking as legitimate labor and situate it in the peacebuilding field. Peacebuilding does not consist of a singular transition from war to peace. It requires multiple attempts and processes to address the structural causes of the conflict (Hudson, 2009), and women have an important role to play in the transition. Informal and everyday peace methods are gaining traction and broadening the definition of what is considered peacebuilding. Informal peacebuilding occurs between non-state actors and attempts to address grassroots concerns of communities affected by conflict.

However, they are not often recognized by researchers or women as "peacebuilding" because they lack the official language of technocratic peacebuilding (Cruz, 2012).

Peacebuilding literature has recently expanded to include "everyday", and "informal" (Mac Ginty, 2014; Ross, 2015), approaches to peacebuilding. "When researchers acknowledge informal peacebuilding, they tend to focus on activities with an overt and recognized goal of peace. Such a lens obscures the study of social, cultural, economic, and political activities that build peace indirectly" (Cruz, p.137). Not only does the realm of the informal allow researchers to examine new areas of peace, but the inclusion of women expands the field even further. "The active participation of women in peacebuilding changes the meaning of peacebuilding itself because it allows different activities [to be] recognized as part of peacebuilding practice" (Adjei, p.141). For example, there are strong arguments for women's care practices to be considered a category of everyday peace (Vaittinen et al., 2019).Through this lens, we can recognize women who cook and how they indirectly contribute to collective peace efforts.

This author also sees the potential for cooking to be transformative for women as an intervention design, particularly when combined with other forms of empowerment such as economic independence and education. The following chapters will explore how women in post-conflict may frame the act of cooking through themes of empowerment, localized agency, identity, and power, with the understanding that women may not self-identify this activity as a contribution to peace formation. As peace, conflict, gender policy, and food studies constantly evolve, this research hopes to add to several strands of literature, in particular cooking's potential as a tool for peace, and women's inclusion in peacebuilding efforts. To sufficiently answer this research question, the relevant variables are broken down, defined, and problematized below.

Variables

How is cooking defined?

Research into food practices, agriculture, and nutrition formed the bulk of food studies for early archaeologists, and only recently have researchers explored cooking as a viable area of study (Graff, 2020). Anthropology was one of the first disciplines to explore food as a scholarly topic, which stemmed from an interest in gender studies and the socio-cultural and socio-political practices of feasting in ancient civilizations. However, cooking and cuisine were less explored (2020). Some authors conclude that the lack of scholarly interest resulted from its connection with domestic work, performed out of biological necessity by women or slaves (people of lower social standing) (2020). However, an academic exploration into the daily turn and the domestic sphere proved that cooking could provide a window into socio-cultural practices (2020).

The term "cooking" is part of a foodways system and is defined as the transformative process of food preparation that renders something potentially edible (2020). In this paper, however, cooking is likewise identified as a skilled practice entwined with social and cultural contexts which will be expanded on in a review of the literature (Trubek et al., 2017). Writing on the subject of food studies conflates the definition of the words "cooking" and "cuisine". Cuisine is typically linked more closely to class status ("high/haute" versus "low" cuisine) or as a cultural artifact and is less related to the daily physical act of cooking (Graff, 2020). To communicate the process of food transformation, the terms "cooking" and "food preparation" (sometimes shortened as "food") may be used as interchangeable terms in this paper, per the assumption that food items will undergo preparation to be consumed. Additionally, "cooking specifically tends to focus on women's work," (p.341) and is generally considered a

gendered division of labor. In this research, when cooking and food preparation is referenced it can be assumed to be performed by women (unless otherwise stated).

How are Peace and Peacebuilding defined?

Peace and conflict are complex processes with different forms, definitions, and qualities. Men and women also experience and define peace differently which has implications for how each demographic participates in peace processes (Justino et al., 2018). The various interpretations of peace have created a broad framework of "building peace," (Hudson, 2009) after conflict, comprising several processes such as peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is generally defined as the process of reconstructing and restoring post-conflict communities to avoid the recurrence of conflict. Peacebuilding activities include addressing structural or physical sources of conflict and they can take place at all levels of society (Adjei, 2019; Delgado et al., 2021; Hudson, 2009; Justino et al., 2018). However, traditionally peacebuilding focused on institutional actors and state-building. Technocratic peacebuilding does not account for the various and context-specific ways individuals experience peace, so bottom-up approaches have been increasingly recognized (Delgado et al., 2021). In particular, everyday peace observes the ways that ordinary people navigate their lives after conflict (Mac Ginty, 2014).

This research adopts this specific notion of peace rooted in Mac Ginty's conceptualization, where everyday activities are tools used by individuals or collectively to build and sustain peace after violence (Blomqvist et al., 2021). Furthermore, this research leads from the idea that "non-violence and coexistence need to be explained every bit as much as conflict and violence" (Ware & Ware, 2021). Within this particular definition is the understanding that individuals and collectives may not recognize these activities as peacebuilding or have the overt

goal of contributing to peace efforts (Cruz, 2012). This research hypothesizes that cooking is used by women to negotiate instances of structural violence which are present in the everyday.

Who are the Women?

There is certainly a strong argument to be made that gender is a difficult and complex issue to address in the conflict field. Other demographics such as ethnicity, race and religion are often the "hot topics" in the literature, while gendered issues remain an afterthought. Additionally, addressing gender concerns in the field is often left for women to research, promote and address in policy and academic literature. This author recognizes that gender issues in general should be at the forefront of conflict dialogue because of how uniquely women are affected by conflict, and the roles they play during and post-conflict. However, this research focuses primarily on women who do not have regular access to the political space; who are not the target of peacebuilding interventions; and who are often left to maneuver, unrecognized in informal spheres. These are migrant women, rural women, poor women, and working women. They are women who belong to minority groups, women who are stateless, and women who are socially marginalized because of caste or ethnicity. In general, these are women who suffer from state-based negligence and experience limited access to resources, education and employment. For the purposes of this paper, and to make the distinction from the larger category of women, when the term "women" is referenced, it is referring to any and all of the women above.

Literature Review

This literature review presents relevant discussions on the topics of gender, peacebuilding and food studies, as they relate to the conflict field. Since some of these discussions are ongoing or newer to the field, this review pulls from other related disciplines to create a comprehensive analysis.

Gender

As women are uniquely and disproportionately affected by conflict, there have been active discussions on how to include women, and create gender-focused agendas without reproducing gendered systems of harm. In the last 20 years the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has been used as a blueprint for other campaigns, policies, and organizations to address gender-specific concerns on how women experience war and its aftermath (Berry & Lake, 2021). WPS has championed gender mainstreaming strategies to increase the presence of women in formal political spheres. In general, the increased attention to gender has prompted handbooks, journal articles, volumes of research, and policy reports devoted to women's issues (2021). Much of this discourse revolves around increasing women's agency and empowerment. In particular, interventions which target women affected by conflict are more cognizant of taking empowerment and agency into account. However, a review of the literature reveals various and at times, divergent approaches to these issues. The literature below is not exhaustive but demonstrates some of the current debates on gender issues, structural obstacles to gender equality, and intervention design.

Approaches to Gender

Efforts to increase women's empowerment and integration in the development process were at the forefront during the UN declaration for the Decade for Women in Development

(WID), which began in 1975. Starting from here, policy approaches for women in developing countries have gone through a few phases. During the decade for WID, the "equity" approach was adopted and enforced by state institutions who aimed to increase the political and economic participation of women (Saad, 2013). Through this approach women were viewed as active participants and the aim was to be able to promote gender equality between men and women. However, critics of this approach claimed that instead, "this approach has identified women's subordinate position in relation to men but has proved extremely challenging for developing countries to implement due to traditional attitudes and macroeconomic constraints" (p.221). Following this, was the "anti-poverty" approach which focused on supplying women's basic needs, the "efficiency" approach, that was aimed at improving women's capacity for agricultural employment, and finally the "empowerment" approach" (Saad, 2013).

Agency & Empowerment

A holistic approach to gender issues requires an examination of the links between empowerment and agency. Indeed, much research and study have been dedicated to defining these two terms, their relationship to one another, and potential indicators of each (Samman & Santos, 2009). Emma Samman and Maria Santos extensively review these concepts in their report for the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, titled, "Agency and Empowerment: A Review of Concepts, Indicators and Empirical Evidence" (2009). From this scholarship, a few frameworks for empowerment and agency emerge.

Authors contributing to the literature such as Narayan (2002) and Alsop and Heinsohn converge on a common framework, used by the World Bank and other research studies where empowerment is understood as consisting of two components: agency and institutional opportunity (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005 as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009). Within this

framework, "agency is an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices" (p.3). Agency is then strongly determined by material assets such as housing and land, and different categories of capabilities (human, social and psychological) (2009). Secondly, opportunity structure refers to broader institutional contexts and both political and social structures which either enable or prevent agents from pursuing their interests. The combination of individual agency and an opportunity structure are necessary prerequisites that allow for empowerment (2009).

A second framework inspired by the capabilities approach authored by Amartya Sen realizes broader definitions of agency and opportunity, where the emphasis is placed on the process of expansion of each, with development as the goal (Amartya Sen, 1999 as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009). Both agency and opportunity (named capabilities in Sen's approach) are processes that intrinsically hold value. In Sen's work, empowerment is the process of expanding agency and opportunity constitutes the process plus the actual opportunities that individuals have. Furthermore, Sen argues that increased agency matters because it can affect other development outcomes.

The difference between these two frameworks is that in the first framework empowerment is the goal, and agency plus opportunity are a means to that end. In the second framework, development itself is of intrinsic value, and the expansion of agency and opportunity hold value. These very different conceptualizations of agency and empowerment have obvious consequences in how each is studied, measured, and achieved. The first framework conceptualizes agency as a prerequisite for empowerment to occur, whereas the second considers agency "an important end in itself" (p.5). Indices that try to account for agency exercised in various spheres, domains, cultures, and concerning other groups, seem almost impossible to conceive, let alone agree upon. "To have a full nuanced understanding of agency requires

considering its manifestation in all these spheres" (p.6). Outside of these two basic frameworks, numerous definitions for both empowerment and agency exist. Therefore, researchers must be explicit when discussing their definitions of each concept.

Measurements of Empowerment & Agency

Malhorta et al., (2002) designed a framework for empowerment, where women's empowerment occurs in several dimensions like socio-cultural, economic, legal, political, familial, and psychological. These dimensions have sub-themes as well which cover a broad range of areas through which women can assume agency. Furthermore, individuals can experience agency at different levels, specifically the micro, meso, and macro levels, corresponding to household, community, and state (Samman & Santos, 2009). However, in this framework, other scholars argue that increased agency in one area does not necessarily equate to an increased agency in other dimensions, which limits agency's effectiveness.

Similarly, Rowlands describes the realms in which power can be exercised and experienced (Rowlands, 1997, as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009). She conceptualizes empowerment as a process in which people gain power, in different categories: "power over (resisting manipulation), power to (creating new possibilities), power with (acting in a group) and power from within (enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance)" (p.8). It is argued within this report that agency and empowerment are cultural concepts that are defined by the system of beliefs and norms, making agency and empowerment both cultural and context-specific (2009). The numerous and distinctive methods of measuring agency and empowerment create a range of possibilities for examining these concepts. These tensions also demonstrate the nuances that must be taken into account when designing gender interventions seeking to address agency, gender, and empowerment.

Alternative Approaches to Gender

With the numerous possibilities for agency and empowerment in mind, this section turns to current concepts for gender-focused interventions. This looks at the approach of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, "traditional" and "transformative," (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016) gender interventions, and approaches used in other disciplines, for comparison. The WPS Agenda has been open to many critiques from scholars, some of which will be discussed below. Outside of the conflict resolution field, innovative approaches for effective gender interventions have been theorized and debated and are discussed below as well.

De Vries and Van den Brink discuss the definitions of traditional and transformative gender interventions in their article, "Transformative Gender Interventions" (2016). Their work is rooted in Cynthia Cockburn's paper, "Equal Opportunities: The Short and Long Term Agenda" (1989) which created a distinction between short and long-term agendas for gender change. In Cockburn's article, short-term agendas are focused on "equality for individual women" and long-term agendas are projects of "transformation for organizations" (de Vries & van den Brink, p. 433). De Vries and Van den Brink define traditional approaches as those which utilize Women-only (WO) training, mentoring, and leadership skills. These approaches "aim to increase women's inclusion in the existing social order," (p.433) and teach women the skills they need to challenge gender inequality. However, this has been criticized for its focus on specific groups of women who have time to participate and access resources, thereby excluding other women from the process (2016). Furthermore, this framing of gender characterizes women as a problem that needs fixing and places the onus on the individual to change. As a result, traditional approaches have been criticized for inadequately addressing the systemic or structural causes of gender inequality. "Interventions with this approach have a limited effect as they aim to increase

women's inclusion…without unsettling the masculine, white, elitist, hetero-normative assumptions that underlie it" (p.433).

Similar critiques have been made by scholars looking at the gender mainstreaming strategy in the WPS agenda. Critics of the WPS discuss the disconnect between women's participation in political/public spheres and institutional change; individual agency does not imply a change in the structures that produce gender inequalities. As reported by Martin de Almagro and Ryan (2019),

> The WPS agenda assumes that through opening access for women to certain political and economic spaces, gender equality will prevail and women will use their agency to transform post-conflict settings into spaces where sustainable peace flourishes. However, access to political spaces alone is not transformative. (p.1063)

Access to these spaces, while an important and celebrated step forward for the visibility of women in the public space, does not translate into more gender equal spaces (Berry, 2015). Within these strategies lies the assumption that more women present in the public space will magically make the other people occupying those sites gender-inclusive. This once again puts the burden of responsibility on individual women to alter the public space into a gender-friendly one without addressing the root causes of gender inequality. "At the core, many have accused the [WPS] agenda and its advocates of failing to challenge broader systems of patriarchy, militarism, and capitalism" (p.467). The approach of "adding women" (Martin de Almagro, 2018) cannot address larger systems of oppression.

