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## Forgiveness as a Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya

Genevieve Mwella Sabala

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Forgiveness as a Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding  
Women in Rumuruti, Kenya

by

Genevieve Mwella Sabala

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to the  
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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**Nova Southeastern University**  
**Halmos College of Arts and Sciences**

This dissertation proposal was submitted by Genevieve Mwella Sabala under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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## Dedication

To my dad, the late Peter Sabala Imboba and my mom, Antonina Makuli Sabala, thank you for your wisdom, love, sacrifices, humility, prayers, and teaching me that although life is a journey filled with obstacles, learning and navigating those challenges until the goal is achieved is what matters. To my partner Levi, and our children Marieclarice, Clarence, and Glevince, you are my 'why', and your unconditional love, patience, and support made this possible. To Wanawake Wa Amani in Rumuruti, and all women in the world, whose transformative work in developing and sustaining peaceful communities post conflict destruction goes unrecognized, keep inspiring anyway.

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## Abstract

The concept of ‘forgiveness’ in relation to sustainable peace has been extensively written about. However, research shows that many organizations involved in peacebuilding have not actively adopted ‘forgiveness’ as they have done with restorative justice, healing, and reconciliation. Therefore it opens up an opportunity for further inquiry to identify the meaning and role of forgiveness in sustainable peacebuilding. Forgiveness is still being debated and the various meanings accorded by a variety of disciplines from religion, political, sociological, and conflict resolution practitioners, make it more complex. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate women’s lived experiences with ethnic violence post the 2007 elections in Kenya to seek to understand the meaning of forgiveness in that rural Kenyan community. The following research questions were investigated through the study: 1) How do women survivors make meaning of forgiveness following ethnic violence? 2) What was the women’s experience with 2007 post-election violence as the harm that was addressed by forgiveness? 3) What was the women’s experience with, and the process leading to forgiveness? 4) How has the decision to forgive transformed their life at individual, family, and community level? Lederach’s Theory of Conflict Transformation, the Human Needs Theory, and Constructivism are main theoretical frameworks that inform this research. Collected data was analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and showed that sustainable peace is at the intersection of forgiveness and transformation.

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

“The competitive nature of Kenya's electoral process” (Onguny, 2019, p.87) and increased frequency of oral radio have intensified the conflict between ethnic groups to the detriment of national governance (Somerville 2009; Jamal & Deane 2008). In Kenya, there are at least 42 different ethnic and linguistic groups in the country with a population of 53 million (Onguny, 2019). Most are located in specific areas such as Nyanza (Luo), Central (Kikuyu) and Rift Valley (Kalenjin), which have recently been divided into 47 counties (Onguny, 2019). The make up of many rural communities in Kenya is like that of the cities with individuals from different ethnic groups living in the same area; hence the rural communities are multi-ethnic with families from various tribes, including intermarriages between tribes. However, when it comes to voting, people vote on tribal lines despite their physical locality or the fact that they have been residents in those geographic region for decades. Those identity formations become a focal point when the country holds its general elections.

In 2007, Kenya went into a general election in which the main political parties were the Party of National Union (PNU) led by Mwai Kibaki, and its opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) led by Raila Odinga. Given the fact that political alliances are mainly along tribal lines, the former's strong base was the Kikuyu from Central Kenya, while the latter drew the bulk of its support from other ethnic groups. While migration from Central Kenya to other provinces has been commonplace, due to high population pressures, voting patterns remain unchanged. Active violence was triggered by the announcement of the presidential result of a second term for former President Kibaki (Onguny, 2019).

Media outlets today include radio stations exclusively run in vernacular languages. These stations seem to exacerbate voting along tribal lines for major tribes including Kikuyu, Luo, and Kalenjin as individuals tend to tune into their own language stations. It is during election times that intertribal tension and conflict arises. In the case of Western Kenya, two communities supporting the opposing sides, Luhya versus the Kikuyu, were pitted against each other in deadly post-election violence. According to Onguny (2019), ethnolinguistic affinity is a means of producing, negotiating, consuming or disputing group interests. Broadcasting in the language seems to have strengthened the perception that certain groups are victims of hatred, abuse, injustice and political opportunism, which may have strengthened the feelings of attack, counter-attack, and self-defence strategies (Onguny, 2019), destroying the community that has coexisted harmoniously for decades. Following the violence, widows in a small rural community in Kenya, chose to forgive their perpetrators, and collaborated with each other in economic development initiatives that have since sustained peace.

The active role of women as a sustainable peacebuilder is often hidden (Cheptile, 2015), while men are deeply regarded as active fighters and community defenders (Odongo, 2004). However, since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR) (2000), women have played an important role in ensuring an effective and sustainable peace process in society (Cheptile, 2015). The resolution 1325 of the United Nations Conference on Human Rights specifically addresses the excessive impact of violent conflict and war on women and girls and the crucial role that women should play in conflict prevention and peace-building (UN Security Council, 2000). Nevertheless, across the African continent, women continue to be excluded from formal peace building

processes that are mainly dominated by men. An example was the presence of only two women out of 126 delegates in the Burundi peace talks in Arusha (Goransson, 2013). The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, known as the Arusha Accord, was “a political framework attributed with having brought Burundi out of its 1993-2005 civil war” (Nantulya, 2015, n.p). The civil war was launched in 1993, following the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically-elected Hutu President by Tutsi officers (Nantulya, 2015). Former “Presidents Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Nelson Mandela of South Africa facilitated the Arusha Accords in 2000, ending 12 years of the civil war and cycles of massacres, including genocide” (Nantulya, 2015, n.p). The absence of women was extremely visible especially when women comprise half the population and were victims of violence.

Recognition of women as agents of conflict management and sustainable peacebuilding, especially in Africa, and highlighting how they achieve their success is necessary. The focus of this study is to explore the lived experiences of widows in a rural Kenyan community, and the concept of forgiveness as a necessary condition for peacebuilding in a community that was once ravaged by ethnic violence. The widows chose to forgive and collaborate with each other in economic development initiatives that have since sustained peace in their community.

### **Contextual Background**

Like any other election, contesting election results by individual, groups or opposing party is not unusual, but post-election violence was unheard of in Kenya until the 2007 general election results. However, results of the 2007 elections drove Kenya into a field of violence that claimed hundreds of lives after former President Mwai Kibaki



was declared the winner of the presidential election. It was one of the researcher's motivations to pursue doctoral studies in the field of conflict resolution. And now for this dissertation research, the researcher studied a rural Kenyan community that was impacted by the 2007 election violence.

### **Pastoral versus Agricultural Conflict**

In pastoralist communities such as Rumuruti, conflict between farmers and herders has not been unusual, but it is a different phenomenon than electoral or post electoral violence. In the pastoralists communities, the high potential of violence eruption is due to cattle raiding as well as limited access to pastures and water. Individuals whose animals were stolen, or crops were eaten by a pastoralists animals are on alert for revenge. Unfortunately, this revenge leads to more violence and such communities are likely to experience recurring ethnic violence. Women and children often suffer and are left to deal with the aftermath of any violence.

It is important to understand that while the subjects in this study have previously experienced pastoralist versus agriculturalists conflicts, it's magnitude was often less compared to the 2007 post election violence where more lives were lost and properties destroyed. The magnitude of the election violence might have contributed to the Rumuruti community's need to seek sustainable solution to any potential violence, whether its between farmers and herders, or related to elections.

### **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

In many studies and publications, forgiveness and reconciliation have become increasingly a central component of healing and peace-building, focusing mainly on individuals and their relations, and then on public relations between communities and

States (Boehle, 2021). Any attempt to better understand forgiveness and reconciliation in connection with peacebuilding must address, at the same time, the critical question of how to integrate the process of justice into peace (Boehle, 2021). The concept of forgiveness is still being debated and the various meanings accorded by a variety of disciplines from religion, political, sociological, and conflict resolution practitioners, make it more complex. Although there lacks a standard definition of forgiveness, there's no doubt when it comes to its critical importance in sustainable peacebuilding. While the debate on whether forgiveness as a condition for sustainable peacebuilding ought to be integrated in liberal peacebuilding processes, it is important that scholars continue to research its manifestation at local levels and provide recommendations on how that can be applied at regional, national, and international levels. Additionally, the role of women in sustainable peacebuilding is being acknowledged, and ongoing research shows they are a critical human resource who must be involved in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. This research focuses on the concept of forgiveness, its effect, and the role of women in developing sustainable peace in a rural Kenyan community. The results will be an addition to existing literature on highlighting women's active role in sustainable peacekeeping and amplify forgiveness as a necessary tool/condition for sustainable peacebuilding. Recommendations on mainstreaming forgiveness as a necessary concept not only at the local level, but also at national and international levels to reduce recurrence of violence shall be provided.

## **Problem Statement**

There are at least 42 ethnic groups living in Kenya, whose identity is by birth and/or residence in certain geographical regions. Due to migration for economic, social, or political reasons, most communities have multiethnic residents. Most communities live harmoniously until there arises an issue that disrupts the harmony, whether it's political, where politicians pit one tribe against the other, or economic where they are fighting for scarce resources, which result in interethnic violence. This seems to be common especially during election years in Kenya where people tend to consistently vote on tribal lines for politicians who come from their tribe. Such violence is extreme in mostly rural, marginalized, and underdeveloped regions in Kenya (Mwaniki *et al.* 2007). The underdevelopment of basic infrastructure such as health, road networks, water, livestock markets and educational facilities (Mwaniki et al., 2007 cited in Gichohi, 2016) should be highlighted as contributing factors.

Gichohi (2016) points out that women in developing countries, including sub-Saharan Africa, face many challenges. In many of these countries, there is a shortage of resources and women are the poorest of all groups (Banerjee, 2010). Women and children living in these highly patriarchal communities are impacted by such violence from losing husbands, who were breadwinners and are left to navigate a society that historically undervalues them.

Most communities are sick and tired of inter-tribal violence and there are efforts to engage in a variety of local initiatives to sustain peace, and some women are actively engaged in such. There is emphasis on a message of forgiveness and reconciliation to promote peaceful coexistence of members from different tribes within these rural

communities. According to Adan and Pkalya (2006) the formation of local peace committees and networks has been one of the commendable community efforts working towards the promotion of peaceful coexistence between different groups in the society and often fills in the security void left by the government, particularly in regions which experience recurrent conflicts in Kenya.