Further, WPS and the "post-conflict development industry" (Hedstrom, 2021) have been criticized for creating interventions that only target women with "time, connections, capital and education," (p.385) thereby excluding poor, rural, and minority women. In addition, the entry of

privileged women into the public or political sphere often occurs to the detriment of minoritized women who take on the domestic labor of women who are privileged to participate in these spaces (Berry & Lake, 2021). In other words, even when the political space opens for women, not all women have access. Women who do not have access bear the domestic burden of women who do, and even then, women's presence does not equate to a gender-equal space. Policies on participation and adding women to the equation are not sufficient in addressing underlying structures which reproduce inequality, and by design, marginalize other groups of women.

On the other hand, transformative interventions which target gender as a structure and rightfully question positions of privilege, status, and power of the dominant group, confront said structures without sufficient "local gender knowledge" (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016). Local gender knowledge is key for interventions to engage in the existing gender discourse for the intervention to be transformative. "There is no shared understanding of the way gender works in organizations…Researchers implementing transformative interventions is often at odds with that of the vast majority of individuals and the organization" (p.431). Interventions aimed at confronting structures of inequality tend to "disappear gender" (p.432) without accounting for how gender realistically functions in that environment. This lack of shared understanding makes it more difficult for the intervention to engage with the gender status quo in a significant way to affect structural change. In addition, this intervention approach is also accused of being too "radical" to attract policymakers. Transformative approaches lack "practical instruments" (2016) with which to measure progress in their implementation, and can therefore be met with resistance.

Transformative initiatives also suffer from intersectional blindness in gender policy discourses. Interventions that seek to address women in the aftermath of war, focus on women as

victims of war's violence or women as subjects of the patriarchal structure (Berry & Lake, 2021). Challenging patriarchal structures as part of gendered knowledge is a necessary framework for understanding women's issues, but minority women are often subjected to overlapping power and economic structures simultaneously. "A singular focus on gender rights often obscures the ways in which class–along with other intersecting systems of oppression– upholds gender inequality and marginalization" (p.468). When gender policy focuses on one framework or the other, it fails to address underlying systems of inequality and violence. This gap in local knowledge of women's intersectional identity neglects "the multifaceted ways that women experience insecurity in their daily lives" (p.468).

Gender interventions such as the "bifocal approach" (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016) attempt to bridge the gap between traditional gender interventions frequently associated with individual or Women-only (WO) training, and transformative approaches which seek to challenge social order and structures of gender inequality. The bifocal approach links two phases of gender intervention; by first focusing on the agency of the individual woman, and secondly transforming that agency into broader organizational change. Key to these approaches is the emphasis on movement from individual agency towards structural change. The "movement" from short-term to long-term or traditional to transformative is "dependent on building an individual's critical gender insight" (de Vries & van den Brink, p.433). Gender insight is then described as the individual's capacity to see socially constructed and performative gender in action (2016). The development of gender insight enables women to label and articulate systemic gendered issues within their environment, and "raise the feminist consciousness" (Colgan and Ledwith, 1996) of others in their environment, even those of a different gender. By including both genders in the gendered change, the issue evolves from being a "women's problem" and

therefore "women's work" to organizational change with the involvement of all persons (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016).

The bifocal approach suggests a connection between traditional and transformative gender intervention, which helps fill in the gaps of the other. Creating change agents in any environment and "beginning where people are" with critical gender insight is the transformative piece. "This 'beginning where people are' approach moderates problems associated with the radical transformative intent…"(p.443). Focusing on the short-term agenda which builds the individual's capacity for gender insight, is then less threatening and less "radical" than overhauling the entire organization at once; and it creates permanent change agents who can advocate for the long-term nature of gender transformation. For the time being, easily quantifiable measurements such as women in formal political positions, or rights-based movements are prioritized over local and informal approaches to gender equality and inclusion (Berry & Lake, 2021). Berry and Lake (2021) ask, "What if our path toward gender equality charted a new course and instead centered communities long marginalized at the peripheries of global politics who have created alternative models of coexistence?" (p.474). Organizations like Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) that suggest economic and political strategies from the perspective of women from the Global South, are promising (Saad, 2013). However, alternative models like these which attempt to bridge the gap between intervention styles are missing from current models in the conflict field.

These extraordinary differences in theory and interventions designed to address gender suggest the divergent ways in which individual women experience power, agency, gender, intersectionality, and structural violence. Berry argues that the construction of women as homogenous presumes that their oppression and subjugation are rooted in the same structures,

"which fails to see that some women are situated at the intersections of several oppressions at once" (p.5). While all women belong to one gendered group, women are not a monolith, and peacebuilding designs supported by feminist theory (or otherwise) should be cognizant of the needs of local communities of women and how they might differ from women in other contexts (Hudson, 2009).

Peace & Peacebuilding

Formal peacebuilding is traditionally understood to be an "institutional" (Cruz, 2012), or "technocratic" (Mac Ginty, 2014) process which occurs between state actors and organizations engaged in long-term efforts of reconstruction. However, women still struggle to gain access to these formal institutional spaces and often operate in informal spheres without recognition. This section explores some of the emerging trends in the peace and peacebuilding fields with a particular focus on informal peacebuilding strategies. This section reviews women's inclusion in peace efforts, women's framing of peace, and how everyday peace conceptualizes agency, power, and gender.

Peace and Gender

In October 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted and was considered a landmark resolution because of its advocacy for the inclusion of women in peace processes and recognizing their unique contributions (Adjei, 2019; Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues, 2000). Consequently, research has shown that considering gender in the peace process and including women in peacebuilding leads to "successful planning, implementation and institutionalization" (p.288). Despite UNSCR 1325 and the research supporting it, women still experience exclusion from formal peace processes beyond the local level (Justino et al., 2018). The exclusion of women from formal peacebuilding processes not only jeopardizes women's

rights during reconstruction phases but negates the purpose of peacebuilding as a whole when an entire demographic is neglected (Hudson, 2009).

Furthermore, development frameworks and peace research often ignore women's diverse roles and gender-based inequality, which obstructs security after conflict (Adjei, 2019; Berry & Lake, 2021; Hudon, 2009; Saad, 2013). When gender is neglected in these agendas, women are left to find creative and innovative ways to survive and rebuild peace in their households and communities. "In post conflict situations women naturally assume the role of putting the 'fabric of life together'. Often, women have little choice on their role in peacebuilding – 'they are left with children, the aged, the wounded and ill, amid devastation and have to find ways to survive" (Adjei, p.141). In doing so, women contribute to informal peacebuilding efforts that are not recognized by states or institutions. This begs the question: If women are still struggling to gain footing in the formal peacebuilding spheres, and operate mainly in the informal, why aren't scholars looking more closely at where and how women are contributing to peace efforts?

Beyond the structural barriers to women's inclusion, Justino et al., (2018) find in their research "Women and Peacebuilding: Local Perspectives on Opportunities and Barriers" that women and men in local contexts may have fundamentally different perspectives of what constitutes peace. In focus group interviews, they found that men's concept of peace was defined as "the absence of violence and armed conflict in the community" (p.922). Contrastingly, women discussed peace related to access to resources, basic needs like food and shelter, and general unity in their communities (2018). In other words, men's understanding of peace correlated to Galtung's "negative peace", while women's definition of peace was akin to "positive peace". Similar studies have confirmed these findings (2018). This research demonstrates the disconnect between local perceptions of peace and state-led initiatives to end the violence. On the local

level, ending the war and its violence does not equate to the end of insecurity. These concerns correspond to a recent focus on local and everyday notions of peace.

Everyday Notions of Peace

The fields of conflict and peace research are constantly expanding. Recently, scholarship has shifted attention towards the "local turn" or "everyday peace" as defined by the work of Mac Ginty in "Everyday Peace: Bottom-up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies" (2014). However, peace research has curiously explored the idea of everyday peace before this. A focus on peace in the everyday can also be found in the research of peace scholar Elise Boulding. Lyytikäinen et al., (2021) summarizes,

> In short, Boulding found that our everyday lives are imbued with peace behaviors that we need to recognize and nurture as such…Her theoretical and practical work on peace as an everyday process, and the importance of women, the family and communities in these processes that do and must take place locally, has been a key contribution to (feminist) peace research and also constitutes an undervalued contribution to conflict resolution.
> (p.8)

Boulding's theoretical contributions lay some of the groundwork on which Mac Ginty and others build their arguments for a focus on informal peace processes. Mac Ginty's work was born out of a critical response to institutionalized peacebuilding which emphasizes top-down approaches to state-building after a conflict has occurred (Blomqvist et al., 2021). His observation is that top-down approaches are exclusionary to those not associated with international peacebuilding efforts, and therefore cannot sufficiently address the local nuances of a post-conflict society. Such that, even when peace accords between institutional actors are achieved, "intercommunal differences often persist" (p.550). Mac Ginty has gone so far as to establish the "Everyday Peace

Indicators Project" which aims to quantify the presence of difficult concepts such as peace, reconciliation, and extremism (*How Does EPI Work?,* 2021).

Ware & Ware (2021) quote playwright Thomas Hardy saying, "War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading" (p. 224). On the contrary, everyday peace scholarship argues that peace and non-violence should be investigated and studied just as much as conflict and violence (Ware & Ware, 2021). Central to this interpretation is the notion that while violence and conflict seem to be rampant, there are far more sites of co-existence and non-violence. Furthermore, everyday peace claims that actors and their actions should be examined with as much interest as elite and state actors. By focusing on the everyday, it produces more narratives and practices that can help decode local peace methods. As a result, since Mac Ginty's original paper was published, academics have expanded his typology to represent broader conflict contexts, more social practices, and a wider range of actors (2021). The expansion of the everyday peace framework has created space for scholars to reexamine a realm of possible peace activities which already exist in local contexts. With a widened definition of peace, scholarship has adapted this framework to analyze community activities such as care practices and linguistic education as potential peacebuilding activities (Blomqvist et al., 2021; Charalambous et al., 2021).

Care work as Everyday Peace

The "care lens" emerges from feminist peace research of "rich traditions that theorize peace and conflict through the ethics of care" (Vaittinen et al., p.195). Through a care lens, everyday practices of care work are rendered visible and valuable to peacebuilding and sustaining social relations. The colloquial usage of the term "care" has connotations of "natural" (2019) feminine kindness. However, it is argued that care practices extend beyond women's

reproductive labor and are not necessarily limited to a traditional gendered division of work (2019). Care is defined as both a social and physical practice that may extend beyond the act itself and give rise to alternative political thinking or conflict management (2019). Since care work in this context applies to both men and women, care ethicists acknowledge that the field becomes a complex site of power relations, "with the potential of dominance, exploitation, and even direct violence- and difficult choices as to whose care needs matter" (p.197). In understanding the dynamics of social relations and physical acts of care in a community, the localized needs of the people and their sources of deprivation emerge. Vaittinen et al. (2019) contend that by accounting for care work in local peacebuilding, a nuanced image of the community is formed for transformative processes to begin.

However, as gender does shape the everyday experience, alternative approaches to gender, care work, and everyday peace argue that women's contributions to care practices should be particularly distinguished from men's. It is important to make visible women's "crucial" (2021) care work that minimizes violence, smoothes social relations, and sustains the survival of both individuals and communities. In "Care and Silence in Women's Everyday Peacebuilding in Myanmar" Blomqvist et al., (2021) argue that women's care practices should indeed include the reproductive role, the maintenance of social relations, voluntary community work to meet the immediate needs of the community, unpaid maintenance of the household, and agents of culture and ideology. Furthermore, during conflict women's unpaid care work both inside and outside the household increases, and this pattern is maintained in the post-war period (2021). The increase in care work thus limits their opportunities for formal employment so instead, they engage in informal (often dangerous) forms of labor. Thus care work performed by women is both vital, and difficult in the conflict context.

Everyday Notions of Agency

Mac Ginty conceptualizes everyday peace through a lens of power, by imagining it as a form of agency. Accordingly, everyday peace activities are an avenue through which individuals can locate agency within their practices and relationships in a way that is context-specific and context-sensitive (Mac Ginty, 2014). He cites the critical social theory of the "everyday" found in the works of Foucault, Billig's examination of the "banal", and Bourdieu's concept of habitus among others. So, while top-down peacebuilding reinforces the narrative that local actors are passive recipients lacking agency, the lens of the everyday legitimizes alternative perceptions of power, ownership, and agency (Foucault, 1980/1982, Billig, 1995, Bourdieu, 1977 as cited in Mac Ginty, 2014). This re-imagination of the everyday envisions it as "a highly creative space where ordinary people, despite being largely subjugated by institutions, structures and narratives exercise continuous creative resistance to those rules, narratives and meanings..." (Ware & Ware, p.5). Revisiting the mundane activities of the everyday through the lens of localized agency allows us to identify them as powerful and valuable.

Limitations of Everyday Peace

While the everyday peace framework creates the potential for new outlets of peacebuilding and local agency, it should be noted that there are limitations and critiques on the everyday conceptualization of power. Everyday notions of peace also involve engaging with uneven structures of power relations, discrimination, marginalization, and authority (Ware & Ware, 2021). Therefore everyday peace "may equally contribute to the perpetuation of injustice" (p.8) Even when individuals act with agency, they may accept systems of inequality to maintain everyday peace (2021). Local actors who find agency in their everyday activities may find themselves ill-equipped to address structural violence. So while sites of the everyday may

potentially contribute to peacebuilding, they also present opportunities to recreate spaces of violence and conflict. Along similar lines, critiques of the everyday peace framework contend that Mac Ginty's expectation for the pooling of social practices into transformative peacebuilding should include an understanding of the limited agency of local actors within uneven power structures (Blomqvist et al., 2021).