### **Defining Forgiveness**

Forgiveness and reconciliation are understood and “defined in a variety of ways by different scholars, across such diverse disciplines as philosophy, psychology, theology, political science and law, focusing on a range of aspects of these values and describing their varied impact on individuals, communities, and societies” (Boehle, 2021, p.109). Emphasizing its importance, North (1987) argues that “the value of forgiveness lies in the fact that it essentially requires a recognition of the wrongdoer’s responsibility for his action, and that forgiveness typically involves an effort on the part of the wronged as a conscious attempt to improve oneself in relation to the wrongdoer” (p. 499). All these diverse perspectives on the meaning of forgiveness imply that the context in which forgiving happens, as well as the processes leading to forgiveness differ by individuals, groups, and communities. It is the experiences of these individuals (victims and perpetrators) that are directly involved that can help us understand the meaning of forgiveness, and the critical role it plays in transforming their lives.

An article in the Journal of Peace Research by Kijewski and Rapp (2019), titled *Moving Forward: How war experiences interethnic attitudes, and intergroup forgiveness affects the prospects for political tolerance in post war Sri-Lanka*, introduces the restoration factor. Forgiveness and reduced ethnic prejudice represent mechanisms

driving the restoration of relationships between different groups (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016; Staub & Pearlman, 2003; Staub, 2006). This quantitative research addressed political tolerance, and war experiences including ethnic prejudice and interethnic forgiveness as variables. Their analysis determined forgiveness as the intermediate mechanisms between war experience and the formation of political tolerance, namely, moving on from ethnic animosities and forgiving the other group – two cognitive processes known to influence the peaceful coexistence of opposing groups (Kijewski & Rapp, 2019). My research, though qualitative, will be a similar addition to the field of Conflict resolution study as it shall seek to determine the meaning and role of forgiveness in sustainable peace initiatives in a rural Kenyan community that was ravaged by ethnic violence post the 2007 to 2008 elections.

In *Reconciling the Irreconcilable: The Role of Forgiveness after the Rwandan Genocide*, the researchers discovered that some of the relevant elements of the forgiveness process were truth and listening to each other, overcoming the initial emotional reactions of fear or anger through empathy and altruism, committing to the process, and holding onto forgiveness experience (Ordonez-Carabano, Prieto-Usua, & Dushimimana, 2019). Forgiveness can also be understood in terms of the ability to provide safe spaces where parties can freely express themselves and have a dialogue as initiated by *Association Modeste et Innocent* (Ordonez-Carbano & Prieto-Ursua, 2021). Association Modeste et Innocent (AMI) is a non governmental organization that was established in 2000, and is involved in conflict resolution and reconciliation in Rwanda (Peace Insight, n.d). The AMI process embraced the “Rwandan culture that is mostly family supported and collectivistic, focused on restoring relationships and not behaving

in ways that threaten group solidarity” (Ordóñez-Carbano & Prieto-Ursua, 2021, p. 435). Using the Amataba Approach, a nine steps to promote reconciliation, *Association Modeste et Innocent* (AMI) “contributes to sustainable peace by creating and empowering actors grown up in ubuntu philosophy and by arousing creative, concerted, and nonviolent solutions to the psycho-socio-economic challenges Rwanda is facing” (Ordóñez-Carbano et al., 2019, p.9). Within the aim of promoting unity and reconciliation among ex-prisoners and genocide survivors, AMI assumes the need of creating a safe setting to give victims and perpetrators the chance to meet with each other and start a true and frank dialogue that can lead to reconciliation (Ordóñez-Carbano et al. 2019; 2021; AMI, 2019). The results show that the presence of forgiveness elements is especially relevant for reconciliation (Ordóñez-Carbano et al, 2019; Ordóñez-Carbano et al, 2021).

According to Boehle (2021), forgiveness is seen as an internal process or activity of a person, letting go of a harmful state of mind, and thereby finding freedom and peace of mind and heart. Forgiveness is interpreted as a psychological resource for dealing with interpersonal harm (McCullough et al., 2003), and as the replacement of negative emotions and oblivion (Cortes and Torres, 2013). Mukasshema and Mullett (2012), consider forgiveness and reconciliation processes as strategies for improving psychological well-being.

Zehr’s (2015) definition of forgiveness in relation to justice states that “Forgiveness is letting go of the power the offense and the offender have over a person. It means no longer letting that offense and offender dominate. Without this experience of forgiveness, the wounds may fester, and the violation may take over our consciousness

and lives. The offense and the offender are in control. Real forgiveness, then, is an act of empowerment and healing. It allows one to move from victim to survivor.”

Forgiveness is letting go of the wish to punish someone after an event or a person has caused harm (Massey, 2009). Exline and Baumeister (2000) posit that forgiveness involves canceling the interpersonal debt that is created when someone has become offended. It is a process where individuals let go of their anger and desire for revenge (Staub et al., 2005; Massey, 2009). Forgiveness means taking a step toward former enemies by coming to terms with the past (Bakke, O’Loughlin & Ward, 2009). The problem is that these definitions are given by authors from their own backgrounds. What is missing is the meaning accorded by the survivors of ethnic violence who chose to forgive their perpetrators and actively engaged in sustainable peacekeeping initiatives.

In a published research *Electoral Violence in Kenya 2007-2008: The Role of Vernacular Radio*, the results of the study indicate that post-conflict frames emphasized collaborative efforts to contain the violence after the 2007-08 election in order to reinforce intergroup reconciliation (Onguny, 2019). Like most of the above studies, there is no specific focus on the critical role of women survivors as the core decision makers, choosing to forgive, then leading the processes that result in collaborative initiatives with their perpetrators.

My study therefore, explores the meaning of forgiveness, and investigates the lived experiences of women in a rural Kenyan community, once ravaged by ethnic violence, who came to forgive perpetrators of the violence that left family/community members dead, maimed, or displaced. They instead collaborated in economic development initiatives that have since sustained peace in their community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate women's lived experiences with ethnic violence post 2007 elections using open-ended interviews, and seek to understand the meaning of forgiveness in a rural Kenyan community.

### **Research Question(s)**

My main research question was: 1) How do women survivors make meaning of forgiveness following ethnic violence? Then the following subquestions were used to inform the interview questions: a) what was the women's experiences with the 2007 post election violence as the harm that was addressed by forgiveness? b) What was the women's experience with and the process leading to forgiveness like? c) How has the decision to forgive, transformed their life as an individual, as a family, and as a community?

To obtain answers to the research questions above, six open-ended questions (Appendix A) were asked during the interviewing session with individual participant.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The meaning of 'forgiveness' as a concept and its critical role in sustainable peace keeping is investigated through this study. Individual characteristics theories emphasize that social conflict is an expression of forces deeply ingrained within an individual (Freud, 1930). The Human Needs Theory, that depends on inherent characteristics of all humans, including Burton's (1979, 1997) human needs theory of conflict resolution and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954, 1970a), and Lederach's Theories on Conflict Transformation (Lederach, 1997) inform this research. Guided by the constructivism world view (Creswell, 2007, 2012; Brau, 2018), this researcher will apply



the human needs approach, and individual characteristics theories to inform the framework for this research. Constructivist theories indicate that humans create knowledge through the interaction between their experiences and ideas (Brau, 2018). More details on these frameworks are given in the literature review section in chapter two.

### **Definitions of Concepts**

For this proposal and corresponding study, it is important we adopt a common understanding of some key terms as follows.:

1. *Women* means widows, mothers, wives, or adult females who were residents of this rural Kenyan community pre and post 2007 elections and are active participants in the collaborative economic development initiatives and local peacebuilding initiatives. Throughout this research,
2. *Ethnic violence* shall refer to conflict between two or more ethnic groups, culturally, economically, or politically instigated.
3. *Peacebuilding* enshrines the norm of nonviolence in all aspects of its creation and enhancement of institutions and practices that permanently transform what had been cruel destruction into new spaces where the lives and life hopes of future generations can flourish. (Woodhouse & Mail, 2016, p. 285). It is “systemically connected with peacekeeping and peacemaking” (p.278). Peacebuilding aims to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is a complex,

long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace (United Nations,2007).

4. *Peacekeeping* means sustained relationships, and collaboration between survivors of ethnic violence and perpetrators that has mitigated recurrence of violence within their community. United Nations (UN) refers to it it as “a range of activities undertaken to maintain international peace and security throughout the world” (2007). The UN pacekeeping is guided by following three basic principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d).
5. *Post-conflict peacebuilding* is defined as “strategies designed to promote a secure and stable lasting peace in which the basic human needs of the population are met, and violent conflicts do not recur” (Lambourne, 2004).
6. *Sustainable peacebuilding* means processes, goals, and activities aimed to prevent the outbreak, the recurrence, escalation, or the continuation of conflict (United Nations).

### **Significance**

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived meaning of forgiveness by the women as experts who experienced the peacebuilding process post election violence in Kenya. The study is significant as it includes validation of individual “truths” revealed through personal stories of experiences, and amplification of the role of forgiveness in sustainable peacebuilding. The meaning of forgiveness in relation to sustainable peace from a gendered perspective is emboldened, and provides

additional research to support the role of women in sustainable peace building and peace keeping initiatives.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed significant information on the Kenyan politics and multiethnic communities. The background of the study is explained in the context of ethnic allegiances, where people tend to vote for political candidates who come from their ethnic group; vernacular radios as a powerful media for communication and misinformation about opposing ethnicities; and how pastoral and agricultural groups clash resulting in ethnic violence. The problem statement, purpose of this study, research questions, a brief on theoretical frameworks, definition and significance of this study in relation to the field of conflict resolution have been addressed.

Chapter one has thus offered an introduction to the study including politics and multiethnic communities in Kenya. Contextual background covers ethnic allegiances, media, pastoral vs agricultural conflicts, forgiveness and reconciliation. The problem statement and purpose of study is explained. The research questions, the nature of the study, theoretical frameworks, definitions of concepts, and significance of this study are discussed in this chapter. Chapter two provides the literature review on a variety of topics from ethnic dynamics, forgiveness and relationship restoration, women and peacebuilding. Theoretical frameworks including Conflict Transformation theories, The Human Needs Theory, and Constructivism as the underpinnings for this study are discussed. Chapter three is a thorough discussion of the research methodology. Qualitative research and interpretative phenomenological analysis was the approach for this study. A brief report on a pilot study is given. The sampling method, recruitment of

participants, instrument for data collection, procedure for data collection, as well as data analysis procedures are discussed in details.