Gender, Power, and Everyday Peace

The power relations within the space of the everyday are further compounded when gender relations are considered. Gender heavily informs how men and women experience war, violence, and post-conflict reconstruction. Gender also structures everyday life, and those narratives are not always reflected in local or formal peacebuilding accounts (Blomqvist et al., 2021). Recalling the previous literature on women's agency, women are frequently viewed as either a victim of war's violence or powerless subjects of the patriarchy (Berry & Lake, 2021). So how does one locate women's agency within the context of the everyday? This echoes critiques of the limited agency individual actors realistically have in the everyday when subjected to multiple systems of inequality (Blomqvist et al., 2021; Ware & Ware, 2021). Furthermore, as everyday peace does not directly address uneven power structures, "engaging in everyday peace practices, or peacebuilding, means (for women in particular) navigating a status quo of gendered inequality, marginalization and insecurity" (Blomqvist et al., p.226). Therefore a feminist approach to the everyday does not assume that sites of everyday peace are necessarily transformative of these structures. Rather, this perspective primarily shines a light on the under-recognized contributions of women to minimize violence and ensure the relative functioning of their communities (2021).

Food & Cooking

To situate cooking and food preparation in the context of conflict, it is important to examine the existing intersections where food and conflict meet. Research which examines both food and conflict is uncommon, so this section will incorporate scholarship on food from a variety of disciplines including anthropology and sociology. This section explores cooking as an inherently social function embedded in a network of culture, interaction, power, gender, identity, and necessity. Below, cooking and its various applications within some of these networks are explored.

Food and Conflict: Food Insecurity

First and foremost, "When theorists do think about food and war, it is in the context of food as an element of a human-security framework" (Shepler, p.45) in other words, food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN as a "prolonged lack of sufficient safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life" (BOGHIȚĂ et al., 2020). This definition refers primarily to dimensions of access, and quality of food for an individual to pursue a healthy lifestyle. Recently, the definition has broadened to include dimensions of availability, access, utilization, and stability to capture the scope and severity of the issue (Carney 2015; Delgado et al, 2021; Lessa & Rocha, 2012). A nuanced understanding of food insecurity allows the burden of insecurity to be transferred from the individual to the state. By doing so, it can hold political and economic structures fully accountable (Carney, 2015).

Food insecurity has become a priority of international organizations and is currently being addressed in the UN's 'Sustainable Development Goals to Zero Hunger' and the World Health Organization's (WHO) '5 Action Tracks for the Food Systems' (*WHO EMRO | Food*

Systems | Nutrition Site, n.d.). In 2020, 155 million people were labeled "acutely food insecure" and approximately 30 million were on the verge of starvation, "meaning they did not know where their next meal would come from" (Delgado et al., para.1). Most of these populations are in countries experiencing violent conflict. This tentative relationship between food insecurity and conflict has raised the issue from a matter of regional and national security to a threat to international security (Delgado et al., 2021; Katsos, 2017).

Among academics, there is a broad consensus that food insecurity can act as both a driver and a result of violent conflict (Allmaier, 2015; Delgado et al., 2021; Flowers, 2018; Molnar, 1999). In fragile states, for example, food insecurity can trigger violence when combined with other grievances such as environmental stressors, resource competition, or dissatisfaction with government leadership (Delgado et al., 2021). Reciprocally, food insecurity can occur as a consequence of conflict. When violent conflict occurs it disrupts local food systems which negatively affects agriculture, production, trade, and access for parts of the population (2021). In addition, armed actors involved in conflict can threaten food sources or destroy local means of production as a strategic instrument of war (Flowers, 2018). The cyclical relationship between food insecurity and conflict has spurred policymakers to design interventions intended to resolve short-term and long-term food insecurity to de-escalate violence in conflict-affected areas (Flowers, 2018; Messer, 2014; Shepler, 2011). However, addressing food insecurity proves to be a compounded challenge of the conflict landscape which tests the capacity of fragile states and the international community's ability to respond accordingly. Food insecurity is a pressing issue threatening millions of people and for the reasons previously mentioned, efforts to resolve food insecurity have become essential to achieving political stability (Flowers, 2018).

Cooking

While food security is a pressing issue of national and international concern, this section will look at the final stage of the food production chain, food preparation or cooking. "Studying food preparation can elucidate social organization in the household and in the community, the organization of production, economic practices, ritual practices, identities, politics, taste and power" (Graff, 2020). More specifically, this section will explore cooking as a function on the individual, household and community levels through the lens of sociology and anthropology.

Cooking and Agency

Relations and activities which occur in the domestic sphere are reflections of how society behaves, making the household a relevant unit of study. "The household is often a fundamental building block of society, and the place where individuals confront basic livelihood concerns, norms, values, power and privilege" (Solava Ibrahim & Sabina Alkaire, p.20). Accordingly, household activities like cooking can be studied for insight into family and community dynamics. However, while early social science research of food has investigated food nutrition, production, and agricultural strategies, until recently "research on cooking, food preparation and cuisine was less explored," (Graff, p.338) or "was only given glancing mention" (Trubek et al., p.299). In the last few decades there have been several strides to fill this gap in academia.

For example, Joy Adapon describes women and household cooking in her book, *Culinary Art and Anthropology* (2008) where she conducted fieldwork in Mexico City. Adapon imagines cooking in the household as a source of women's agency. Adapon believes that through food, women create "art" (2008), manage familial relationships, and assert themselves in family and community settings. She asserts that cooking is a "skilled, creative practice… [which] creates agency for its practitioners–in particular women" (Trubek et al., p.299). Similarly, studies in Mozambique showed that women's skills in food were a source of pride and agency for

women (Arnfred, 2007, as cited in Trubek et al., 2017). Building on these ideas, Tubek et al., (2017) form the theory of "food agency" which describes the ability, capacity and action involved in everyday food preparation. Food agency is the capacity to "intentionally produce the food that she envisions" (p.303). They argue that a combination of these concepts leads to a certain empowerment and wellbeing in the food environment (2017).

Cooking and Power

Women's responsibility for domestic foodwork and the kitchen as a "women's space" continues to be a reality in various cultural contexts (Carney, 2015; Trubek et al., 2017; Valliantos, 2021), for some women it is the only space where they have power in a partiarichial society (Loewen et al., 2021) In *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power*, Carole Counihan notes, "women's power and identity have often come from their ability to produce food," (p.46), and in some cases, authors have "identified the practice of successful culinary skills as a source of gender identity…and power" (Graff, p.343). Therefore the physical labor of cooking may inform cultural and gendered performances and identity (Valliantos, 2021). Feminist scholarship generally views domestic spaces such as the kitchen as sites of gendered oppression and subordination (Allen & Sachs, 2007). Other women may view their authority in the kitchen as a site of power (Valliantos, 2021). This interpretation of food as a site of power and politics stems from Arjun Appadurai's conception of "gastro-politics" (Appadurai, 1981; Valliantos, 2021). For example, in South Asian households women may exert power through food serving practices such as serving certain family members in a "non-hierarchical" order to signal support or disapproval of an individual's actions (Valliantos, 2021). In this way, "control of a material resource, such as food, in one way power is demarcated" (p.206). However, some may interpret the act of servitude as a sign of oppression rather than a position of power, since it

still engages with traditional patriarchal systems while demonstrating an act of resistance (2021). This analysis requires a contextual interpretation of an individual's power which may shift in time and space (2021). This research is heavily informed by this contextual understanding of gender roles and power with the consideration that women's experiences of power and gender are unique and valid.

Food as a Cultural Identity Marker

Conceivably, it is the daily necessity of food as a biological function that causes us to overlook its relevance and regard it as banality (Counihan & Esterik, 2008; D-Sylva & Beagan, 2011; Graff, 2020). However, food provides other functions such as the marking of cultural or ethnic group identity (Lessa & Rocha, 2012). The significance of food in the construction of cultural identity has typically been overshadowed by other cultural symbols like language, customs, traditional dress, and holidays. Research has shown the "importance of food in marking ethnocultural affiliation; food's power as a signifier of identity results in culinary food heritage continuing three or more generations…long after language and other markers of ethnocultural identity have disappeared" (Valliantos, p. 206). Food is instrumental not only in the formation of ethnocultural group identity but its endurance, relative to other cultural markers, is an asset that can strengthen group identity and belonging. Archaeologists studying food agree that "cuisine is culturally defined and that cuisine and identity are intrinsically linked" (Graff, p.340) and facilitates belonging, kinship and a shared humanity (Allmaier, 2015; Mintz & DuBois, 2002). Therefore, when individuals make choices concerning food preparation and consumption, it signals participation or individuality within the larger group (Weller & Turkon, 2015). In this context food evolves from the individual act to a collective practice.

Food as a Cultural Reservoir

The inherent nature of food as necessary, common, and enduring also makes it an accessible category through which individuals may move from individual identity and access group identity. Food is a central tool used for affiliation and is often one of the most accessible ways in which groups communicate a shared culture and cultural participation (Valliantos, 2008). The accessibility of food as a cultural identity marker becomes more significant in diasporic contexts. Food becomes a resource upon which groups may consistently draw on collective, national or religious identity, particularly when the sense of belonging may be fragile (Wright et al., 2021). "By acting as a bridge between immigrants and their homeland, food also functions as a reservoir that immigrants draw on to…pass their cultural identity on to their children" (Weller & Turkon, p.58). In the diaspora, food practices become an important vehicle of cultural transmission and identity (D'Sylva & Beagan, 2011). As food becomes such a huge resource for cultural identity in the displaced context, "cultural food security" helps frame a discussion of well-being and identity maintenance, particularly for diaspora communities (Wright et al., 2021).

Cultural food security refers to the access, availability, and quality of food practices that are culturally significant to one's identity. Activities like food preparation, consumption, and sharing, can produce positive memories of family and homeland that create a heightened state of well-being. Beoku-Betts (1995 as cited in D'Sylva & Beagan, 2011) reflects on food and memory below:

> When 'home' is far away, when daily life is rife with accommodating others who do not understand your language, appreciate your culture or support your values, then food in the privacy of your home may have the ability to confirm the familiar, reinforce group belonging and strengthen ties to a distant place or past. p.281

Consequently, the absence or presence of cultural foods can be linked to either negative or positive well-being (Wright et al., 2021). For example, lack of access to cultural foods can be emotionally challenging or produce feelings of culture shock (2021). Cultural food security helps to sustain the cultural reservoir from which identity is strengthened especially in a culturally diverse environment (Loewen et al., 2021). Food as a cultural reservoir also helps displaced individuals to preserve their cultural identity in new places. Women in particular use cooking "to bring a sense of comfort…and to keep memories and traditions alive when negotiating changes in environment and culture" (Ore, p.96, 2021, as cited in Loewen et al., 2021). In this role, women are essential as purveyors and protectors of cultural food traditions.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature above reveals a few gaps. First, even though gender issues have been addressed in peace initiatives over the last forty years, women still experience exclusion and neglect in formal peace processes. Therefore, gender interventions that are designed to address women's issues still suffer from intersectional blindness and generally ignore informal peacebuilding methods where women participate. Recently, peace research has turned its focus to local and everyday peace processes. As women's peacebuilding participation remains generally in the informal sphere, the concept of everyday peace has allowed for a reexamination of daily activities, including those performed by women. However, literature is still sparse on how everyday peace is practically experienced and applied to everyday lives of women. Furthermore, gendered inquiries into everyday peace activities have only been broached by a few authors in the field (such as Blomqvist et al., and Vaittinen et al.). Everyday peace has been applied to a small category of activities such as care work, but not to specific activities like cooking. Finally, food preparation and cooking are rarely featured in the conflict resolution or

peace fields, which seems like a glaring oversight considering that cooking occurs in every person's life and can be considered material and symbolic with social consequences. From these gaps, this research advances an examination of women's role in everyday peace processes through the use of cooking.

Theoretical Frameworks

Structural Violence

The term "structural violence" was first introduced by Johan Galtung in 1969 to demonstrate the complex relationship between conflict, violence, and peace (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Galtung's distinction between direct, physical violence and structural violence which he defined as, "the systematic exclusion of a group from the resources needed to develop their full human potential" (Mukherjee et al., p.538), formed the basis upon which he theorized notions of peace. Galtung distinguishes between positive and negative peace; where negative peace is the absence of physical violence and positive peace is the absence of structural or cultural violence (Delgado et al., 2021). Furthermore, Galtung believed structural violence was linked to unequal power which affected factors such as the distribution of resources and resulted in "unequal life chances" (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, p.4). Since then, peace and conflict studies have expanded or critiqued Galtung's structural violence and other scholarly disciplines have adopted it as well, creating a large variability in its definition (2017). However, for this research, structural violence is understood as "the violence of injustice and inequity" (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017), which is embedded in social structures and institutions. "These structures are violent because they result in avoidable deaths, illness and injury; and they reproduce violence by marginalizing people and communities, constraining their capabilities and agency, assaulting their dignity and sustaining inequalities." (p.2)

Rylko-Bauer and Farmer's handbook titled, *Structural Violence, Poverty and Social Suffering* (2017) goes on to identify some of the characteristic features of structural violence. Unlike physical violence, structural violence is invisible and often so seamless within the social order, that it is perceived as "natural" (2017). Structural violence's invisibility can make its

presence harder to detect and confirm. Additionally, states and the international community are more preoccupied with the cessation of physical violence than other less "dramatic" (2017) forms of violence, so structural violence endures. Secondly, the authors characterize structural violence as massive, making it difficult to quantify its weight and enormity (2017). This complicates the analysis of this type of violence because multiple axes of inequality exist, and individuals may be subject to them simultaneously. For example, some women are victims of violence from various social structures at the same time such as class, race, and gender. Finally, other frameworks have proposed a link between structural, normalized, and symbolic violence and its connection to direct violence (2017). Central to this framework is Galtung's original notion of unequal power relations and their normalization. "The concept of normalized violence recognizes the indifference in broader society and identifies mechanisms by which violence becomes an inevitable part of daily life for its victims" (p. 10). This conception of normalized and invisible violence reveals the need to pay attention to the violence of everyday life "across classes of people and social contexts, each with different histories, sustained by different social dynamics" (p.11).

Considering that structural violence is context-specific and shaped by different social structures, critics of the structural violence conceptual framework have suggested that studies should focus on how this violence is perceived on the local level (2017) by investigating the emotions and viewpoints of those "affected by poverty, exclusion and discrimination" (p.12). The structural violence framework was chosen for this research for precisely this reason. This framework permits a broad level of analysis to examine the types of violence experienced by women in their daily lives across multiple contexts. Utilizing this framework exposes violence that may be invisible and normalized, but shape the realities of poor and marginalized women.