In chapter four, the findings from the data analysis are presented. Five themes emerging from the data including Sustainable peace and unity, personal development and enlightenment, economic development and empowerment, safety and impact of violence, and forgiveness and transformation are introduced, then later discussed in chapter five. Chapter five provides the summary of the findings, the discussion of the identified themes, the processes leading to forgiveness, and theoretical relevance to the study. Additionally, the topic of forgiveness and sustainable peace, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for the field of conflict resolution are also presented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This section reviews literature on the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation in the context of restoring relationships in the aftermath of violent conflict. It also looks at ethnic dynamics in contemporary politics in the context of ethnized neo-patrimonial Kenyan politics. Women's activism and role in peacebuilding processes is also reviewed. Constructivism, individual characteristics, and human needs theories of conflict transformation are discussed, as theoretical frames that will highlight both causes and transformation of conflict.

### Ethnic Dynamics

“Kenya has been plagued by divisive ethnic politics since the colonial era, as communities have benefitted disproportionately from having one of their own in or close to, the seat of power” (Jenkins, 2020, p. 180). According to Jenkins (2020), “in this context of ethnicized neo-patrimonial politics, of potential marginalization and exclusion, and of substantial horizontal inequalities, elections have become high-stakes, winner-takes-all games that have repeatedly been a catalyst for violence” (p.180). During this election year, “the December 2007 polls sparked some of the worst ethnic violence the country has ever witnessed” (Jenkins, 2020, p.180). Jenkins (2020) reveals that “these elections pitted the incumbent Kikuyu president, Mwai Kibaki, and his Party of National Unity (PNU), against an alliance of leading politicians from Kenya's other major ethnic groups, including the Luo, Kalenjin, Luhya, Kamba, and Coastal communities, under the leadership of Raila Odinga and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM)” (p.180). The following two months, in January and February 2008, “saw members of the Kikuyu

community targeted by ODM-affiliated groups, and the former engage in revenge attacks, as the country spiraled into violence that left approximately 1300 people dead and over 700,000 displaced (Jenkins, 2020, p.180).

To add to the dynamics of political rivalry and violence, the media has been utilized to rigidify identity differences. The use of media as a tool to foster and maintain ethnicities has become prevalent in rural communities. Messages are framed in a manner that is divisive and inciting members against other ethnic groups. A report published by Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), shows “a study conducted over four months in three ethno-linguistic locations: Kisumu, Nyeri and Eldoret, where Onguny examined how shifts in vernacular radio narratives influence intergroup relations in situations of electoral violence in Kenya, with particular emphasis on that of 2007-08” (Onguny, 2019, p. 86). The study also explored how and why election-related violence often shifts from electoral discourse to embrace ethnicity (Onguny, 2019; EISA, 2024). The results indicate “an erratic pattern regarding the accommodation and negotiation of intergroup relations in the period leading to the 2007-08 conflicts which were dependent on the stage at which the violence unfolded” (Onguny, 2019, p.105).

Analysis of research on interethnic war between Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka confirmed the relevance of forgiving for political tolerance: never forgiving was the only indicator that had a consistent, negative, and significant influence on civil liberties, i.e., granting basic liberties to opposing groups (Kijewski & Rapp, 2019). Not forgiving the other ethnic group, partly driven by war experience and ethnic prejudice, appears to be a more consistent predictor of intolerance (Kijewski & Rapp, 2019). These

results imply that postwar efforts to further forgiveness are important to promote political tolerance and thereby long-lasting peace (Kijewski & Rapp, 2019).

Given the dynamism of contemporary politics, former ‘victimized groups’ do come to power, often times through nonviolent social change (Ackerman and Duvall, 2000). When that takes place — and its less oppressive, or at times democratic, regimes emerge such as those in Argentina, Poland, reunified Germany, and South Africa — a central question arises how to treat the continuing presence of former perpetrators of violence (Minow, 1998, p. 2). Considering South Africa’s famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission mandated by Mandela, with Tutu at its head, Montiel points out that at the sociopolitical level conditions which give rise to constructive forgiveness are ‘qualitatively’ different from the human experiences which take place at other levels (Satha-Anand, 2002). Meaning forgiveness at a sociopolitical level is much broader than forgiveness at a human level, where it is purposeful and comes from within the individuals. Forgiveness in a political context is an act that joins moral truth, forbearance, empathy, and commitment to repair a fractured human relation (Shriver, 1997).

### **Forgiveness and Relationship Restoration**

Forgiveness emerges because some wrongs have occurred. It follows then that there are wrongdoers and the wronged or the victimizers and the victims. The problematic relationship between the two parties is the precondition for forgiveness (Sath-Anand, 2002). Through the search for truth, each recognizes the extent and dimension of what happened, identifies those responsible for it, and evidences what violence has caused in victims and the consequences for the aggressors (Ordonez-Carabano, et al, 2020). Sath-Anand (2002) emphasizes that once forgiveness takes place,

and the categories change from victim/victimizer to the forgiver/forgiven, the antagonism should disappear. Otherwise, if it continues then the possibility of violence/cruelty will reappear (Sath-Anand, 2020).

In his recent publication on *Forgiveness, restorative justice and reconciliation in sustainable peacebuilding: contemporary debates and future possibilities*, Boehle (2021), argues that “forgiveness, restorative justice, and reconciliation processes should be further mainstreamed and integrated as part of and standard responses to major conflicts and wars by national political bodies, religious communities, and religious/secular NGOs, international organizations, agencies, and institutions, in order to positively and sustainably resolve and transform conflicts, wars, and violence between groups, and to build sustainable peace” (Boehle, 2021, p.103). His research revealed that “local and national reconciliation and peacebuilding benefit from being supported and strengthened by national and international organizations, wherever possible through national and international norms, practices, and formal processes” (Boehle, 2021, p.120-121). Additionally, “such norms, practices, and processes on the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation are still being further developed and discussed, and there is no widely accepted standard response” (Boehle, 2021, p.121) to sustainable peacebuilding. Boehle (2021) investigated the question “why liberal peacebuilding overall has been reluctant to integrate forgiveness into its standard practices, whilst restorative justice and reconciliation processes have been increasingly acknowledged and integrated in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and transformation” (p.105).

Unlike restorative justice, the punitive nature of retributive justice is problematic and interferes with sustainance of peace. To achieve sustainable peace, “any reflection



concerning the relation and potential interdependencies between forgiveness, reconciliation and a holistic view of justice the distinction between retributive justice and restorative justice needs to be taken into consideration, a distinction that was developed in scholarship and practice since the 1980s” (Boehle, 2021, p.105). Boehle further distinguishes between retributive and restorative justice.

Retributive justice seeks punishment for crimes that were committed and assumes that the imposed punitive judgements and sentences serve as a deterrent for the offender not to re-offend and for potential offenders to consider the severe consequences before they engage in criminal activities, thereby preventing crime and unlawful behavior. Restorative justice does require that crimes, abuse and human rights violations that have been committed are admitted and that only then a process of seeking restoration, healing and repairing of any harm suffered can take place. ( p. 105-106)

In the Kenyan context, retributive justice is difficult and challenging to pursue for various reasons including lack of financial resources, and political power or lack thereof. The Rumuruti community has limited resources and limited political power to insist on or seek retributive justice. Besides, “retributive justice does not seek the healing and restoring of broken and harmed relationships, whereas restorative justice seeks to heal and transform the offender as well as the victim and seeks to restore right relationships between them and in the concerned/involved communities” (Boehle, 2021, p.106). Instead their processes leading to forgiveness allowed them to restore the broken interethnic relationships and establish sustained peace in their community.

In another study of perpetrator and victim construction of justice, forgiveness, and trauma healing in colonial central Kenya, Karanja (2015) reports that “the absence of justice as defined by stakeholders is a primary perceived barrier towards forgiveness and trauma healing in post-conflict environments” (p.iv). The many aspects and processes of forgiveness and reconciliation are not only debated and analyzed in view of healing and restoring personal relationships in contemporary scholarship, but also in relation to restorative justice and sustainable peace in the public sphere, in societies and between states (Boehle, 2021). In summarizing the dilemma, political and institutional challenge in the debates of forgiveness, Philpott writes:

The most surprising, controversial, and dramatic development in the age of peacebuilding is the growth of forgiveness. It is embodied far less than the other practices in global norms and institutions. Punishment is supported by international law, an international criminal court, national courts, and large communities of officials and activists. Human rights and democracy have even stronger support among activists and in international law. Acknowledgement has its truth commissions and its memorials. Reparations and apology are practiced and enacted by presidents and legislatures. Not so forgiveness. (Philpott, 2012)

It is concerning that “forgiveness, which is often seen as a highly personal and private matter, has so far proved to be too complex, too elusive, and too controversial to be defined and expressed in shared global norms and to be routinely applied in public processes in national and international institutions, whilst justice, human rights, rule of law and judicial punishment have been increasingly embodied and institutionalized internationally over the past decades” (Boehle, 2021, p. 109). However, Boehle (2021)

argues that “a restorative, transformative understanding of justice can contribute to healing, liberation, a lasting overcoming of evil and a restoration of right relationships” (p.110). To “overcome the antinomies between justice and forgiveness that are often expressed by those who prioritize retributive justice in dealing with past trauma, conflicts, abuse and violence, an explanation of a relational approach, as expressed in models of restorative justice and reconciliation, can lead the discussion beyond these perceived antinomies into a synthesis” (Boehle, 2019, p.112). Both “restorative justice and reconciliation are relational approaches that conceive of human persons not as isolated individuals or as mere bearers of utility but rather as beings who are fundamentally connected and defined in and through their relationships with others” (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014, p.88).