Consequently, an approach focused on the everyday violence of vulnerable populations can provide insight into how people respond or adapt to its consequences at the local level.

Everyday Peace Framework:

If structural violence allows us to view everyday manifestations of insecurity, then everyday peace is the lens through which we examine the response to that violence. When communities are left to navigate insecurity without institutional help, normalized coping mechanisms, conflict-minimizing social devices or local mediation strategies may be used (Mac Ginty, p.550). These practices fall under the umbrella of what Mac Ginty calls "everyday peace". Everyday peace "refers to the routineized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society…prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence" (p.549). In this framework, Mac Ginty proposes that "simple everyday activities" are tools that individuals use to sustain peace during and after violence. Furthermore, while everyday peace practices are highly localized by their nature, Mac Ginty believes that combining these social peace practices can lead to transformative peace. In this conceptualization, everyday experiences are "placed at the centre of efforts to understand how peace is manifested and sustained." (Blomqvist et al., p.223). This approach to peacebuilding observes the ways that ordinary people navigate their lives when conflict and violence are present. Delgado et al., report states (2021):

> The everyday practices of so-called ordinary people in this sense include responding to structural attempts to organize life, negotiating structural and overt violence, and reappropriating spaces that have been lost to conflict. This is achieved through engagement with the community and its daily experiences, and through relationship-building within these spaces. The space of the everyday is therefore a political space

where those who are most marginalized and excluded from formal political discourses

find collective meaning and organize in response to conflict, violence, and exclusion.

(p.18)

Investigation of everyday activities which sustain communities permits a wide range of practices

that are not usually recognized by formal peacebuilding initiatives to be reconsidered forms of

peacebuilding. In addition, those who participate in these local peace practices may not

recognize their action as contributing to peace, because it is perceived as coping with insecurity.

However, an everyday peace framework reframes these spaces as political, and therefore their

activities are politically relevant to peace formation. Mac Ginty also imagines everyday peace as

a space where localized agency can be located in everyday activities in a way which is context-

specific. This expanded notion of peace and agency in the everyday, challenges dominant

discourses of violence, peace, and power at the institutional level; and allows for alternative

interpretations of conflict and resolution at the local level.

This is especially relevant in consideration of women's limited presence in formal

peacebuilding arenas and their activities in everyday peacebuilding. A feminist analysis

combined with the everyday lens recognizes that women's everyday experiences are shaped by

"gendered inequality, marginalization and insecurity" (Blomqvist et al., p.226). In the same vein,

women's practices that help them navigate the insecurity of the everyday are reframed as acts of

agency and resilience (2021). This perspective makes women's contributions to sustaining

communities visible and valuable, even if they are contextualized by gendered inequality and

insecurity. This tension reveals that the gendered everyday space is both complex and ordinary,

filled with ambiguity and insecurity. However, it allows us to include a wide range of activities

that women perform that otherwise go unnoticed for their contributions to everyday perceptions of peace.

Utilizing the everyday framework helps this research achieve a couple of objectives. First, it recognizes alternative activities as sites of local peace. Everyday peace literature places a focus on the everyday experiences and practices of people navigating direct and structural violence. So this framework provides a nuanced understanding of how local peace is experienced, practiced, and sustained. Next, these peace practices are interpreted as political and imbued with a potential agency. This approach locates agency "not only in overt resistance but in resilience in the daily struggles to sustain lives, families and communities" (p.226). Finally, a feminist analysis of the everyday characterizes women's activities as sites of agency that contribute to the survival of families and communities. Therefore, women's seemingly mundane activities are viewed as valuable contributions to the broader dynamics of peacebuilding. Additionally, through this lens daily activities such as cooking have the potential for categorization, even though they may not have the overt goal of contributing to peace.

Feminist Care Framework

Yet still, other applications of feminist scholarship and everyday peace have emerged to recognize carework performed by women as crucial to peacebuilding. This research will rely on a feminist care framework to illuminate the particular labor and contributions made by women before, during, and after violence. The feminist care perspective as it is conceptualized by Fatma Osman Ibnouf (2020), lays the groundwork for framing cooking as care work; and explains how care work contributes to everyday peace. This research will adopt Ibnouf's definition of care as outlined in "Researching Women, Unpaid Care work, and Peacebuilding in Darfur" (2020). She states that care practices are daily activities that serve to sustain or enhance life. The feminist

care lens is relevant to our research, because food provision and preparation is considered "the most basic labor of care," (Allen & Sachs, p.1) which women oversee. In addition, "in all its forms care work benefits the society on the whole" (Ibnouf, p.154). Typically care practices are described as bound by the domestic sphere; notably, this definition of care work is not limited to spatial dimensions and can therefore extend to the community level. Blomqvist et al., (2021) confirm this: "Women's care work not only has value but indeed matters far beyond the individual family; this is critical labor which sustains communities and undergirds social life" (p.226). Care practices as necessary work to sustain life, care practices, and "build trust among and within communities," (Vaittinen et al., p.196) particularly when institutions fail to do so. This framework illuminates the importance of care practices and how local peace is formed, making care work necessary and specialized. It also allows the research to center women's voices and experiences as a source of knowledge.

Care work has value

Women's care practices are crucial to sustaining the material needs of communities both during and after conflict, but because care practices extend into society they are also enveloped by social dynamics and power relations. These dynamics are a specific and localized insight that is critical to understanding everyday peace. However, institutions are often blind to this labor due to the general devaluation of care practices. "When care is not explicitly addressed in analyses of peace, it follows that mundane practices of caring that are crucial in creating trust…are either taken for granted, or remain invisible" (Vaittinen et al., p.196). Regarding peace research, feminist care ethics attempts to reverse the notion of "wifesization," (Lyytikäinen et al., 2021) a concept that describes the process of devaluation or erasure of women's contributions and knowledge. Wifesization has negative implications for both knowledge production and

peacebuilding (2021). In consideration of this, women should be acknowledged for having specific knowledge and skill sets that are relevant to those trying to understand the local dynamics and structures of the community (Vaittinen et al., 2020). Women in care roles have particular expertise and valuable insights to aid peace processes.

Care work allows us to pay attention to all women and their voices:

Importantly, the feminist perspective of care work allows us to "considers the different ways in which women conceive of themselves, individually, and in relationship to others, and their roles in society at different times, especially as caregivers" (Vaittinen, p.149). Peace processes need to be sure they are centering all women's voices and experiences and incorporating them into all phases of the peacebuilding process. The most prevalent narrative portrays women as victims of violence, lacking autonomy, or as agency-less (Martin de Almagro & Ryan, 2019). However, this feminist perspective amplifies the voices of women who may not be in readily available or politically-active spheres. It recognizes the possibility that some women may frame their care practices as community management, de-escalation, and mediation. In the words of one of Ibnouf's (2020) interviewed participants, "Caregiving is a labor of love," (p.158) illustrating the importance of centering these lived experiences. The feminist care perspective opens spaces for silenced women who may not be the target of international interventions but exist and contribute to their community nonetheless (Blomvquist et al., 2021; Martin de Almagro, 2018). By using a feminist care framework, the invisible work of women is rendered "visible" to researchers and women themselves (Ibnouf, 2020). It allows researchers to accurately capture the lived realities of women in post-conflict accounting for their complexity, diversity, and intersectionality. As care practices are an under-valued area of peace studies, this research has chosen to specifically examine cooking as a category of local care work performed

by women. Based on the definitions outlined above, cooking meets the qualifications as a daily

activity that sustains daily life and can therefore be considered a category of care practices. The

methodology and the case studies chosen for this research cover multiple sites and sources to

make space for a variety of women's voices and move toward more inclusive peace research

(Lyytikäinen et al., 2021).

Research Design and Methodology

This research was conducted through the application of several frameworks to a collection of case studies that serve to illustrate how cooking is used as a form of everyday peace. Cooking fulfills practical and social functions and is therefore not limited to "a set of mechanical and individualized skills" (Trubek et al., para. 4). Cooking is embedded in cultural, social, and gendered structures and as such can respond to certain forms of insecurity.

The thread of similarity woven throughout these cases is the use of cooking, by small groups of women, to meet a community need. This disparate sample of case studies was selected to demonstrate how cooking as care can be a site or source of everyday peace in the midst of insecurity (Vaittinen et al., 2021). An illustrative case study was deemed an appropriate method to summarize these cases and examine the patterns among these projects to convey a deeper understanding of how cooking is used in different contexts. The theoretical frameworks discussed in previous chapters were then applied to the cases as a lens of analysis. These frameworks provide context to the conflicts in the cases and help identify the role of cooking in local peacebuilding.

The first intervention in Ecuador was designed by a leading academic in Indigenous Food Studies and was the only one designed with this particular scholarship in mind. The second case is a long-term project currently operating in the refugee camp of Burj El-Barajneh in Lebanon demonstrating the longevity and sustainability of female cooking interventions. The third case is a community kitchen project supported by UN Women, created as a short-term response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the fourth case is a private business owned by female Chef Asma Khan in London called Darjeeling Express. These narratives were chosen to explore the range of organizations who have implemented cooking projects for women; specifically an

independent academic study, a grassroots movement from a local stakeholder, UN Women, an international organization that partnered with local civil society organizations and a private business owner of South Asian descent. Furthermore, the cooking projects were responding to deprivation and insecurity in their communities. These cooking projects were created to address malnutrition in rural areas, unemployment caused by statelessness, and a relief response to severe food insecurity.

Methodology

To gain a nuanced insight into women's attitudes toward cooking, a thematic analysis was conducted from secondary interviews of women who participated in or led the cooking interventions in the selected case studies. A thematic analysis proved to be the most useful approach to prioritize participants' experiences, views and opinions (Suter, 2012). This included transcribing secondary video and audio interviews to text where applicable, and manually categorizing the data into the most prevalent themes. Data analysis revealed themes that mirrored those found in everyday peace and feminist care research. Over the four case studies, 23 participants' interviews were transcribed or reported. While informed by the theoretical frameworks and literature review, themes were identified in an inductive approach to remain flexible for themes to develop organically during data analysis. A combination of open coding and values coding was used to categorize data while providing appropriate insight into participants' emotional states, values, and beliefs. In some cases, codes were combined under broader categories, by identifying words or ideas that were synonymous with one another.

Analysis of the transcripts proved to be an iterative process with constant reference from raw data, to themes, sub-themes, and literature. Themes were defined as the ideas that appeared most frequently in the interviews. The following themes of self-esteem, community keeping

through the function of food & cultural security, and peer group support were consistent in all case studies. Other themes which showed up in various degrees among the cases were the benefits of employment and cooking as a remedy for social exclusion and empowerment. In addition, many of the major themes identified had meaningful connections to one another.

Limitations to Research

The primary limitation of the research was the lack of time and resources to conduct in-person interviews with intervention participants. Time constraints for conducting this research impacted the study significantly. Identifying a research question, gathering literature and theories, evaluating data, and drawing conclusions from that data are very difficult in the period of 14 weeks. Therefore, the data used was from a collection of secondary interviews and documentaries of participants. As a result, there is no control over interview conduct or the types of interview questions that were asked. This may lead to a potential skewing of interpretations of the interviews presented. In addition, the interviews which were sourced were created with the purpose of promoting the cooking interventions, so interviewees' responses may be biased to reflect positively on the projects.

Future research on cooking interventions for women would benefit from being conducted as a long-term study over the course of several years and would ideally focus on a single case study. This approach would be able to observe the effectiveness of women's cooking groups in helping their communities. It would also permit researchers to gain in-depth knowledge on the participants and their reflections on the project. For the projects which provided income for women, it would be useful to see how or if women used their financial independence to pursue other employment opportunities.

A more thorough and appropriate design for this research would have been to include the use of focus group interviews to provide insight into group dynamics, as peer group support and community keeping were two major themes identified in the data. A mix of interview styles (semi-structured, informal, in-depth) would have also been beneficial in capturing the complexity and diversity of the women's experiences. The in-depth interviews would be appropriate for emphasizing the first-hand experiences of women.

Case Studies and Data Analysis

The following chapter introduces each of the case studies, providing background to the conflict, actors and history and provides details of how the cooking interventions were carried out. Afterwards, selected data and themes are discussed.

Case Studies

Case Study One: Quichua Mothers, Ecuador

Background

The first case study looks at a group of indigenous women in the isolated province of Tungurahua, Ecuador. Globally, Indigenous Peoples are among the most marginalized populations of the respective larger society and therefore, do not have the same access to healthcare resources, "resulting in physical and cultural health consequences for the individual and the collective group" (*CINE Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems for Health Promotion*, n.d.; Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Cunningham, 2009 as cited in Roche et al., 2018). According to the Global Nutrition Report in 2015, Indigenous Peoples more regularly suffer from being overweight, underweight, or both occurrences within the same household (Roche et al., 2018).

Ecuador in particular is characterized as one of the most underdeveloped countries in Latin America and deeply fragmented along regional, social and ethnic lines. The fragmentation is a result of the enduring Spanish colonial legacy, which succeeded in integrating the Coast and Amazon Basin regions but excluded the Indigenous populations in the Highlands (Larrea & Kawachi, 2005). Indigenous Peoples in the Highlands remain marginalized with higher levels of social and economic inequality. Some progress has been made to address the malnutrition of Indigenous Peoples, however economic disparities, education, and illiteracy rates which are

contributing factors to malnutrition remain disproportionately high compared to non-Indigenous Ecuadorians (Roche et al., 2018).

The Quichua people are the largest group of Indigenous who live in the Andean highlands. They maintain a strong cultural connection to the land or "pachamama". Women in Quichua society have a prominent role in this regard, "with women being said to be unchanging like Mother Earth" (Webb, 2012 as cited in Roche et al., 2018). Additionally, the traditional foodways of Indigenous Peoples tend to carry critical social and cultural value for these communities (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996). The cultural tradition of women, native land, and traditional Indigenous foodways informed the community nutrition intervention of Quichua women in Tungurahua.

Project

The study builds on the Quichua concept of "mink'a" a form of communal labor that extends beyond familial affiliation in service of community well-being (Cities & University, 2020; Roche et al., 2018). The study was also adapted from a previous intervention by World Vision Ecuador, a Christian humanitarian organization that addresses causes of poverty to support children, families, and communities (World Vision "About Us," n.d.). World Vision uses a Positive Deviance/Hearth (PD/Hearth) approach which is an "asset-based intervention that brings small groups of mothers in a community together to share in the ingredients and cooking a meal for their children." (Roche et al., 2018, p. 2). The PD/Hearth approach complemented the communal aspect of "mink'a" while simultaneously promoting the Quichua language and culture through cooking.

With this in mind, mothers' cooking clubs were organized under the direction of elder "guide mothers" to help train women in food preparation, sanitation, and nutrition. "The

objective of this study was to assess the nutritional, social and cultural potential of mothers'

cooking clubs that promoted Quichua culture and traditional foods," (p.1) by using traditional

leafy greens in dishes to target children's nutrition. Two locally available wild greens which had

fallen out of culinary use were used as the target for increasing children's vitamin intake. Weekly

sessions required participating mothers to contribute ingredients and then participate in group

preparation of a local recipe (2018). Through the cooking club sessions, women were able to

reintegrate local produce into already existing Quichua foodways.

Project Outcomes

While the intervention's primary focus was to improve child nutrition, interviews with

mother and elder participants reflected the positive social outcomes of family and community.

Quichua language and cultural knowledge had deteriorated in the community due to previous

colonial school systems (2018). Women participating in the study expressed strong interest in

improving their knowledge of Quichua and the desire to teach their children as well. Themes of

strengthened identity and increased self-efficacy emerged during the course of the study. Women

noticed a positive change in their relationship with their indigenous foodways, their peers, and

their children (p.5). The inclusion of local greens once associated with the traditional land, "el

campo" was transformative in helping women feel reconnected to their cultural heritage and

identity.

The practice of including local produce in a supportive peer environment also improved

self-esteem. They had a positive association with being able to feed their families with nutrient-

rich local food with a sense of pride and security (p.6). Amongst peers, the mothers expressed a

new sense of unity and shared accomplishment (p.6). Even after the cooking club sessions ended,

the mothers who participated continued to meet in groups and socialize (p.6). Community events

were also held and included the promotion of traditional foods with the addition of wild greens.

The community promotional events and the increased sense of "unity" among the mothers

suggest that this intervention was able to mobilize the community's awareness of Indigenous

foodways and cultural identity. Similar nutrition interventions suggest peer cooking groups have

demonstrated benefits like increased "decision-making" and the "empowerment of women"

(2018). Overall the "intervention incorporated both cultural and nutritional aspects of improving

food security, which are integral aspects of respecting dignity for Indigenous communities"

(p.7).

Case Study Two: Soufra Cafeteria, Lebanon

Background

The second case study examines a current project by Cuisines Sans Frontieres (CsF) or

"Kitchens Without Borders" operating in Southern Beirut, Lebanon. In the refugee camp of Burj

El-Barajneh in 2017, CsF launched a catering company and cafeteria run by local women (CsF,

2019). The Swiss-based organization seeks to "build gastronomic meeting places and training

facilities in areas of (social) conflict. Conversations are held, relationships are forged and

problems solved. CsF is based on this everyday experience" (CsF, 2019). With active projects in

South America, the Mediterranean, and Africa, Cuisine sans Frontieres operates as a non-profit

organization and oversees the initial project phases of operations with the help of volunteer

workers until the project is handed over to local partners. The organization emphasizes the

necessity of these projects to be grounded in grassroots and local partnerships to be funded.

CsF's unique intersections of cooking, conflict, and informal peacebuilding provide a relevant

sample population to conduct this research. Several international and non-governmental

organizations aid the Palestinian population in the refugee camps. The UNWRA (United Nations

Relief and Works Agency) which has served the refugee population in some capacity since 1949,

formed the WPA (Women's Program Association) in the 1990s to design women empowerment

programs ("Women of Soufra, the Beirut's Food Truck Founded by Refugees," 2019).

The Palestinian refugee camps established in Lebanon are among the oldest operating

camps in the world. The focus of this research will look at Burj el-Barajneh, a camp established

in 1949 on the outskirts of Beirut which continues to operate today. Over the past 70 years with

the continued destabilization of the region, the demographic makeup of the camp has shifted to

include Syrian refugees, Iraqis, Egyptians, and Lebanese (Latif, 2010; *Soufra The Film*, 2017).

As a result, the camp population has almost doubled in size since 1960 (Csf, 2019; *Burj*

Barajneh Camp, UNRWA Website, n.d.). The influx has strained the camp's capacity creating

close quarters, increased conflicts between local Lebanese and refugees, and limited resources or

job opportunities, particularly among men (Latif, 2008). These factors have all contributed to

women's insecurity in the camp and have made it increasingly difficult for them to venture out of

camp borders to seek education or employment (2008). For physical security reasons, women are

typically not allowed to leave the campgrounds, and safe congregational spaces for women are

limited (Hofmann, 2022).

Project Origins

Mariam Shaar is a generational refugee and lifelong inhabitant of the camp who was

working for the WPA when she was inspired to begin her own business. With the support of CsF

and the WPA, Mariam Shaar established a catering company for women within the camp in

2017. Shaar conducted a local survey among women in the camp to determine what fields they

were most skilled in, which would benefit them the most, and what they were most passionate

about. Most of the women's responses were cooking so the catering company "Soufra" or

"dining table" was born (Colombo, 2019). Palestinian refugees are considered stateless persons in Lebanon, so Shaar faced structural obstacles like Lebanese legislation and regulations in the process of opening her brick-and-mortar company ("Soufra Food Truck," n.d.; Hofmann, 2022). As a result, the company opened instead as the first refugee food truck in Lebanon (Colombo, 2019). The success of the food truck led to the eventual publication of the cookbook, "Soufra: Recipes from a refugee Food Truck", the opening of the Soufra Cafeteria in Burj El Barajneh, the creation of a rooftop kitchen garden, and a recently released documentary "Soufra"(AP Archive, 2022).

Project

The Soufra Cafeteria employs refugee women of diverse ethnic backgrounds who all receive culinary training and cook traditional Middle Eastern dishes as a collective. The project goals as listed on the CsF Website are, "female empowerment: increasing the economic opportunities for women and their families and strengthening the sense of community through regular exchanges between women from different backgrounds" (2019). As the company and its projects have expanded, it has created new employment and training opportunities. "We started with five women. Now we have many units in Soufra, in the kitchen (of) Soufra, we have catering, we have a cafeteria…Now, we have more than 30 employees in Soufra's Kitchen" (AP Archive, 2022). Soufra is fully run and operated by women in the camp who earn their income from their skills. Men in the camp experience unemployment or underemployment, so women's financial contributions to the household can help improve their household security as head of household and provide necessary services for their children (AP Archive, 2022; CsF, 2019).

Women's physical security is an issue in the camp, the Cafeteria also functions as a hospitable space within camp borders for women to meet and share ideas, experiences, and

recipes. In a video interview with Shaar, she explains that the space is not just crucial for job skills but so that women may congregate in a "safe environment" and "know their rights" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2021). Beyond providing physical and financial security for the refugee women, the collaborative nature of the project has helped decrease local tensions between the different ethnic groups in the camp. Shaar states "the training sessions in the kitchen are reducing tensions and animosities that exist between the Palestinian refugees and the Lebanese and Syrians" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2021).

Case Study Three: UN Women, Nepal

Background

The third case is a project that was developed as a response to the economic effects of Covid-19 in Nepal. UN Women is an entity of the United Nations dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women supports the Member States in their agendas to achieve gender equality and works primarily with government bodies and civil society groups (About UN Women, 2022). The UN Women Nepal Country Office began operations in 2013, 7 years after the end of the Nepalese Civil War in 2006, also known as "The People's War" (Pettigrew, 2012). Historically, Nepal's population has been characterized by intense demographic divisions, particularly among caste and ethnic categories (K.C. et al., 2017). Lower caste and ethnic groups had experienced years of social and political marginalization, discrimination, and overall frustration with the country's economic stagnation (Menon & Van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015). In 1996 the Maoist Party mobilized this growing discontent to address structural inequalities based on caste, class, ethnicity, region, and gender (K.C et al., 2017; Menon & Van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015). The conflict between the Maoists and the Rana monarchy of Nepal resulted in a

devastating civil war that lasted a decade and incurred heavy social and economic costs to the country.

A defining characteristic of the People's War was the inclusion of women combatants in the Maoist insurgency. While the exact percentage of female participation is contested, (various sources estimate at least 19% but up to 50%) it is obvious that the Maoists were able to attract a substantial number of women to their cause (K.C. et al., 2017; Mawby & Applebaum, 2018; Pettigrew, 2012). The Maoist movement also included a lot of "women empowerment" rhetoric as part of their political platform (Pettigrew, 2012). The "inclusion" of women in both the People's Liberation Army and their political agenda has had implications for women combatants and non-combatants alike. Researchers on women's issues in Nepal argue that the civil war "presented the opportunity to create new (generally unanticipated) experiences for Nepali women of all backgrounds" (p.104) and forced new political parties to introduce reforms that addressed women's issues. As is often the case, the conflict opened up spaces and opportunities for shifts in gender roles and expectations (Fuest, 2008; Mawby & Applebaum, 2018).

The Peace Accord which ended the civil war signaled a formal post-conflict peace-building phase (K.C. et al., p.178). However, in 2015 Nepal experienced a devastating earthquake that has thrown up roadblocks to successful reconstruction and created even more vulnerable communities, affecting women in particular (Mawby & Applebaum, 2018). Nepal's particular conflict history and the acknowledgment of gender issues during its political transition have opened a space for women to become more politically active (2018). Various projects and organizations led by international and grassroots initiatives have been operating in Nepal to address specific gender challenges to reconstruction (K.C. et al., 2017). These tools and experiences have created many active women-led civil society organizations in Nepal.

Project

      In direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women Nepal has collaborated with project partners from both the public and private sectors to assemble the "Comprehensive Relief Package" which targets the needs of women and marginalized groups made increasingly vulnerable by the health crisis. (Marginalized groups are contextually defined as "returnee migrants, rural dwellers, women with disabilities, wage workers, and women who are ill, pregnant or lactating"(*Comprehensive Relief Package*, 2021). The relief package aimed to address these populations as part of a long-term agenda to "achieve gender equality and social inclusion" (*Comprehensive Relief Package*, 2021). The package included other elements such as legal aid, access to pertinent health information, and cash-based support organized through feminist organizations and local governments. In particular, UN Women in conjunction with four CSOs (Women for Human Rights, Maiti Nepal, Nagarik Aawaz, and Nari Bikas Sangh) established six women-managed kitchens in several provinces of Nepal (*Women-Managed Community Kitchens Support Vulnerable Women in Nepal*, 2021). Peacebuilding CSOs like Nagarik Aawaz contributed their resources and mobilized their existing networks to help organize a swift COVID response. Since 2004, Nagarik Aawaz has been operating a community kitchen for marginalized and displaced communities (Mawby & Applebaum, 2018).

      The community kitchens address the sudden unemployment caused by the pandemic lockdown, provide critical access to food items and resources for marginalized groups and temporarily alleviate women's domestic care burden (*Comprehensive Relief Package Brief*, 2021). In the latest report by UN Women, the kitchens have served a total of 95,298 meals, with an average of 250 to 500 meals a day since May 2020 (2021). The community kitchens have succeeded in providing meals for an additional 30,859 marginalized people. The kitchens also

provide income to 123 women who are managing and distributing food. In Nepal, the COVID lockdown has stopped daily wage work, so these incomes have been crucial in sustaining household economic security for employed women.

Women who are beneficiaries of meals from the community kitchens have alleviated part of the household burden; allowing them to pursue other areas of domestic care or explore alternative employment opportunities. Reports from UN Women have stated that "free meals from the community kitchens have also helped build trust and cohesion in the community" by providing direct relief which exceeded government assistance and centering local women as frontline workers in the crises (Comprehensive Relief Package Brief, 2021).

Case Study Four: Darjeeling Express/The Lotus Flower, UK

Background

The final case study looks at Darjeeling Express, an Indian restaurant owned by Chef Asma Khan and the only Indian restaurant in the world run by all-women. Chef Khan's success at Darjeeling Express has led to the publication of two cookbooks and has made her the first British chef to be featured on the Netflix Series, *Chef's Table*. Darjeeling Express has been lauded as one of the most popular Indian restaurants of this decade (LaGrave, 2022); noted not just for the delicious food honoring Chef Khan's Bengali heritage, but also for her particular kitchen staff.

Historically, South Asian immigrants to the UK have experienced racism, social marginalization, and housing and employment discrimination. Indian immigrants in particular, "faced hostility on a number of fronts. Apart from the difficulties in getting access to good-paying jobs and to decent housing, racist harassment and abuse was common and sometimes boiled over" (Thandi, p.46). Indian immigrants initially faced multiple deprivations and as a

result, struggled to secure cultural and religious rights in their host country (2018). After decades of settlement and social initiatives celebrating multiculturalism, the Indian diaspora community has made important socio-economic progress. The diaspora community has succeeded in establishing places of worship in their communities and has a relatively high market participation rate (2018). However, challenges to the community persist. "A significant proportion of the community still lives in deprived neighborhoods and are stranded in low-paying unskilled occupations, and especially women workers continue to experience high rates of unemployment in some localities and survive off state benefits" (Thandi, p.55). The Indian immigration experience to the UK provides a historical and social context for Khan's project.