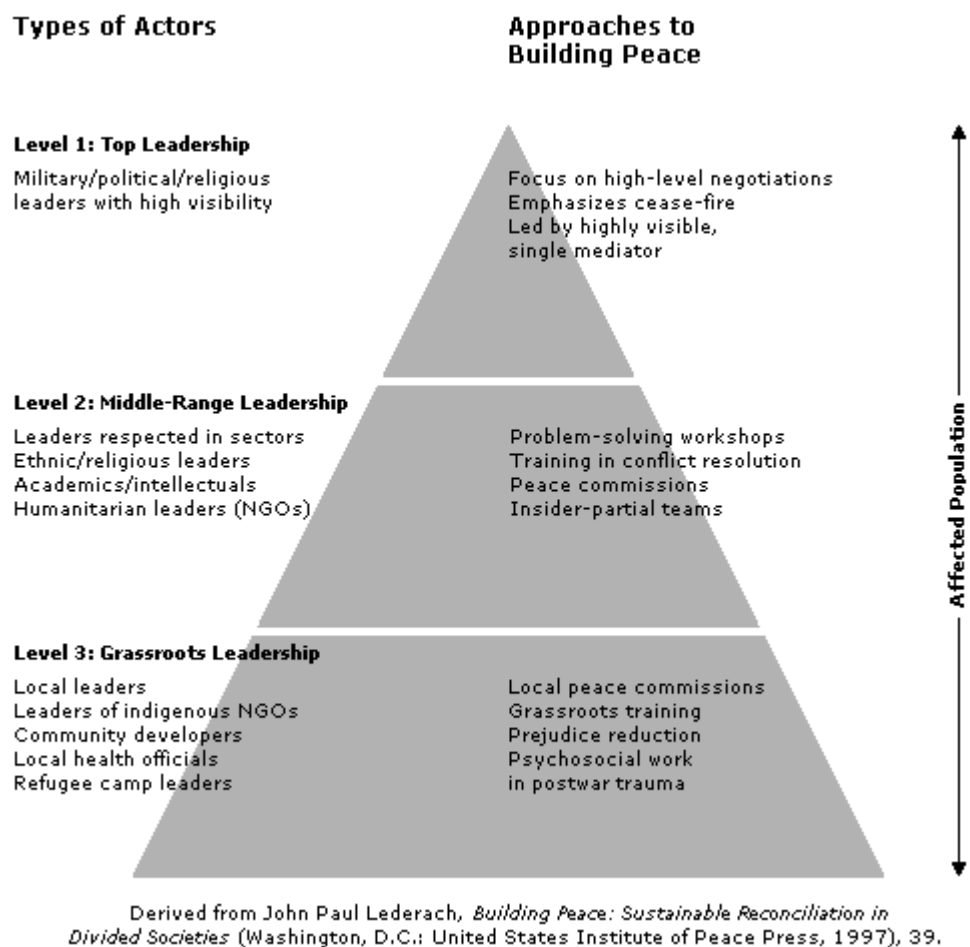
Prof John Paul Lederach, “is a pioneering, well known peacebuilding scholar who was amongst the first to highlight in his writings the intricate link between relationships, reconciliation, and sustainable peace” (Boehle, 2019, p.114-115). In his publication *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, he outlined what he calls “core models of building peace, including his often-quoted Pyramid model (Table 1) and presented the core conceptual framework for building peace as being constituted by four key values: truth, mercy, justice and peace” (Lederach, 1997, p.39). This framework was “developed by Lederach after he was part of mediation group meetings in Nicaragua between the Sandinista government and an indigenous resistance group, the Yatama” (Boehle, 2019, p.114). Apparently, these mediation meetings had opened with a reflection on Psalm 85 (10) from the Bible: ‘Truth and Mercy have met together, peace and justice have kissed’ (Lederach, 1997, p.28). The place where these four concepts

meet was named reconciliation (Lederach, 1997, p.28-30). Lederach (1997) suggests that reconciliation involves the creation of the social space where both truth and forgiveness are validated and joined together, rather than being forced into an encounter in which one must win out over the other or envisioned as fragmented and separated parts.

Forgiveness was understood by Lederach as being an aspect of mercy and mercy as being related to compassion, restoration, and healing (Boehle, 2019). And that lasting, sustainable reconciliation and peace involves all concerned parties and their righteous and healthy relationships (Boehle, 2019). Based on these insights, Lederach argued for a change in the paradigm of peacebuilding, away from a statist diplomacy paradigm to a relational paradigm (Boehle, 2019). According to Boehle (2019), Lederach wrote:

I believe this paradigmatic shift is articulated in the movement away from a concern with the resolution of issues and toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships. [1] This calls for an approach that goes beyond a mechanical strategy. The framework must address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding. (p115)

Forgiveness is either connected with restorative justice or reconciliation cases in which both victim and the perpetrator are present. In this study, forgiveness made possible some of the level 3 approaches to building peace (Table 1.) such as grassroots training, prejudice reduction , and problem-solving training.

**Figure 1***Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Society*

From Lederach's model, the grassroots level leadership represents "the masses who often experience a day-to-day struggle to find food, water, shelter, and safety in violence-torn areas. Because local communities are often split into hostile groups, grassroots leaders witness firsthand the deep-rooted hatred and animosity associated with conflict"(Maiese, 2017, n.p). When solutions to address violence emanate from the grassroots by those who have experienced the pain caused by the deep hatred, with access to resources, they are more likely to be sustainable.

### **Women and Peacebuilding**

Feminist concepts and perspectives of peace and security, bring a whole new meaning to conflict analysis and resolution. Some scholars argue that traditional research around conflicts has been male dominated, hence downplaying women's perspectives, roles, and experiences (Cockburn, 2010; Cockburn & Enloe, 2012; Boer & Bode, 2018) with conflict and violence. Thus, age-old discrimination has led to less attention being paid to engendering the "field" (Sjoberk, 2009), and hence leading to scholarship being predominantly masculine in outlook. This view is however evolving with recognition being more and more toward a rethink of gender and transformative peacebuilding.

Efforts to address underrepresentation of women in peacebuilding processes begun in the 1970s. It has been over "38 years since the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) was adopted," (Gichohi, 2016, p.1), over "34 years since the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the participation of women in promoting international peace and cooperation," (Gichohi, 2016, p.1) and over "21 years since the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women (BPFA, 1995), where participating governments around the globe issued and committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (Gichohi, 2016, p.3). Nevertheless, there is continued underrepresentation of women in peace processes.

Fatuma Boru Guyo's study in exploring the roles of women in peace-making and conflict resolution, in Tana River district, Kenya, from a historical perspective "revealed that women were significant social actors generally and particularly in peace-making" (Guyo, 2009, p.1). Although their stories were consistent with the theories on war and peace, their significance affirms feminism by "painting a picture of how they

were able to create a place for themselves in their community through their role in peace-making, a role not necessarily defined through men” (Guyo, 2009, p.54). The women explained their understanding of peace, their engagement in peace prayers, and other traditional roles to address conflict (Guyo, 2009).

Women’s influence in peacemaking and conflict resolution is highlighted by some scholars. For example, “Codou Bop’s *Women in Conflicts, Their Gains and Their Losses*, in Meintjes et.al, *The Aftermath: Women in Post Conflict Transformation* (Guyo, 2009, p.6 ; Bop, 2001). More “authors in this collection provide a classic understanding of women’s roles in post conflict reconstruction and their experiences in South Africa, Eritrea, and Niger” (Guyo, 2009, p.6). Other research findings speak to “the role of women in settling disputes in the context of traditional African society. For instance Rose Acholonu’s, “Igbo Women and the Tradition of Peace: The Dynamics of Change and Continuity,” in *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa* and in Ife Amadiume’s in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society*” (Guyo, 2009, p.6). Another argument on women’s influence in peacebuilding is that “based on age seniority, patrilineage daughters had great power especially in matters of peacemaking” (Guyo, 2009, p.6).

Using case studies, literature reviews and interviews, some scholars highlight women’s activism (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011) for peace and security in terms of anti-war and anti-militarism (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). However, other findings showed that when it comes to unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP), (Julian & Schweitzer, 2015), interventions for local efforts at peacebuilding use of a variety of non-violent methods increase the safety for local leaders and everyday people to engage in (re)building peace

infrastructures and governance, within their own culture and contexts (Furnari, Oldenhuis, & Julian, 2015). Rumuruti community women brought together local leaders and the residents through their peacebuilding activities including soccer for peace, and playing tag games with each other that symbolized unity. They have also taken on the roles of mediators for their community to mitigate any conflict from becoming full blown violence.

Using mixed methods research, Cheptile's (2015) findings showed that when it comes to gender roles in peacebuilding, women are seen as humanitarians (80.4%), advocates (63.9%), facilitators (61.9%), advisors (59.8%), informants (58.8%), decision makers (20.6%) and trainers (15.5%). The study revealed that lack or availability of financial and physical resources impacted women's decision to participate in peacebuilding (Cheptile, 2015). This challenges international and civilian peacekeepers creating community peace infrastructures to coordinate and collaborate with local partners, other peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies, local government, army, and other armed actors (Furnari et al., 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework and Conflict Transformation**

When change has its roots in indigenous and autonomous initiatives, is catalysed by strong local leaders-be they old or young, men or women-and is based on a self-help spirit, traditional solidarity (*fihavanana*), and cultural values that uphold local spirituality, sustainable development seems feasible. (Schachenmann, 2006, p.327)

Conflict changes people's lives in both a good way and a bad way. Loss of lives, properties, and relationships are some of the negative impacts of conflict. On the other



hand, opportunities to transform individual lives, families, and communities for the better is an empowering outcome of conflict.

### **Conflict Transformation Theory**

Conflict transformation is about “transforming systems, structures, and relationships that give rise to violence and injustice. It addresses underlying structures, cultures, and institutions that encourage and condition violent political and social conflict” (Makonye & Bengesai, 2020, p.150). Reich (2002) describes conflict transformation as a holistic, multi-faceted approach to managing violent conflict in all its phases. Makonye et al. (2020) state that conflict transformation theory views peace as centred and rooted in the quality of relationships. These relationships, according to Lederach (2003) include not only face-to-face interactions, but also ways in which the society structures its social, political, economic, and cultural relationships. The focus is on peace, a relation between parties, not on security (Galtung, 2000).

Capacity development is necessary to achieve the transformation of communities affected by conflict. This is because “peace is made from within the society in conflict rather than by external experts and interveners, even if the latter may bring much needed and welcome ideas and support” (Lederach, 2003, p.3). The need to develop capacities to engage in change processes at the interpersonal, intergroup, and social-structural levels (Makonye et al. 2020) is the emphasis for conflict transformation theory. Reich (2002) identifies two capacities: the direct face to face interaction between people or groups, and the need to see, pursue, and create change in ways of organizing social structures. Similarly, Botes (2003) emphasizes the need for capacity to understand and sustain dialogue as a fundamental means of constructive change.

In his book, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Lederach writes: “As an analytical framework, then, transformation seeks to understand social conflict as it emerges from and produces changes in the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions of human experience. As an intervening strategy, transformation works to promote constructive processes with the following range of change-oriented goals...personally, relationally, structurally, and culturally” (Lederach, 2014, p.25).

The importance of analyzing conflict from the personal and relational perspectives is highlighted by John Lederach. The personal aspect of conflict on one hand “refers to changes effected in and desired for the individual which involves the full person, including the cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and spiritual dimensions” (Lederach, 2014, p. 23). On the other hand, “the relational dimension represents changes in face-to-face relationships. Here we consider relational affectivity, power, and interdependence, and the expressive, communicative, and interactive aspects of conflict” (Lederach, 2014, p. 24).

Structural and Cultural dimensions are deemed equally important in understanding the impact of conflict in conflict transformation. In addition to analyzing the personal and relational aspects of conflict, “the structural dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict and the patterns and changes it brings about in social, political, and economic structures” (Lederach, 2014, p.24). According to Lederach, “this aspect focuses attention on how social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. It is about the ways people build and organize social, economic, political, and institutional relationships to meet basic human needs, provide access to resources, and make decisions that affect groups, communities, and whole

societies” (Lederach, 2014, p. 24-25). Lederach’s final dimension is the cultural dimension which “refers to changes produced by conflict in the broadest patterns of group life, including identity, and the ways that culture affects patterns of response and conflict (Lederach, 2014, p. 25). The personal dimension will help this researcher understand the perception of forgiveness. Through the relational dimension the new relationships between survivors and perpetrators will be revealed, and cultural dimensions will highlight the cultural changes in terms of gender roles within this community.

Conflict transformation requires identifying the root causes and impact of violence on individuals, families, groups, and communities. Understanding that “at a prescriptive level transformation represents deliberately intervening in order to gain insight into the underlying causes and social conditions which create and foster violent expressions of conflict. At a descriptive level, transformation attempts to understand how conflict affects and changes the cultural patterns of a group, and how those accumulated and shared patterns affect the way people in a given setting understand and respond to conflict” (Lederach, 2014, p. 25) is critical to real transformation.

In this research, I posit that in the aftermath of ethnic violence, forgiveness is a fundamental tool throughout the processes leading to sustainable peacebuilding within a community, that transforms lives and the community at large. If the women believed that the men who killed their family members or neighbors simply acted on their “innate aggressive drive lying within us all” (Schellenberg, 1996, p.42), then the individual characteristics theories will help us understand why violent action is an unfortunate instinct that deserved to be forgiven. Sigmund Freud’s (1930) approach to social conflict

was as an expression of forces deeply ingrained within an individual, that it is common to refer to them as basic instincts. And Darwin's friend, Herbert Spencer's concept of 'the survival of the fittest' affirms that humans have an inborn tendency toward aggression (Shellenberg, 1996) as they compete for resources. Was there competition for resources between the ethnicities that engaged in violence? Absolutely! As a community of herders and pastoralists, scarcity of resources is a common experiences where farmers blame pastoralists for letting their animals eat their crops, and pastoralists blame farmers for stealing their cattle. Participants believed that their aggressors' violent actions were unplanned and occurred suddenly because they were either triggered by politicians, or it was the devils' work, considering that they had lived in the same community for a long time, a normal person could not simply attack and kill their neighbors.

Wanawake Wa Amani group engaged in activities that enhanced a positive perception of each other where they realized that they had invaluable skills to learn from each other, and not see each other as enemies. Basket weaving skills, beading, making scarfs, and farming were some of the skills they taught each other, enabling them to start small businesses by selling those products at the markets. They invested their time in activities that eventually changed their attitudes, perceptions, and behavior towards each other. These changes align with the assertion that "the process of transformation first transforms attitudes by changing and redirecting negative perceptions. Secondly, it transforms behaviour, and lastly transforms itself by seeking to discover, define, and remove incompatibilities" (Makonye et al. 2020).

## **Human Needs Theory**

Human needs theorists argue that conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet needs, and that violence occurs when certain individuals or groups fail to see any other way to meet their needs (Makonye et al, 2020). In this perspective, violence is perceived as a tragic expression of unmet human needs, hence all actions undertaken by human beings are attempts to satisfy their needs ( Rosenberg, 2003).

The human needs approach (Burton, 1990) supports collaborative and multifaceted problem-solving models and related techniques. These models consider the complexity of human life and the insistent nature of human needs, while maintaining a focus on fulfilling peoples' unmet needs. According to Spence, “the process of peacebuilding calls for new attitudes and practices: ones that are flexible, consultative, and collaborative and that operate from a contextual understanding of the root causes of conflict” (Spence, 2006, p.45). This transformative approach is based on terminating something undesired (violence) and the building of something desired through the transformation of relationships and construction of the conditions for peace (Lederach, 2000). Human Needs Theory provides insights into the sources of conflict, and thus possible mitigating options (Danielson, 2005) that address the unmet need.

The research questions allowed the women to describe why they chose to forgive, and what forgiveness means to them. Their stories demonstrated that it was a one-time aggressive behavior of the perpetrators, whether there was need to fulfill psychological needs for growth and development, or both. These are needs for identity, security, recognition, participation, and autonomy (Irobi, 2005). This is important as collaboration in the community development initiative has not only sustained peace within the

community, but these women have also taken on the roles of problem-solvers, decision makers, and financially independent breadwinners who are making ends meet for their families, in a culture where men are revered in those roles.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism is defined as “a learning theory which holds that knowledge is best gained through a process of reflection and active construction in the mind” (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005, p. 51). According to constructivist theories creation of knowledge by humans occurs through the interaction between their experiences and ideas throughout their life (Brau, 2018). According to Creswell et al (2018), “social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p.48). Therefore, “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell et al., 2018, p.48-49). that have been impactful. These meanings “are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell et al., 2018, p.48-49).

Interaction processes among individuals, historical and cultural context of participants are important aspects for a constructivist researcher. Note that “constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals and they also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 49)). It is critical that “researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their

interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell et al., 2018, p.49) throughout the study.

According to Crotty (1998), constructivists operate on the following assumptions:

Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views. 2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background.3.

The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive; the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field. (p.56)

The constructivist philosophical worldview was used to understand the meaning constructed by individual women’s experiences with ethnic violence, forgiveness, and ultimately collaboration in economic development initiatives that have transformed their community. Through the constructivism perspective, a new understanding of ‘forgiveness’ as a phenomenon, in relation to peacebuilding and peacekeeping shall be established. Additionally, the social and historical construction of gender roles in relation to peacebuilding and peacekeeping shall be examined. Hence, the newly constructed meanings and importance of the concept of forgiveness as a necessity for sustainable

peace in communities ravaged by ethnic violence will be additional knowledge to the field of conflict resolution.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter discussed literature by various scholars on ethnic dynamics including divisive politics, role of vernacular media, and civil liberties. Forgiveness and its role in relationship restoration covered retributive justice, restorative justice and reconciliation in sustainable peacebuilding. The complexity of forgiveness, and Paul Lederach's models of peacebuilding provide a framework that engages the relational aspects of reconciliation in sustainable peacebuilding. Women and peacebuilding section highlights the critical role of women in sustainable peace. Theoretical frameworks include Lederach's conflict transformation theories, Human Needs Theory, and constructivism, as the researcher's dominant perspective from which she sees the world and analyzed the study. The next chapter will cover interpretative phenomenology, a qualitative research methodology that was used by the researcher.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introducing Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research has been widely used by scholars who are interested in understanding the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of people who have experienced that phenomenon. It is “a way of learning about social reality” (Leavy, 2014, p.2) through exploration, explanation, and description of meanings of peoples’ lived experiences. As Cooper and Finley (2014) note, qualitative research has several important features including a naturalistic context for research, researcher reflexivity, honoring the voice of participants, and evaluation of context. According to Flick (2008), qualitative research is intended to approach the world ‘out there’ (not in specialized research settings such as laboratories), and to understand, describe, and sometimes explain social phenomena ‘from inside’..accessing experiences, and interactions in their natural context.

Qualitative research is the study of people and phenomena in their natural setting and reflects an emphasis on the meaning people find in their natural social life.

Qualitative researchers recognize that not only do the participants in our studies make meaning of their experiences and interactions, but also that researchers themselves are making meaning out of the information athered through interviews, observations, and analysis of documents and visual artifacts. (Cooper & Finley, 2014, p.2-3)

Meaning making is not something that can be quantified. Since understanding the meaning of forgiveness is the focus for this study, a quantitative methodology cannot be applied as it requires quantifying data collection as well as its analysis. In cases where

quantitative research method is not suitable, using a qualitative method is recommended (Creswell, 2007). According to Peat et al. (2018), interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to conduct research in psychology, however, it has received more notoriety in health and social sciences, an increase that is attributed to IPA's use of interpretation when examining complex topics that are emotionally laden. This researcher used this method to interpret the complexities associated with Wanawake Wa Amani's experiences with ethnic violence post the 2007, general elections in Kenya. The methodology also allowed the participants to share their experiences in relation to their peacebuilding processes. This is why interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilized to gather in-depth data from 8 participants through interviews.

Phenomenology, as a method, derives from the work of Edmund Husserl (1970) who is known for his motto, "We must go back to the things themselves" (p. 252). He argued that every science must be situated within the primary experience individuals have with the world. Before anything else, investigators must understand the unique experience of the object (Yahalom, 2013). Dermont Moran (2000), views phenomenology as a philosophy which focuses on getting to the truth of the matter by broadly describing the phenomenon in terms of what it is and ways in which it manifested in the consciousness of the person experiencing it. Phenomenology therefore begins on a clear slate, seeking to 'avoid all misconstructions and impositions placed on experience in advance, whether these are drawn from religious or cultural traditions, from everyday common sense, or, indeed, from science itself'. The phenomenon must be understood from within before any explanations can be given (Moran, 2000). All the

above makes phenomenology a suitable methodology to understand forgiveness as a phenomenon, from the perspectives of the women who experienced it.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Phenomenology allows a researcher an opportunity to access participants' lived experiences with a certain phenomenon, through descriptions of their perceived meaning (Moustakas, 1994). "Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach committed to the examinations of how people make sense of their major life experiences. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p.1). Smith et al. (2012) state that when people are engaged with a major experience in their lives, they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening, and IPA engages with these reflections. Furthermore, "IPA shares the views that human beings are sense-making creatures and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experiences" (Smith et al. 2012, p.3). Through their own reflection, a researcher then tries to make sense of the participants' reflections. This process is known as "double hermeneutic" (Smith et al. 2012, p.3).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) therefore is "an approach influenced by phenomenology and by hermeneutics which focuses on the detailed examination of individual lived experience and ways in which individuals make sense of that experience" (Grantland & Peoples, 2021). Details of a particular case are thoroughly examined by the IPA researcher to understand what the experience is like, and what sense the individual is making from what is happening to them (Smith et al, 2012). This

examination of experience and meaning making through IPA, while exploring similarities and differences between each case is idiographic (Smith et al. 2012).

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012), point out that IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. This is because the aim of IPA is to find a homogenous sample that will allow the detailed examination of the convergence and divergence of data. Gathering detailed narratives from a few subjects is what makes the data rich for interpretation and analysis. Data is collected using semi-structured interviews. Then a systematic qualitative analysis of transcript for each case is done by the researcher's interpretation (Smith et al. 2012).