Asma Khan was born the second daughter of a royal family in Kolkata. Khan states, "A first-born girl is sad–a second girl is a disaster" (LaGrave, 2022). She expresses a sentiment that is embedded in South Asian culture and manifests itself as discriminatory treatment towards girls socially and within the household. This sentiment became the motivation for Khan to create safe spaces for other "second daughters like herself " (Muherjee, 2020). While growing up in India, Khan had never learned to cook even though her mother owned a catering business (and hired marginalized women as cooks). It was not until she moved to Cambridge, the UK with her new husband that she was struck with homesickness and wanted to eat the food that reminded her of home. She returned to India a year later to learn with her mother and Haji Saheb, the family cook (LaGrave, 2022). "Once, after making *shami kabob*, Asma's mother tasted it and approved, serving it to the staff who had been watching, women celebrating other women. *May Allah bless your hands*, Haji Saheb told Asma" (LaGrave, 2022). This experience became Khan's inspiration when she rejoined her husband in England to recreate community through food in her new environment. She began cooking small dinners for South Asian nannies and housewives she met

through her children's school. These dinners became so popular they evolved into supper clubs, which hosted up to 40 people.

Project

Khan was eventually able to open Darjeeling and Express through word-of-mouth; she hired a staff of South Asian immigrants who had never trained in professional kitchens. Her decision to hire "untrained" staff was intentional. "Why are home cooks not considered good enough…to be paid to work in internationally lauded restaurants?" (LaGrave, 2022). Khan adds that if you travel through South Asia a woman is overseeing the cooking at home, but in restaurants it's men. "In the commercial kitchen we might expect women to outnumber men as cooks. After all, cooking is almost universally coded as women's work in the home. Yet women are less likely than men to work as cooks in restaurants–whether McDonald's or five-star restaurants" (Allen & Sachs, p.8). Her efforts to hire women with no professional training aim to highlight "women's labor that goes unregarded, unheralded, unrecognized" (La Grave, 2022). Khan believes that the life experience of cooking in a household can be transferable to working in a restaurant atmosphere. Building on this Khan plans to implement training programs that would give women the skills they need to successfully run and manage restaurants, not limited to the kitchen (2022).

In hiring a team of "second daughters", Khan has created a safe space for women in the restaurant industry. Working late and long shifts in the evening are notoriously difficult for women who have care responsibilities, but Khan implements a flexible system to accommodate their schedules. In the afternoon she allows women time to call their family abroad and return home to check in with their children, or women who are pregnant, are allowed a late shift where they can come in after heavy restaurant prep is finished (Kelly-Linden, 2018). Offering

flexibility around childcare support is just an example of how Darjeeling creates a level playing field for women in restaurants.

Furthermore, by hiring South Asian immigrant women specifically, Khan supports diversity and representation in London hospitality, with the hopes of getting women of color into decision-making and senior positions. These women face intersectionality of sexist, racist, and class-based issues so by elevating them within the industry she hopes to give them a platform to celebrate their identities (Mukherjee, 2020) and create more opportunities for future women.

As an extension of her experience with Darjeeling Express, in 2019 Khan financed and launched an all-women cafe, the Lotus Cafe, in the Essyan refugee camp in northern Iraq. The Essyan refugee camp houses 15,000 internally displaced people, many of whom are women and girls who were victims of ISIS (Lotus Cafe, n.d.; Mukherjee, 2020). The Cafe was created as a culturally acceptable space for women to gather, and gain economic independence through cooking and management skills offered by Chef Khan. In the same vein as Darjeeling Express, the Cafe is managed and operated by the women in the camp. Women who work in the cafe also retain profits as income, so they can financially support their families or reinvest the money at their discretion. The Lotus Cafe provides an opportunity for women who were victims of gender-based violence to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society with employable skills (The Lotus Flower, n.d.).

Data Analysis

Women cooking in these case studies shared similarities across 3 major themes: self-esteem, women's group support, and community keeping. These themes were broken up into sub-themes to adequately address the topics covered in the interview transcripts. Women noted higher self-esteem and self-efficacy which came from a variety of sources such as financial

independence. Women's group support was beneficial to women's social lives and in pursuing

other livelihood opportunities. Finally, community keeping is discussed as a responsibility to

care for others, including addressing community food insecurity and cultural insecurity.

Structural violence is embedded in all of these cases. First, a lack of access to nutrition and

healthcare professionals and low investment in rural areas has caused severe malnutrition in

Indigenous communities in Ecuador. Second, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are considered

stateless; their lack of citizenship rights create obstacles to employment opportunities. Third,

women in Nepal are still suffering from their civil wars' violence, and experience social

exclusion due to caste, ethnicity and gender. Lastly, South Asian immigrant women in the UK

struggle to gain employment beyond low-wage jobs or living off state services. In general,

women did not experience access or power in their family or communities. The data below seeks

to understand how women sustain peace in the face of everyday violence.

Themes from the Data

Self-Esteem

The Importance of Self-Esteem: "Women Can Do Anything, Correct?"

The data reflected that many women felt increasingly positive about themselves which

increased their overall well-being. This data does not infer that self-esteem has a definite

relationship to creating positive peace processes, rather it indicates that people's attitudes and

values could be important indicators of where the community is in the peace process. The ways

that women view themselves and their participation in society are relevant social and power

dynamics to be considered in an analysis of everyday peace. It might also help identify potential

stakeholders in the community. Self-esteem and pride as it relates to agency and empowerment

may also be indicators for which peace initiatives might be most successful in different contexts.

The overall data on self-esteem showed that women perceived a higher sense of self from different sources. Some were related to their financial security, their cooking skill, or their ability to use their skill to the benefit of others.

For example, in the Quichua community, there was a local custom common exclusive to men where they greet each other in public as a sign of respect. Interviewee #2, "Before I would hide my face and look away if someone came to the house; now I reach out my hand and greet them, and the children have learned to do it too" (Roche et al., p.5). Women who participated in the cooking clubs adopted this cultural practice which had a "profound effect" on their self-esteem and continued after the intervention ended (Roche et al., p.5). Other women felt pride in their increased cooking skills and ability. Ghadah Messrieh says,"I feel alive working and being productive. I am not a chef yet but I gained a lot of experience. I can cook anything! Kubah, pastries, grape leaves…all my food is delicious!" (Morgan, 2018). Manal Hassan adds, "Women can do anything. Especially in these times, women can do anything, correct?"(2018). These women's sentiments reflect a broader feeling of positivity based on their ability. This could also be situated in the framework of feminist care ethics, whereby the process of making women's care work visible increases esteem and value. Kamal Mouzawak who works with the women at a local restaurant believes in Schaar's efforts as well (Cuisine sans frontières, 2017):

> This is a group of active women trying to change their lives and influence the lives of others using very simple methods from their daily life such as cooking…What we want is that a woman who used to feel like a nobody, like she wasn't important, realizes her relevance and that she is doing important work.

Mouzawak's statement proposes a relationship between cooking as a way to raise esteem and place value on work. Whether or not this relationship exists does not fall within the scope of this

paper, but it still contributes to our understanding of how cooking can be a tool for building esteem and value.

Self-Esteem related to physical contribution

One of the most surprising and consistent themes to emerge from the data was women's feelings of pride and high self-esteem related to cooking. Women felt high self-esteem related to their activities and used phrases like "feeling good", "feeling alive", having "joy". Their positive feelings were generally linked to women being able to cook which they saw as beneficial to themselves, their households, and their communities. Interviewee #4 observed, "We make better mothers. We feed our children well, and from within oneself…you start to feel good" (Roche et al., p.7). Jamuna Khadka says (Nagarik Aawaz, for Peace, 2020),

> This is a whole new experience for me. While I was confined in my home, I didn't know there were helpless people. After coming to community kitchen I came to know there are a lot of people who are in need. I am satisfied and happy to be working here.

Mariam Schaar adds, "Our lives have drastically changed. You realize your worth, you feel more accomplished. You finally benefit yourself and not just your family" (Morgan, 2018). In the first two statements, the interviewees perceived a higher valuation of self-based on their ability to properly care for family and community. Due to women generally being socialized into caregiving roles, the sense of self might be informed by the ability to perform care practices (Ibnouf, 2020). However, Schaar's statement reflects a slightly different sentiment where higher self-esteem was a benefit in and of itself and not because it enabled her to perform care practices for her family. Alternatively, Asma Khan reflects on the emotional benefit connected to feeding others and how it positively affects her. Asma Khan (Mandviwalla, 2019):

That's how food should be. I get happiness from seeing people's eyes when they eat the

food I've cooked. That feeling when you can light up someone's soul with something

you've prepared, that feeling is a privilege and an honor.

These statements reflect a real, valid diversity in how women view themselves, frame their work,

and how they might build their self-esteem. This insight is critical for peace researchers because

it demonstrates context-specific personal and social dynamics contributing to everyday peace.

Self-Esteem related to Financial Contributions:

Overwhelmingly, women felt pride in being able to contribute financially to their

households and support themselves. This observation corresponded with the objectives of these

projects, as cooking was used to alleviate severe cases of unemployment and instability in their

communities; such as the refugee camp in Lebanon and the marginalized communities of Nepal.

Nani Maya Maharajan stated, "I am very happy now. Even though I run my own local business, I

had to stop it because of the lockdown. This kitchen has provided aid to me during the

pandemic" (Nagarik Aawaz, for Peace, 2020). Manal Hassan adds(Morgan, 2018):

Every morning I am excited to go to work. Some women say, 'Why should I work and

my husband works?' Sometimes it's not enough…Now I can provide my kids with

whatever they need. If they want new clothes or food, I could not do this before. But now

it's different. I have income.

In these cases, women were able to participate in achieving financial security in their households.

The opportunity to work may indicate that these women felt better about being productive

member of the household and society. Pushpa Sunar comments (*Women-Managed Community

Kitchens Support Vulnerable Women in Nepal*, 2021) :

Women are often the ones cooking for their entire families at home but are hesitant to do

so professionally and earn an income…When women are financially independent, they

no longer have to be dependent on the men in their families.

Here Sunar emphasizes the importance of women earning income not to support families, but to

gain financial independence. While there is little indication of feelings of pride associated with

financial independence, it is relevant to note that she perceives it positively. For Sunar, women

should feel more confident in using their cooking in non-professional settings as a means to a

financial end, not because it benefits anyone else.

Khan talks about opening her restaurant with her staff of South Asian immigrant women. From

her position of privilege, she had to consider that these women had part-time jobs that they could

not quit right away (Mandviwalla, 2019):

I am very very lucky, the meal on my table is not dependent on my income alone. But all

these women, they're supporting families back home. So when I opened Darjeeling

Express, I didn't let any of them resign from their positions.

Khan understood the sacrifice and financial implications for many of the women that wanted to

work with her. Once they were all able to officially join her kitchen full-time it was a source of

pride for her to showcase the women in the restaurant. Full-time work also meant increased

financial security through commensurate pay and benefits. "That was the moment I put my flag

in the sand…I wanted to have an open kitchen because I wanted people to see the hands that

cooked the food, and just celebrate the soul of my kitchen" (Mandviwalla, 2019). Khan wanted

to make sure that her staff could still contribute to their families abroad and support themselves

while they transitioned to her kitchen. With the knowledge of what financial security means to

women, particularly marginalized women (immigrants) she was proud when they were all able to

join her. These case studies once again emphasize women's divergent motivations for financial security and how their self-esteem may be related to their ability to support themselves or others.

Women Group Support: "This is the story we need to tell"

Across all interventions, women reported that the biggest benefit of cooking was bonding with other women. Words such as "unity", "friendships", "shared accomplishment" and "love" appeared repeatedly in interview transcripts. In these all-woman groups, women felt secure, supported, and created new opportunities for other women. In these case studies, women benefited socially from the cooking interventions. They were able to fight feelings of loneliness and isolation, which in some cases improved the overall social community dynamic. Support from their peers also encouraged growth and learning opportunities for women in the group. Based on the interviews below it is easy to see why women's groups are effective as a form of community development.

Social Interactions

Interviewee #6 stated plainly: "We didn't meet up before because of egoism, but now we meet once a month…What I liked best about the project was the union between ladies that we formed while preparing food for all of our children" (Roche et al., p.6). Interviewee #1 agreed saying: "We weren't in the habit of getting together. Some wanted to, others didn't. We weren't very united. Now in the afternoons we put a time and date and we meet up" (Roche et al., p.6). In this particular case, both women cite a division among the women in their community that prevented them from meeting or bonding. After they participated in the mothers' cooking clubs the women felt united and felt encouraged to continue meeting. Interviewee #4 adds, "We got together with the others, we became better friends, we laughed…"(Roche et al., p.7). Although the nature of the conflict which prevented women from the meeting is unclear, the cooking club

played a part in decreasing tensions and helping the women bond. The cooking club changed the nature of the relationships between women and therefore the social dynamics of the community. Mariam Schaar makes a similar observation about the women in her kitchen (Morgan, 2018):

> The kitchen does not only benefit women financially. It created a team spirit. They are always in touch. Even if they don't work, they meet for coffee. It feels great to work together, great energy. You never feel alone. We got used to each other and loved one another.

Asma Khan describes the loneliness of the immigrant experience in London, and how the group support in her kitchen shifted the dynamics for the women on her staff (Mandviwalla, 2019),

> In my community, South Asian women, we are hidden behind a wall. It is an anonymous, faceless, nameless existence. I saw in these women [in her kitchen], that fire, the desire, the joy. We all were on that same journey together. You could see them grow as a team, the bond within that kitchen was very strong.

Both Schaar and Khan reference feelings of isolation, which were present before the establishment of their kitchens. This was remedied by the camaraderie created in the kitchen space which then extended into the women's daily social lives. Khan continues, "I've watched these women grow, stand tall, be proud. This is what happens to women when other women stand by them" (2019). Both women, as leaders in their respective communities, understand the positive impact that peer support has on women. Lastly, Suvadhra Baniya also comments on the bond formed in their community kitchen: "In this pandemic, we were all stressed and sitting at home. We sisters are coming together in this kitchen and forgetting all our pains and sorrows. We cook one healthy meal for the people who are in need" (Nagarik Aawaz, for Peace, 2020).

In these informal environments, women form their social networks through which they gain support, and friendship and are dedicated to a common purpose.