In this study, I explored the meaning of forgiveness, in relation to sustainable peacebuilding, as a phenomenon experienced by women in Rumuruti, a small rural Kenyan community after the 2007 general elections. As a qualitative researcher, I interacted with participants using semistructured interview questions as a research tool to capture women's perspectives, and their interpretation of forgiveness from their experiences. Therefore this makes IPA the most suitable approach for this study. Smith et al. (2012) identify open-mindedness, flexibility, patience, empathy, and willingness to enter into and respond to the participant's world as the underlying qualities required of an IPA researcher. Throughout my study, I was mindful of these five principles.

### **Research Site**

Laikipia County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya, located on the Equator in the former Rift Valley Province of the country. Laikipia is a cosmopolitan county and is county number 31. It was formed on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Rumuruti, a small town in Laikipia County, is located 40 kilometers north of Nyahururu. Rumuruti Municipality is the

formal headquarters of Laikipia with a projected population of over 42,585 people in 2022.

Rumuruti is known for its livestock auction market between herders and locals. Located north of the town center, the market attracts sellers from as far as Baringo, Turkana, Isiolo and Samburu, and buyers from as far as Meru, Nairobi, Nakuru, Murang'a, Nyeri and even Somalia. Approximately 2,000 cattle and 5,200 sheep and goats are sold at the auction every Thursday. Residents in Rumuruti represent various tribes including Kikuyu, Maasai, Kalenjin, Turkana, Samburu, and Pokot.

### **Role of Researcher**

The qualitative research process is split into seven stages by Kvale (1996) as follows: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting, all of which are critical roles completed by the researcher.

- *Thematizing*: This process involves answering the question of what is going to be studied, why this is going to be studied, and how this is going to be studied as the background for conducting the fieldwork, analysis, and reporting (Fink, 2000).
- *Designing*: The “methodological procedure is planned and prepared” (Fink, 2000, p.5). For example, in a case where interviews will be conducted, the researcher determines whether they will be individual or focus group oriented, as well as the number of subjects to be interviewed.
- *Interviewing*: Interviews were conducted following an interview guide prepared by the researchers (Fink, 2000). The questions were open-ended to give the interviewee time to share an elaborate response to each question.

Responses are in most cases audio recorded, with the researcher making observations and handwritten notes as necessary.

- *Transcribing*: Transcribing the audio recording is the next step. Although some might seek assistance with transcribing, this role is critical for me as a researcher to transcribe my own recording as part of the initial immersion in the participant's world. I transcribed the interviews, then I listened to the zoom recordings again while reading my transcriptions. This step allowed my continuation of making some side notes or memos as I listened to them and recalled our interaction.
- *Analysing*: After transcribing, analysing the transcripts begins. This will go through first/initial and second cycle of coding where I will be naming, categorizing, re-categorizing themes, and identifying interrelationships between them.
- *Verifying*: This is considered an intuitive process performed by the researcher at all stages of the research process (Fink, 2002). It varies from asking follow-up questions of those interviewees, to cross-checking transcripts information with field notes, etc.
- *Reporting*: After all is said and done, the researcher writes a report to present their findings. "The interview report is itself a social construction in which the author's choice of writing style and literary devices provide a specific view on the subjects' lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p.253).

### **Pilot Study**

Prior to doing the research, I conducted a pilot study in Rumuruti with a few women in May 2022. This allowed me to interact with the potential research participants, while testing my research instruments.

According to Arain et al.(2010), a pilot study is a small feasibility study designed to test various aspects of the methods planned for a larger, more rigorous, or confirmatory investigation. Polit and Beck (2017) state that researchers use pilot studies to evaluate the adequacy of their planned methods and procedures, including their instruments. This begins with an evaluation of success in recruitment of participants (Lowe, 2019), which allows one to determine if enough subjects will be willing to participate. Lowe (2019) adds testing the data collection instruments/methods for data quality and appropriateness as another purpose of a pilot study.

Following the approved IRB protocol, I conducted a pilot study in Rumuruti, Kenya. Participants met me at a central location in a hall at the district county center (DCC). This venue was secured by a gatekeeper, who had facilitated the peacebuilding activities the year following the 2007 post election violence and is well known in the community. Potential participants lived far apart within the county, so this allowed easy access to all of them in an open central location.

### **Participant Selection for Pilot Study**

Using purposive sampling, participants were women who were 1) residents of Rumuruti during the 2007 general elections in Kenya 2) participated in the peacebuilding initiatives following the 2008 post election violence. This criterion was shared with the gatekeeper, who voluntarily contacted the women, asking them their willingness to

participate in a research. The gatekeeper also explained the participant consent, and all of those she spoke to were more than willing to participate.

There was a high turn out, and everyone wanted to be interviewed, but as a pilot study, I could only speak to a handful of the women. I introduced myself, and also went over the participant consent form to make sure they all understood what the study was about. With their consent, I was able to audio record all the interviews. The interview desk was in one corner of a big room at the county administration offices where everyone was meeting. The public officials were aware that I was coming to speak to these women in their county. The gatekeeper had informed me that these women like to be together and not be isolated alone in a room, especially with a stranger. That made it suitable that she reserved a space where they would all come and feel comfortable together. Although there were conversations going on amongst them that were noisy, my recording device captured the one on one interviews with clarity.

I interviewed four women aged 29, 40, 70, and 73 years old, who signed the consent forms before I started the interviewing conversation. Illiterate participants signed an X on the consent form as their signature. Duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. I started by gathering some demographics about each participant in table 2 below. This pilot study accorded me great opportunity to practice interviewing subjects, listening carefully, and asking appropriate follow-up questions.



**Table 1***Pilot Study Participants' Demographics*

	Age	Years of residence in Rumuruti	Formal Education	Marital Status
Participant 1	73 years	49 years	0	Widowed
Participant 2	70 years	50 years	0	Widowed
Participant 3	40 years	30 years	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Widowed
Participant 4	29 years	29 years	High School graduate	Married

**Pilot Study Instrument**

The researcher developed an interview guide (see Appendix B) that consisted of questions that were asked of each participant. This guide maintained the interview's focus on the phenomenon that is being studied and allowed participants to tell their stories. Active listening skills were critical for follow up questions, that differed with each participants. They may have shared experiences with violence, but their stories and individual experiences were definitely different considering the age diversity in their demographics.

**Pilot Study Procedure**

The pilot study begun with me reaching out to someone who had been involved in peacebuilding initiatives post the 2007 elections violence in Kenya, expressing my intention to conduct this study specifically with women. It turned out she had worked with women in the same capacity in Rumuruti, a rural town in Laikipia, and agreed to connect me with participants. She sent me a site-approval letter that was part of IRB documents, after which she contacted the women and explained my intent to conduct a

study. As I mentioned previously, all of them were willing to participate. And since the participants preferred to be together, the gatekeeper proceeded to secure a hall at the county offices as a central meeting and interviewing location.

Prior to starting the interviews, I introduced myself to all them as a group, explained my study and reviewed the participant consent form. Each participant signed their copy of the consent form agreeing to participate before the interview started, and they also understood they could withdraw from the process at anytime for any reasons. With their permission, all interviews were audio recorded, while I also took some handwritten notes throughout the interviewing process.

### **Pilot Study Methodology**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach was used in the pilot study. IPA approach is used to explore the meanings of participants to certain life changing events. When people are engaged with a major experience in their lives, they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening, and IPA engages with these reflections (Smith et al, 2012). Data is collected using semi-structured interviews and then a systematic qualitative analysis of transcript for each case is done by the researchers interpretation (Smith et al. 2012).

### **Challenges of the Pilot Study**

Conducting individual interviews in the same room with other 15 women catching up and talking to each other was a little challenging. To minimize the interruption of their conversations, I had the interview table and chairs moved to the furthest corner, where I spoke to interviewees directly while maintaining eye contact to ensure they were focused. The rest of the women remained in the other half of the big county hall where we met.

For the main interview, the participants met in the same location, and there was a noise reduction headphone that was utilized by each participant during the interview, that minimized noise distractions.

### **Results of the Pilot Study**

A pilot study is a small-scale exploratory study that tries to answer questions such as the pragmatics of recruitment and whether a larger study is feasible (Dworschark, & Campbell, 2015). This pilot study was an eye opener for me as the principal researcher. It was fulfilling to see the willingness of the women to participate in the study. This meant that recruitment for the main study would not be an issue. The interview guide or schedule was helpful in keeping interviewees focused on the phenomenon of study. However, the interview questions were reduced from 10 to 6, where I would use more probing on each to gather rich, deep, and detailed data on specific experiences. The indepth interviews proved to be the better tool for data collection from this study. Having everybody in the room chatting while conducting individual interviews from the same was a little concerning at first. However, once I started the interviews, had our eye contact, and focused on the participant in front of me, the conversation flowed, and the noises around had no effect on the quality of the recording. I had a better understanding of the logistics involved and planning for the main study.

## **Main Study**

### **Sampling and Recruitment Criteria**

According to Creswell (2007), sampling approach for research must intentionally sample a group of individuals that will best inform the researcher about the research problem or phenomenon under study. A purposive sampling (Hoeber, Hoeber, Snelgrove,

& Wood, 2017; Creswell & Creswell 2018) was utilized during this study because it is “the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigor of the study and trustworthiness of the data and results” (Campbell et al, 2020, p.1). A purposive recruitment of individuals who were involved in peace building initiatives after the 2007 elections was used to identify study participants. The key informant was purposively identified from their leadership, facilitation, and implementation of the peace building initiatives. In purposive sampling, “participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to the particular perspective on the phenomenon under study” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 49). The purpose of this study was to investigate women’s lived experiences with ethnic violence post 2007 elections and seek to understand the meaning of forgiveness.