Opportunity and Learning

Women also felt secure in their support groups, which was a catalyst in some cases to help women try new experiences or explore other opportunities for growth. For example, in the nutrition intervention in Ecuador, the cooking club helped normalize the reintroduction of traditional food into women's and children's diets. The cooking clubs "provided participating mothers with an opportunity to learn recipes from the few mothers who were already including wild green in their cooking. It also provided a way for the women to try the nettle together" (Roche et al., p.7). Group support from other mothers removed the stigma and fear of testing the unfamiliar ingredient. Social support from peers was identified in the study as a key factor in the success of the intervention (2018).

Some women used the support and experience from their groups to explore other opportunities. Abeer Almassry claimed that as a result of her experience working in Soufra Cafeteria, she hoped to pursue her economic ventures, " My dream is to open a food chain, because it is my passion. Hopefully I will do it one day. I hope all women reach their dreams and improve" (Morgan, 2018). In Asma Khan's experience her restaurant functioned as an incubator for women to gain experience and strike out on their own (Mandviwalla, 2019).

> Two of the women in the kitchen are the opening chefs for a new [restaurant] venture …One of the women working with me will be hosting her first independent supper club cooking food from Bombay…It has begun, I can see the ripples already!

In these case studies, the social support provided by these groups improved women's social lives and their daily experiences. Furthermore, the security and experience that these groups provided made it easier for women to explore other livelihood opportunities such as entrepreneurship.

Community Keeping

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the data analysis was women's framing of cooking and serving others as a form of community keeping (Cruz, 2012). Community keeping was broadly defined as the ability to provide a basic daily need (food) for those in need. This theme was further separated into sub-themes of food insecurity and cultural food security, which contributed to trust-building and well-being.

Addressing Food Insecurity

In many cases, the cooking interventions were a way of addressing short-term food insecurity in communities. In this context, the FAO's definition of food insecurity applies, "A prolonged lack of sufficient safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life" (FAO, 1996). In some cases, women positioned themselves as responsible for helping others. When addressing her kitchen providing food to the unemployed during Covid, Mariam Schaar states "Wherever we can help, we must help. Maybe the amount of food is a lot for us but at least it is securing their daily food" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2020). About the community kitchen's shutting down temporarily due to Covid-19, Maheshwari Bhatta stated, "We knew the importance of a healthy meal to people living under the poverty line who have lost their safety net. Stopping this kitchen was an emotional predicament for us" (Nagarik Aawaz, for Peace, 2020). Bhatta implies they felt a burden of responsibility to feed those in need. "The government was distributing food items, but it was far from enough." In response, her kitchen worked with local governments to estimate the dietary needs of those in the area. Asma Khan has also used

cooking to address food insecurity, by hosting events for Action Against Hunger and donating to her local communities (Mandviwalla, 2019):

> I have always been aware of the privilege of eating and not going to bed hungry…I always wanted to help those that were more disadvantaged and I watched my mother doing this when I was young…I have given food to the homeless and in shelters in London as cooking is a gift I have and I want to share it with those who are the most needy in my community.

These women used cooking to address a gap of community food insecurity that was not being met by other institutions. Women framed their work as a responsibility to help the disadvantaged. In temporarily meeting these food needs, women were able to build trust in their communities. These acts of community keeping are linked to feminist care work, specifically using Daniel Engster's definition where care practices are "everything we do directly to help individuals to meet their vital biological needs, develop or maintain their basic capacities, and avoid or alleviate…pain and suffering so they can survive, develop and function in society" (Ibnouf, p.153). In these cases, alleviating food insecurity was a form of community keeping achieved through care practice.

Noticeably, women often placed importance on preparing "nutritious" foods. For example, Safiya Kharroub states, "I decided to join…for the sake of the children. Many things at the camp have germs that hurt the kids. That is why we, and myself in particular, want to learn how to serve healthy food to our children" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2017). Maheshwari Bhatta adds that the healthy food from the community kitchen would be beneficial for those fighting Covid-19, "We are not only increasing their energy with nutritious food, but also developing their immunity in these desperate times" (Nagarik Aawaz, for Peace, 2020). Not only were

women meeting immediate food needs in these dire situations, but they stressed the nutritional value of the food they were serving.

Cultural Food Security

In other cases, food held cultural value and contributed to overall well-being benefiting the community. In Ecuador, the reintroduction of traditional local foods was connected to increased cultural well-being. Quichua women identified a difference between "city" food and food from "el campo". Interviewee #3 stated, "With green foods, with what we have in el campo [land], there are many vitamins. We can give them to children and be healthy and offer them what is good" (Roche et al., p.5). Women participants recognized the connections between their traditional lands ("el campo") and health. Through the cooking clubs led by local guide mothers, women were educated about cultural foodways, which connected both nutritional and cultural benefits. Guide mothers also used the cooking clubs to promote the use of the Quichua language, so women could practice with their children at home. Overall, participants expressed, "an overarching theme of strengthened identity and increased self-efficacy," (Roche et al., p.5) because of the nutrition intervention. These results extended to the rest of the community, where women reported a noticeable change in well-being amongst their children and their peers. Furthermore, news of the intervention had spread through the community which resulted in a recipe contest for the traditional leafy green at the local cultural fair in the area (2018). This demonstrates the cultural impact the intervention had on the community, even for non-participants. Asma Khan also speaks to the cultural significance of food (Mandviwalla, 2019):

> My mother said 'You're dying because you're hungry. You're hungry for food that tastes
> like home. I'm going to teach you how to cook.' In the Indian tradition there are these

iconic dishes that people have carried through generations. For so many South Asian women, their signature dishes mean honor and respect.

For Khan and her mother, preparing cultural foods was a method of reconnecting to home and "tradition" which was equated to increased well-being. Khan goes on to say that learning to cook the cultural dishes of her family, helped improve her quality of life which she used to cultivate a community of South Asian women in London. "I started cooking for them. It felt so wonderful. Slowly they started coming more often….I ended up with a group who I would consider now, my sisters…No this feels like home" (2019). Cooking cultural food was a way to strengthen Khan's sense of cultural identity as well as create a cultural community in a diasporic context.

Ghadah Messrieh talks about using food as a way to create a cultural connection with women from different backgrounds (Morgan, 2018):

I cook Palestinian food, and we have a Lebanese that cooks Lebanese food, and we exchange and learn about each other's background. I know about her way of life and she knows about mine. We explore different tastes. There are old Palestinian dishes that I didn't know about but I learned through this interaction. All of this encouraged us to get closer.

In the context of the refugee camp, cultural exchanges over food resulted in trust-building in the broader community. Mariam Schaar confirms this adding, "These sessions in the kitchen are reducing tensions and animosities that exist between the Palestinian refugees and the Lebanese and Syrians" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2017). Messrieh discusses not only an exchange of food but also history, cultural background, and individual experiences. She also states that this interaction helped deepen her own cultural identity by learning about dishes she was not previously aware of.

Summary of Findings

An analysis of this data shows that women framed themselves and their work among themes of self-esteem, group support, and community keeping. These themes also demonstrate how women's work affected not just themselves, but positively resonated in other domains such as the group collective and the community. This observation corresponds with other scholars who note that, "the agency of women for instance, has been shown to affect positively the wellbeing of all those around them" (Sen, 1999 as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009). Importantly, some of the cooking interventions involved a financial or educational component which are widely recognized indicators for increased agency and empowerment for women (Saad, 2013; Samman & Santos, 2009).

Discussion

This research was based on 23 interviews transcribed from documentaries, video clips, and written interviews. These cases were chosen because they do not look at spaces of active violent conflict, but rather post-conflict communities where structural violence takes place. As women are often active in community reconstruction and maintenance, the priority of this research was to understand how women framed their roles, as these perspectives are often missing from peace processes and discourse. To do so, everyday peace and feminist care frameworks were used to interrogate the use of cooking by women in communities. The intention was to gain insight into women's perspectives and how they framed their cooking in the context of their communities. The cases that were chosen sought to exemplify the diverse ways cooking was utilized in different parts of the world and had different objectives such as addressing nutrition, unemployment, and food insecurity.

Various themes consistent across these cases emerged, which were explored in the data analysis section above. Women's roles as community keepers, women's self-esteem, and group support were the most relevant to this analysis. The intention was to demonstrate the diversity of women's experiences, and how they use cooking to fulfill different needs for themselves and their communities. This section will examine if cooking interventions may contribute to local dynamics of everyday peace, beginning from the notion that micro-level peace should be investigated just as much as violent conflict. This hopes to bring awareness to the lived experiences of everyday women, how they navigate violence of the everyday and how these themes might support local peacebuilding. In doing so, peace research gains insight into forms of both everyday peace and everyday violence. While these projects were not designed with the overt goal of sustaining or creating peace, they provide insight into moments of "peaceful

engagement or non-violent coexistence in everyday life," (Ware & Ware p.2) which may contribute to wider peace formation.

Research Themes

Women's self-esteem

One of the most surprising elements of the study was women's positive change in their perception of self during the cooking interventions. Women's change in self-esteem was linked to a variety of sources: self-efficacy, contribution to the household or community through labor, or their ability to help others. Women being able to recognize their labor as valuable in these ways corresponded to an increase in self-esteem and vice versa. This theme was analyzed through the frameworks of structural violence and care practices. The first, recognizes that the violence of the everyday restricts the resources available which prevents the development of their full potential. Through the interventions women were able to access other resources like employment, income and opportunities for learning, which increased their self-esteem and self-efficacy. When combined with the lens of care practices, the cooking interventions demonstrated women's labor as valuable and necessary, which also contributed to improved psychological well-being.

In addition, there is a lot of discussion on definitions, models, and indicators for women's agency and empowerment, and "certainly, a universal interpretation of agency across cultures cannot be assumed" (Manchanda, p.4738). Furthermore, a full debate on what should and should not be considered an indicator of empowerment is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth noting that various other frameworks consider psychological well-being an indicator of empowerment, even though it is "rarely operationalized in empirical research at any level" (Malhotra et al., p.15). In these frameworks, self-esteem was defined as "self-efficacy",

"appreciation in household" and a "sense of self worth" (Malhotra et al., 2002). Mayoux's

framework categorized self-esteem as "power from within" and defined it as increased awareness

and desire for change on an individual level (Ibrahim & Alkaire, 2007).

When psychological well-being is operationalized at the community level, it could spur

collective mobilization and awareness of injustices. On a broader level, high self-esteem could

positively impact their sense of inclusion and acceptance, which was reflected in the data above.

The psychological sphere including women's self-esteem, confidence, and happiness, would be

worth examining in future qualitative research. When considered along these frameworks,

increased self-esteem is a positive consequence of these cooking interventions that has

implications for increased empowerment.

Women who spoke about higher self-esteem regarding their financial contributions often

framed it in reference to equality with men or as sole breadwinners in the households. In these

cases, having financial independence shifted the power dynamics in the household because

women "no longer have to be dependent on the men in their families" (*Women-Managed*

Community Kitchens Support Vulnerable Women in Nepal, 2021) . In addition, where men had

little or no work opportunities, financial contributions to the household allowed women to

renegotiate gender relationships with men. One of the husbands commented, " It's really good

that she works because she can help our family. A man can't do much by himself. We have to

help each other have a better home. It takes two hands to clap, right?" (Morgan, 2018). In this

scenario, economic empowerment was perceived as acceptable because it was beneficial to the

household. However, this type of economic activity can also serve as a source of agency for

women within the household and in the community (Ibrahim & Alkaire, 2007; Martin de

Almagro & Ryan, 2019). Mukerjee et al., (2011) put it plainly,

Giving village women paying jobs for which they are valued in the community is a way

to improve the status of women on several fronts. First, it values their knowledge of the

local population and conditions. Second, it puts cash in the hands of women, which is

known to improve the health of women and children. p.595

Cooking interventions which pay women adequately for labor that is viewed as "domestic" like

cooking, goes a long way in furthering the argument that women's labor should be remunerated

in the first place. In some scholars' opinions, "It is important to understand that unpaid and

underpaid feminized work is a form of structural violence that also leads to direct experiences of

violence in the everyday" (Hedstrom, 2021). Paying women for their labor allows them to avoid

one less form of violence. Furthermore, by creating these micro-level changes in economic

empowerment for women, an entry point is created for those seeking opportunities in the formal

economy. However, this is not to assume that informal activities like these are inherently

negative, as they help women survive and thrive in certain contexts. Finally, financial

independence is a widely agreed upon indicator for empowerment and agency (Saad, 2013). So

at the very least, women earning income have the ability to gain a sense of empowerment and

independence from (or within) their households.

Women's group support

Women reported that one of the benefits of the cooking intervention was the support and

bonding that happened between women; which supports the notion that cooking is a social

practice with social consequences. The theme of women's group support was interpreted through

the lens of everyday peace, which emphasizes that the smoothing and maintenance of social

relations are key to co-existence and non-violence. Everyday peace is achieved "through

engagement with the community and its daily experiences and through relationship-building

within these spaces" (Blomqvist et al., p.18). These relationships transcended their space of work and permeated into their daily social lives. Women who participated were able to reduce feelings of isolation, and the groups created comfortable spaces where women could share their experiences. This suggests that these projects facilitated the rehabilitation of social relations for women experiencing marginalization and exclusion in their communities. In addition, "bringing women together in groups where they can share their experiences, gain access to resources and build knowledge, skills and social networks is increasingly recognized as a potential strategy to empower women" (Kumar et al., p.173). In doing so, these pockets of positive relationships may contribute to overall lower social tensions, trust-building, and wider social networks from which women may gain support and empowerment. The effectiveness of this strategy is evident when looking at the popularity of women's groups in India and Nigeria to improve livelihood opportunities for women (Kumar et al., 2018; Siwach et al., 2022).

The security and support which comes from women's groups may also be used as platforms to address other issues. According to Nussbaum (2002), it is not until women learn about opportunities that other women like them have pursued, that they are encouraged to believe in their worth as equal citizens. For example in Case Study Lebanon and Nepal, both kitchens used their spaces to promote dialogue and awareness on social issues affecting them and their communities. Mariam Schaar claimed that the kitchen was a space of support for women to learn about women's rights as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. "The need to know the rights in their lives. That is why, the women need to come, they need to talk, to have a safe environment" (Cuisine sans frontières, 2017). UN Women community kitchens in Nepal were also able to mobilize volunteers to spread pertinent health information about Covid-19 to their community. As some of the community kitchens were supported by local women CSO's, they also used the

initiative to address gender-based violence and social isolation of disadvantaged women (*About UN Women*, n.d.).