Women who are residents in this community, experienced ethnic violence, and were actively engaged in peacebuilding initiatives to transform their community, were the target of study. Regarding the sample size, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) advice researchers to interview about six to ten people when applying an interpretive phenomenological analysis. Therefore, 8 participants, aged 27 years to 73 years were interviewed made the primary unit of analysis. Recruitment of the participants to be interviewed was through a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers could be local chiefs, elders, or nonresidents who came in with the purpose of supporting and guiding the community through the peacebuilding initiatives. They are trusted and acquainted with individuals who were actively involved in the peacebuilding initiatives. I used one gatekeeper, who is a nonresident and previously supported the community during their peacebuilding initiatives. Her role was simply to contact Wanawake Wa Amani, agree on a meeting

day, and reserve a meeting hall at the district county center (DCC). Researchers are advised that:

Gatekeepers are essential mediators for accessing study settings and participants within social research. They may be persons within organisations who have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations during research into organisations. Gatekeepers may also represent any individual or group of individuals who may be invaluable for gaining access primarily due to their knowledge, connections with or membership in a research population... When research is conducted in areas designated as legitimate public spaces such as streets, sidewalks, parks, public beaches, open markets, neighbourhoods, taxi ranks, and bus shelters, gatekeeper roles may be inconsequential. Beyond the access mediating functions, gatekeepers are noted to influence social research in diverse ways. They can fill both obstructionist and facilitative roles, not only in relation to access but also in terms of choice of theoretical orientation and methods, and with matters of disclosure and publication. ( Andor-Arthur, 2019, n.p)

During the pilot study, I met one of the gatekeepers, who contacted potential participants on my behalf, secured DCC location, where everyone convened, and introduced me to them. I was given her contact by one member in my former high school alumni group, where I inquired my interest in identifying anyone who was involved in peacebuilding initiatives post the 2007 elections. This gatekeeper spent several months in Rumuruti, facilitating the women's peacebuilding initiatives as part of her conflict resolution training practicum. In this research, she played a facilitative role to simply

convene potential participants. Therefore, the pilot study already facilitated my entry into this community for this full blown research since I met and interacted with most of the women at that time.

The gatekeeper communicated with the women who were actively involved in the peacebuilding initiatives on my behalf once I provided her with specific dates when I intended to collect data. Active involvement means that they or their parents, attended meetings and participated in some or all of the peacebuilding activities within their community. Participants met at the district county center (DCC), a central location where we met during the pilot study. Since I was not able to travel for in-person interviews, I conducted in-depth interviews individually via Zoom, with each participant using noise canceling headphones. This allowed only the participant to hear the questions. This also guarded from possible gatekeeper influence on the participant's response to questions asked since she could not hear them. The gatekeeper did not have access to my research instrument to avoid any attempt to coach participants on how to respond. Questions were asked and the participant was given time to respond. Each interview lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and was recorded.

On risks and benefits, the following statement is included in the "participant consent" form (see Appendix C): *'It is important to note that the only risk is that you may find some of the questions about your experiences to be sensitive. There will be minimal, or no risk involved, however, if there is any indication of any danger to you because of your participation, the interview will be called off. There are no specific benefits to you individually'*. It means the sensitivity of the questions may result from potential

reminders of the experiences with violence, the loss of a loved one during the violence or both.

As a researcher, protecting identity of participant is an important ethical consideration. I ensured this by assigning pseudonyms or unique code for each participant. This is in addition to start recording each interview after their introduction to avoid capturing their names on the video. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that ethical considerations are paramount to protecting the identity of participants in any study.

### **Data Collection**

This topic of forgiveness is connected to trauma experienced by participants post the 2007 general elections in Kenya, which makes it a sensitive issue. It had potential for participants to be retraumatized. Fortunately there was no such occurrence during this study, which I attribute to the various support groups established by Wanawake Wa Amani. Semi-structured questions were used to keep the conversation open so participants can share as much as they were able, and go as deep as they were free to. These semistructured questions in qualitative data gathering were intentionally used to provide a more relaxed conversational atmosphere, which was in alignment with the fact that a qualitative research interview is simply “a conversation with a purpose” (Smith, et al., 2018, p.57).

Before the start of each Zoom interview, I verbally gave a welcome statement to everybody. They were informed that they are doing this at their own free will, and could choose to not participate in this study at anytime during the interview process. A consent form was read to each participant, who were then asked to verbally state if they agreed with it. After a statement of welcome, I started interviewing each individual participant.

According to Smith et al. (2012) “one to one interviews are easily managed, allowing a rapport to be developed and giving participants the space to think, speak, and be heard” (p.57). At the beginning of the interview, the participant’s demographic information was asked and noted down on a form before recording begins. This strategy was important to ensure anonymity and protection of participants from being identified in the recordings. All interviews were recorded and as a researcher, I was also taking notes throughout the interviews as I made observations. I asked each question, and gave the participant as much time as they need to respond to it. Follow-up questions were asked as necessary.

“Primary research questions in IPA are directed towards phenomenological material: they focus upon people’s understanding of their experiences. Such questions should be ‘open’ not ‘closed’ and they should be exploratory not explanatory” (Smith et al., 2012, p.47). Therefore, open-ended interview questions were asked of each participant to elicit “detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings from the participants” (Smith et al. 2012, p.57) through in-depth interviews. What exactly are in-depth interviews? They are simply discussions with a participant, that allows the researcher to capture rich data on topics that will answer the main research questions.

### **In-depth Interviews**

Smith et al. (2012) describe a qualitative interview as ‘ a conversation with a purpose’, a purpose that is informed implicitly by a research question. They further state that the aim of an interview is largely to facilitate an interaction which permits participants to tell their own stories, in their own words, while the interviewer listens (Smith et al. 2012) carefully. I constantly utilized my active listening and probing skills as participants responded to the interview questions. Therefore, I took on the role of the



human instrument of data collection through intentional prompting and interviewing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Kvale (1996) defines a qualitative interview as “ an interview whose purpose is to obtain description of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p.5), which points to the fact that conversations are important to understand human experiences with certain major events in their lives. My interviews with Wanawake Wa Amani opened up that conversation and space to share their experiences with ethnic violence, and peacebuilding processes for the first time.

The interview is “an event which facilitates the discussion of relevant topics, and which allows the research questions to be answered subsequently, via analysis” (Smith et al. 2012, p.58). To capture rich data and accurate information that will answer the main research question, six interview questions, were asked of each participant. Smith et al (2012) refer to this list of questions as a ‘schedule’. It is important to note that, these interview questions were not asked in the same order, based on the stories of each participant, although, development of an interview guide helps the researcher to organize the sequence of questions to improve data collection (Patton, 2002). Researchers must heed Smith et al’s (2012) caution that, even if one has prepared an interview schedule, it will shape the interview but may not guarantee its content and quality. They emphasize the importance of a good interview to IPA analysis (Smith et al. 2012). “Unless one has engaged deeply with the participant and their concerns, unless one has listened attentively and probed in order to learn more about their lifeworld, then the data will be too thin for analysis” (Smith et al., 2012, p.58). The interaction between myself, the interviewer and

the interviewee makes us both active participants (Smith et al. 2012). Following the interview protocol, the following research question is being explored : How do these women survivors make meaning of forgiveness following the ethnic violence?

Establishing rapport with participants, having flexibility with the interview guide i.e interview questions, probing participants on important things, and actively listening to what they are saying are crucial elements that will result in rich qualitative data for IPA analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) describe IPA analysis as characterized by a set of common processes and principles which are applied with flexibility. Hence, analysis is an “iterative and inductive cycle” (Smith et al., 2012, p.79) that draws upon the following strategies:

- line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006);
- identification of the emergent patterns or themes (Eatough & Smith, 2008) from each case, then across multiple cases;
- dialogue development between researcher, coded data, and their knowledge about it’s meaning for participants (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith 2004) as interpretation develops;
- development of a structure or frame illustrating relationships between themes (Smith, et al., 2012);

- organization of the material in a manner that allows for analysed data to be traced through the process from initial comments, to clustering and development of themes (Smith et al., 2012);
- seek collaboration or supervision to audit to help test and develop coherence and plausibility of the interpretation (Smith et al. 2012);
- narrate the detailed commentary on the data to take the audience through the interpretation by themes and visual guides such as diagrams or tables ;
- reflection on your own perceptions, conceptions, and processes as the researcher (Smith, 2007).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe interpretative phenomenological analysis as; ...a fluid and generative process of breaking data apart, trying to understand the intended meaning, denoting concepts to stand for that meaning, and weaving the concepts back together so that the analytic products form an abstract but representative rendition of how persons or organizations experience events, manage transitions, and handle problematic situations. (p.215)

The following steps were taken to analyse collected data, one case at a time, applying the appropriate coding process accordingly, after all the interviews are completed.

The first step is transcription of the recorded interviews. Recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Throughout the transcription process, the researcher began the process of immersing herself in the data, by noting certain information that stood out or writing down questions that arose. The researcher also had her paper notes that she had made during the interviews, just in case she captured something similar to

the arising questions. Upon completion of all transcriptions, the researcher proceeded on to the next step of reading and re-reading.

To make sure that all content is accurate on the transcript, the researcher listened to the first case while reading through the transcript. Thus, following Smith et al.'s (2012) advice for IPA researchers that "if the transcript is from an interview, it is helpful to listen to the audio recording at least once while first reading the transcript"(p.82). This process was for the researcher to focus on the participant's voice and their story as the key for analysis, while slowing down our habitual propensity for 'quick and dirty' reduction and synopsis (Smith et al. 2012). During this step, it is advisable to "record our own recollections of the interview experience itself, or some of the initial, and most striking about the transcript in a notebook, as a way to bracket them off for a while" (Smith et al., 2012, p.82).

Active engagement with the data through repeated reading allows a model of the overall interview structure to develop and permits the analyst to understand how narratives can bind certain sections of an interview together (Smith et al. 2012). Therefore, this continued immersion in the data enhanced the researcher's ability as the analyst, to clarify certain brackets as she went through each case.

Coding is an ongoing process throughout data analysis. "A code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2016, p.4). Coding is described by Charmaz (2001) as the critical link between data collection and their explanation. Vogt et al. (2014) affirm that in qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or translates data. The data to be coded

consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey responses, drawings, artifacts, photographs etc (Saldana, 2016).

Coding is done in cycles with initial or first cycle coding of single words to a full paragraph or an entire page (Saldana, 2016). During the second cycle coding processes, “the portions coded can be exact same units, longer passages of texts, analytic memos about the data, and reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed so far” (Saldana, 2016, p.4).

Qualitative “analytic process is cyclical rather than linear”(Saldana, 2016, p.68). Saldana (2016) has categorized coding processes into first and second cycle. The first cycle coding processes are further subcategorized as “Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory,Procedural, and Themeing the data.The second cycle coding methods consists of Pattern Coding, Focused Coding, Axial Coding, Theoretical Coding, Elaborative Coding, Longitudinal Coding” (Saldana, 2016, pp. 68-69). And “because each qualitative study is unique the analytical approach will be unique” (Patton, 2015, p.522).