Social support from women's groups can build an awareness and knowledge of social issues; which may be followed by shifts in social norms, the building of social capital, and eventually behavioral changes in the community. Ideally, in this context women's cooking groups do not just contribute to everyday peace, but can be mobilized towards other social and political action, addressing root causes of violence on the local level.

Community-keeping: Food Insecurity

Women framed their ability to cook on the community level as an act of community keeping. In all of the cases, women were fulfilling material needs that were not being met by state or local institutions. These actions can be best understood through the lenses of feminist care work, and structural violence which recognize the lack of basic needs as a form of violence and cooking in these contexts sustains life and builds trust in communities (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017; Vaittinen et al., 2019). Without these responses, their communities would have suffered longer bouts of food insecurity and malnutrition, making their work necessary. It is important to pay attention to women's care work responses in their communities for a few reasons. First, when women respond to urgent needs like food, it provides necessary insight into where true deprivation and suffering are experienced on the local level. In the cases of Lebanon and Nepal women mobilized to organize group cooking efforts and provide meals for those who were unemployed, ill, or in need as a result of the Covid pandemic. In Nepal, the community kitchen's successful response allowed it to remain in operation months after its initial end date. This suggests that food insecurity in those communities may have been an already existing issue exacerbated by the Covid-19 lockdown.

Second, when women respond with necessary care practices to sustain their communities, it contributes to trust-building and capacity-building. Women who were a part of the community kitchen in Nepal were able to take on leadership and aid response roles, which strengthened women's social inclusion and perception. Program associate Anjana Vaidya stated, "Our experience of running community kitchens during the pandemic has shown that women are not only beneficiaries but frontline workers in crises" (*Women-Managed Community Kitchens Support Vulnerable Women in Nepal*, 2021). In Lebanon, due to Soufra Cafeteria's already established community reputation and capacity, they were one of the first organizations to respond with meals and medicine after the Beirut Port explosion of 2020, and the Covid lockdown (Cuisine sans frontières, 2020). By meeting immediate food needs and building the capacity to respond to these situations, care practices can cumulatively create possibilities for rebuilding, and trust-building in communities (Vaittinen et al., 2019).

Finally, local and international institutions should recognize this work as valuable and necessary so we can support women as they navigate their everyday experiences. "Women's labor is seen as 'elastic', expanding in unlimited ways to provision the significant basic needs of families and communities when the state, employers or the community do not provide for them" (Rai et al., p.570). However, women's bodies and labor become especially depleted as they try to fulfill household and community obligations with limited resources and aid. When institutions recognize this work and its impact on communities, women can be supported in their roles. In recognizing this work as necessary and valuable it legitimizes the labor of women in communities all over the world. Practices like cooking are not "unskilled" labor to be taken for granted, but a unique skill set and knowledge which contributes to the survival of communities.

In these ways, formal recognition and support from the state can make this work transformative for women.

Summary

This section demonstrated the ways that women utilize cooking interventions to address needs in their communities. Some of the projects were designed to alleviate malnutrition, unemployment, food insecurity, social exclusion, and marginalization. However, the themes which emerged as a result of the projects reflected social, cultural, and economic implications for women who participated. Themes such as positive self-esteem and women's groups already demonstrated the potential to be connected to women's agency and empowerment, particularly where economic independence was involved. Women's peer groups were analyzed through the framework of everyday peace, where they were found to be useful for women navigating the presence of structural violence by "smoothing social relations" between individuals and communities (Blomqvist et al., 2021). In the case studies these did not culminate in women addressing the root cause of violence, however there was evidence that the women's groups stimulated an awareness of other pressing social issues. This indicates that women's cooking groups could be a safe space for women to mobilize on political and social issues to address structural violence. Finally, community keeping through care practices like cooking were used as catalysts for the processes of trust and capacity-building (Vaittinen et al., 2019). These results illustrate the potential contributions cooking interventions can make towards everyday peace and addressing the everyday violence of women.

Conclusion

Summary of Academic Study

The introductory chapter of this research explained that women are assigned a gendered responsibility of care in the home that often goes unrecognized. This care is a form of emotional, manual, and symbolic labor necessary to sustaining life and present in the everyday. In the absence of direct violence (what some may call "peace"), women shoulder the burden of social reproduction while facing forms of structural violence which makes security more difficult to achieve. The structural obstacles which prevent women from achieving security before conflict become exacerbated during and after conflict. For women, even when active violence "ends", structural violence continues, creating a continuum of insecurity in their everyday lives. To sustain the livelihood and survival of their communities, women use care practices that are essential to household and community maintenance. However, there is little acknowledgment of these practices or their value by formal peacebuilding initiatives.

In addition, the peace field has expanded its research into the realm of the everyday, contending that the everyday minutiae of life hold valuable political and social meaning. The everyday peace literature argues that these are sites of resilience, survival, and agency which are invisible to formal peacebuilding institutions. Therefore mundane social practices considered part of everyday co-existence can be reconsidered through the lens of everyday peace. As cooking is both an everyday biological necessity and a process shaped by socio-cultural factors, this paper affirms its categorization as a form of care practice that takes place in the everyday. However, cooking has yet to be thoroughly applied to the conflict resolution field, which as an everyday practice represents a gap in the literature. Furthermore, as women often perform care practices like cooking, this research begins an exploration into women's cooking when viewed

through the everyday peace and feminist care frameworks. Central to this investigation was the desire to emphasize women's voices and their everyday lived experiences. It was important to understand how women talked about themselves and their roles in their communities.

Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical frameworks used to frame the discussion of cooking as peacebuilding. First, structural violence was established as the broad level of analysis to contextualize the case studies chosen for this research. In a structural violence analysis, invisible and normalized insecurity experienced by women could be investigated. Women's lives and experiences are shaped by systemic structural violence, regardless of the presence of overt violence. Even when direct violence ceases or there is a return to the status quo, women still experience insecurity in their everyday life. An everyday peace lens recognizes that daily life and social practices should be reinterpreted as micro-political actions which are just as relevant as formal peacebuilding spaces. Everyday peace argues that these activities sustain communities during and after conflict, and actors within that space have an agency that goes unrecognized. An everyday peace lens provides a fuller picture of how peace is manifested in local communities and how they might contribute to wider peace formation.

Next, the concept of feminist care ethics was introduced which supported two major aspects of the research. Feminist care ethics affirms the value of care work as a specific knowledge and skill set which operates in both household and community domains. This framework asserts that care work is essential to daily survival and sustaining social relations. As such, care practices help build trust in communities and provide insight into local dynamics. Second, the feminist perspective of care work creates a space for multiple women's narratives to be heard, especially the voices of women that exist in informal spheres. Including these narratives provides a more nuanced understanding of women's experiences, allowing for more

inclusive peace research and design. These two pillars helped lay the groundwork for introducing the act of cooking as valuable to household and community livelihood as well as acknowledging the women who perform this labor.

Chapter 3 attempted to cover the wide breadth of literature on gendered agency and empowerment, food, and peacebuilding. Since peacebuilding, cooking, and gender are constantly expanding fields of inquiry, this literature review pulled research from various disciplines to create an adequate representation of each topic. The literature on women's agency and empowerment, in particular, was not exhaustive of the entire scholarship that exists on the subject. Rather, the intention was to demonstrate the various schools of thought and the potential issues interventionists might face when attempting to design a gender-focused intervention. The literature which covered food and peacebuilding presented the current debates on both topics. Food and conflict are typically framed as an element of human security. However, when food is combined with a sociological or anthropological lens, it presents a new possibility to be adopted in the conflict field. Lastly, the literature review covered both formal and informal peacebuilding and included critiques of everyday peace's conceptualization of power and agency.

In Chapter 4, I expanded on the motivations behind the research methods chosen for this paper. A thematic analysis of the research was chosen to center women's experiences in the cooking interventions. Interviews were transcribed from over 20 women participants, which were then coded and identified for themes. These projects all utilized cooking as the dynamic process to address different forms of structural violence such as social and economic marginalization, unemployment, and malnutrition. Out of the data compiled, 3 main themes emerged relevant to the research. Women reported higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, they identified their cooking as a form of community keeping, and they indicated that the biggest

benefit was the collective support they formed with other women. Women also identified factors such as economic independence as beneficial and necessary to improving women's livelihood.

Chapter 5 discussed these themes in the context of everyday peace and care practices. In the case studies, women's self-esteem was improved by their participation in cooking interventions, and this had positive ramifications for social and community relations. This is a relevant shift in social dynamics that could be relevant to those who are interested in analyzing local peace processes. On a broader scale, women's self-esteem or psychological well-being has been used as an indicator of women's empowerment in various models. Women in the case studies benefited from the security and support from the women's groups. Most women socialized in their groups even outside of their interventions or continued socializing after their projects ended. The women's groups helped to alleviate some of the social exclusion women felt in their daily lives and some cases altered the social dynamics of the community. In general, however, women's groups tend to encourage awareness and knowledge of other social issues. For this reason, women's group initiatives have been used in other countries as a development strategy to improve women's access and opportunities. Finally, women framed their cooking in the context of community keeping. Cooking as a care practice was a way to respond to food insecurity in their communities and a source of cultural reproduction which strengthened their cultural identities. Extensively, these practices can contribute to local trust-building which may be pooled into transformative peacebuilding.

This concluding chapter looks at the limitations of the theories used as it applies to women and their agency in the everyday and the implications of this research on a broader scale. This chapter ends with recommendations for future research in this area.

Limitations of Research

It is relevant to this discussion to consider the differences between cooking interventions and cooking in the household. In the household, there is a presumed lack of autonomy in deciding the gendered division of labor. As women are socialized into gendered housework like cooking, they are assumed to have little to no decision-making power. Therefore they do not choose, but are presumed to perform labor like cooking. In the case studies examined above, women chose to participate; the power and ability to choose is crucial. Their motivations for participation are unknown and certainly varied, but they exercised a choice nonetheless.

In addition, it should be acknowledged that engaging in everyday peace practices for women also means navigating sites of gendered inequality and insecurity (Blomqvist et al., 2021) Everyday peace practices can be viewed as mere coping mechanisms or doing what is necessary to survive conflict. In navigating these sites is the potential "for the reproduction of inequality, oppression and structural violence" (Blomqvist et al., p.225). Cooking interventions may not be necessarily transformative or progressive for women who feel they have no other options but to participate to survive the insecurity of the everyday.

Implications

For women, the everyday is filled with a myriad of gendered injustices and structural violence which can be devastating to women's livelihoods. Particularly post-conflict, institutions are interested in the physical violence of war, but rarely pay attention to the daily challenges that women must navigate both during active conflict and after. It is necessary to pay attention to how women navigate everyday structural obstacles to adequate nutrition, food, unemployment, and marginalization because the everyday is also embedded with resilience, creativity, and localized agency. These cooking interventions demonstrate the creative ways in which women

renegotiate the everyday space to build self-esteem, group empowerment, access to livelihood opportunities and meet community needs. Interventions like these can be powerful because it allows women to reappropriate a skill associated with domestic unpaid labor, into a potential source of self-esteem, participation, and empowerment. In this case, the recognition of this skill as useful, the capacity of the woman to choose to use the skill, and its transition from the private to the public sphere are necessary to these interventions' success. From this starting point, when interventions combine with other indicators of empowerment like financial independence, they have the potential to become transformative for women.

Conflict analysts can utilize models like the bifocal approach to target women who are marginalized from dominant spheres to convert their traditional roles into transformative ones. For example, using the traditional role of cooking in the household and creating a collective of women which can raise a feminist consciousness to address social issues. From there, including other tools of empowerment such as education or economic independence, can create transformative opportunities. Intervention designs might consider this model as a promising stepping stone for women who are restricted by their household, community or cultural contexts.

Finally, cooking interventions like these attempt to address the issue of women needing to be "trained by the international community" to be "empowered" (Martin de Almagro, p.404). This line of thinking suggests that empowerment and agency are bestowed onto women by those with power, to create agents of change. This ignores the ways women frame and manifest their agency and become effective agents of their development (Ibrahim & Alkaire, 2007). Adopting an everyday peace conception of agency and power, allows us to revisit care practices like cooking as a potential exercise in agency that may be part of larger schemes of local empowerment. "Ultimately, individual agency is collectively learnt because of collective

experiences of scarcity, or what might be referred to as mundane practices and minutiae of everyday life" (Martin de Almagro & Ryan, p. 1073). The collective nature of these cooking groups reinforces the potential for agency to be learned and reinforced on a grassroots level. Martin de Almagro (2018) illustrates this with the example of women who start as individuals selling fruit and water, who then join an association that functions as an informal investing and lending organization. "These practices challenge the official narrative of agency and empowerment in peacebuilding: from the individual female entrepreneur, to collective solidarity and empowerment" (p.1073). Notions of peace and agency are therefore not contingent on top-down interventions by state actors, but can be found in "a local capacity to create real and imagined spaces of connection, tolerance and civility" (Williams, p.181). These women are providing a function and meeting needs that are not being met by state actors or the international community. Designing interventions with an alternative perspective on how agency is manifested and learned, could be a method of creating organic empowerment interventions for women. If institutions focused on these local expressions of peace and channeled resources towards it, they could have the potential to address structural causes of violence.

Future Recommendations

This research does not claim cooking as a hopeful cure-all for women in their everyday life. Rather, it suggests cooking as a meaningful peace practice that can be a part of a larger pathway towards empowerment and agency. Ultimately, this research aimed to present how a small portion of women view themselves, their work, and their contributions to their communities. In doing so, it aimed to demonstrate the plurality of women's experiences and sow a seed of doubt into the notion that the kitchen is a site of absolute subordination and oppression. A future academic study should prioritize women's voices and focus on how insecurity and

violence manifest in their everyday lives. This research also suggests that academics fervently

ask how and why peace is sustained on the micro-level. If we do not ask these questions,

women's contributions to informal peace efforts will remain invisible.

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