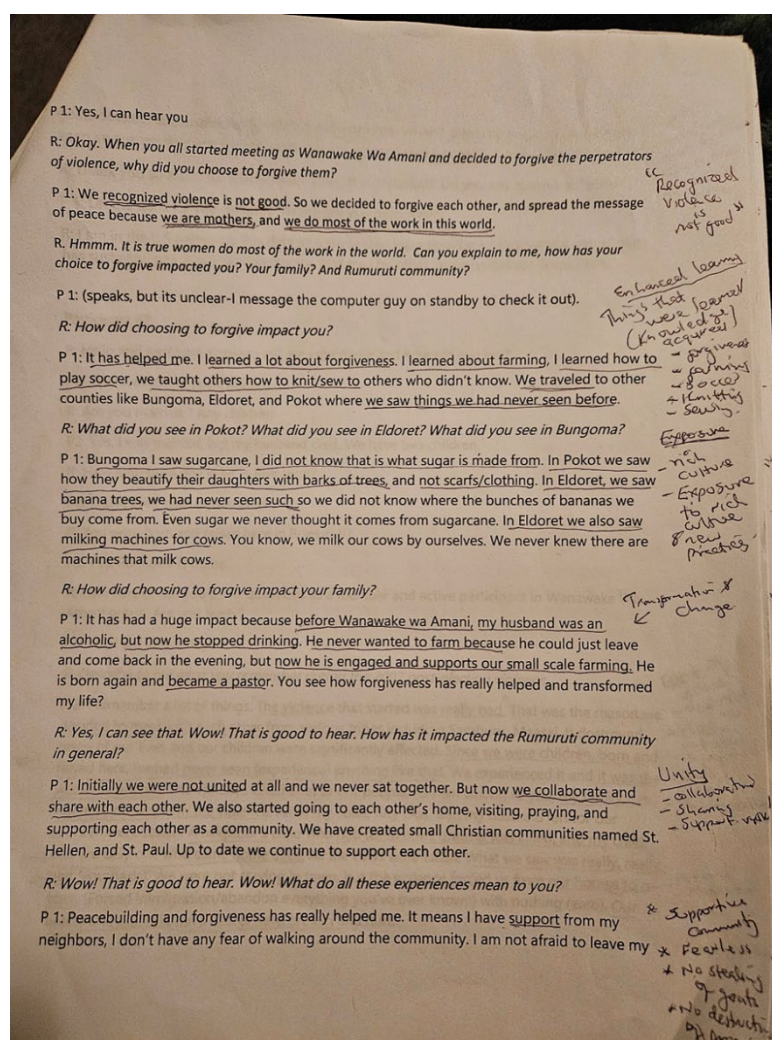
During the coding process, the researcher described, classified, and interconnected the concepts of the phenomenon under study. Unlike grounded theory where analysis of each interview takes place before moving to the next participant, interpretative phenomenological analysis occurs after all interviews are completed, one case at a time, starting with the most detailed and engaging . “Given IPA’s idiographic commitment, we almost always work in this way-analysing the first case in detail, moving to the second case, and doing the same, then moving to the third case, and so on.

It can be helpful to start with the interview that you found to be most detailed, complex, and engaging” (Smith et al. 2012, p.82).

The third step, involved initial noting. This was the most time consuming level of analysis where the researcher examined semantic content and language use on an exploratory level (Smith et al. 2012). It called for the researcher to be open-minded as she familiarized herself with the transcripts, noting down anything that was striking within the margins of the transcripts (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Sample of Initial Manual Noting*



The researcher's "aim [was] to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. At the center of the account [ the researcher] developed through initial notes, there are a descriptive core of comments, [some underlined] which have a clear phenomenological focus, and stay[ing] close to the participant's explicit meaning" (Smith et al. 2012, p.83). The researcher paid attention to important events described by the participants, what these events were like, and the meaning accorded. Asking herself questions such as how and why researcher's participant had these concerns from the language they used and the context in which they used that enhanced this initial noting (Smith et al., 2012).

Smith et al. (2012) identify the following as effective processes to make exploratory comments in transcripts:

Descriptive comments focused on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript. Linguistic comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant. Conceptual comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level.  
(p.84)

The researcher engaged in this process consistently writing down notable words, questions, and thoughts that came up from reading the transcripts. Figure 3 below is a sample of the exploratory process that the researcher conducted with each transcript.



FIGURE 3

*Sample of Initial Exploratory Comments*

Original Transcript	Initial Exploratory Comments
<b>Participant #1</b>	
R: What do you remember after the violence of 2007 to 2008?	
P1: We organized ourselves as women, promoting peace. We even played soccer for peace to unite all tribes, that also shared their history/culture. We sang songs of peace, tailored scarfs and clothing, and we did all that together as a group with people from different tribes. As a group, we were taken to other communities and cities to unite people and teach them about promoting and living peacefully. We went to Pokot, because we belong to <u>Wanawake wa Amani</u> women group.	<p><i>Why were these such important activities and events that they took part in?</i></p> <p>“Organized ourselves as women, promoting peace”. Soccer for peace=unity Songs for peace. Tailoring together</p> <p><i>They were “taken to other communities and cities to unite people and teach them about promoting and living peacefully”.</i></p>
R: Why were you happy to join the group?	
P1: When we joined together, we learned a lot about living together peacefully with neighbors and with your own family	<p><i>Sounds like learning to rebuild trust with each other. Otherwise, how can you collaborate with someone you don't trust?</i></p>
R: Okay. When you all started meeting as <u>Wanawake Wa Amani</u> and decided to forgive the perpetrators of violence, why did you choose to forgive them?	
P1: We recognized violence is not good. So we decided to forgive each other, and spread the message of peace because we are mothers, and we do most of the work in this world.	<p><i>Reason why it became their responsibility to establish peace and stop potential violence in future</i></p>
R: Hmm. It is true women do most of the work in the world. Can you explain to me, how has your choice to forgive impacted you?	

Another strategy that is advised for use at this stage is ‘deconstruction’ or ‘decontextualization’ to bring into detailed focus the participant’s words and meanings (Smith et al., 2012). This is done by fracturing “the narrative flow of the interview by taking a paragraph and reading it backwards, one sentence at a time to get a feel for the use of particular words”(Smith et al., 2012, p.90). Decontextualization pulls the researcher from the traditional explanatory scripts, and instead helps to develop an appreciation of the embedded nature of the participant’s report (Smith, et al., 2012). Thus



emphasizing the importance of context within the interview as a whole, providing insight into the interrelationships between one experience and another (Smith et al.,2012).

The researcher was making and highlighting descriptive comments from key words, phrases, assumptions or emotional responses as they are the ones that structure the interviewee's thoughts and experiences (Smith et al., 2012). Exploring the language used including metaphors, pronouns, tone, repetitions, or hesitancy through italicized linguistic comments (Figure 4) could lead to discovery of conceptual meanings of these experiences (Smith et al., 2012). "We became like kids" was one of the metaphors a participant used to describe their excitement and how they felt when they learned they were going to travel to western part of the country, to promote peace, while staying in a hotel with all expenses paid for by the government. Conceptual comments (Figure C) occurred at the third level of annotation at a more interpretative and interrogative form (Smith et al., 2012).

Figure 4

*Sample of Linguistic (Italicized) and Conceptual Comments*

<p>other from various tribes including Samburu, Maasai. It destroyed many of our lives and our children were significantly affected. Since we were children, born and raised here, we had <i>never seen anything like that</i>. We experienced it and it was the worst experience. <i>The violence killed a lot of our people</i>. As I am talking to you, my family has lost a lot of people in the violence. All of my cows, fifty plus, that my husband left for our children were stolen. A neighbor's child who had taken cows grazing was killed, and my child was the only one who came home alive. All the cows were taken. <i>What we saw was really, really bad</i>. We were not staying in town, but the violence forced us from our homes to town with nothing. Our hearts and our children's hearts were broken and hurt.</p> <p>When we came to this town, we found Maximilla, who came to speak to us, and <i>taught us that there is something called peace, uniting in peace, holding each other in peace</i>. We all decided to do collaborate and support each other in building our peaceful community. We decided our peace will never end, and we will never tolerate such violence in our community again. We even <i>thought the world had come to an end</i>. Through our Women of Peace group, we stood by each in spite of our respective tribes that we came from. We joined together and engaged in various activities, including "soccer for peace" even though we are old. I was even a goli (goalkeeper) which was my job, aha! hal hal.</p> <p>R: Why did you choose to join Women of Peace?</p> <p>P2: During that time there was no peace. So when we established our group to promote peace that united Samburus, Kikuyu, Pokot, and we were playing with each other. It was <i>very good and strengthened our strength</i>. We learned how to co-exists peacefully with each other, and not hate each other. There is no enemy. They are your sister and</p>	<p>United various tribes (Unity as a goal)</p> <p><b>What happens when there's violent conflict?</b></p> <p>Destruction of lives (Impact). Even Children were affected (Traumatic) "never seen anything like that" (surreal) Never experienced such as a native (All new). Killed a lot of people-deaths of family, neighbors, friends-(Impact of violence) Property/Assets lost-(Impact) Dealing with survivors' guilt. (psychological impact)</p> <p>"What we saw was really, really bad" Emphasis on magnitude of the violence. Forced immigration/abandon everything you've ever known with nothing. Our hearts and our children's hearts were broken and hurt (Impact on families). "We thought the world had come to an end" (feelings of fear).</p> <p><b>Lessons learned from Peacebuilding facilitator.</b></p> <p>Collaboration, supporting each other, building "our peaceful community". "We decided our peace will never end" (sustainable peace as a goal). "Stood by each other" (Support system). They did whatever it took to achieve their goal and spread the message of peace. Peacebuilding activities: "soccer for peace". Co-exist peacefully. "established our group to promote peace"</p>
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The fourth step in IPA data analysis is developing emergent themes. The researcher started analysing the exploratory comments to identify emerging themes from each transcript at this stage. "In looking for emergent themes, the task of managing the data changes as the analyst simultaneously attempts to reduce the volume of detail (the transcript and initial notes) whilst maintaining complexity, in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between exploratory notes" (Smith et al., 2012. p.91). The researcher set aside the transcripts and start using the notes to identify patterns and connections. This process also involved breaking up the narrative flow of the interview and reorganizing the data, a manifestation of the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al. 2012), a critical part of using interpretative phenomenological analysis. For the

researcher to understand a part of the data, they had to look at the whole context and to understand the whole, the researcher looked at the parts.

The researcher went through the notes for each case, to determine the emerging themes within that single case. This process involves the researcher's "attempt to produce a concise and pithy statement of what was important in the various comments attached to a piece of transcript" (Smith et al. 2012, p.92). According to Smith et al (2012), "themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual" (p.92). The themes reflected the participant's thoughts and the researcher's interpretation of those thoughts.

The fifth step is identifying connections across emergent themes. With all the emergent themes from each transcript laid out, this step involved charting, or mapping of how the themes fit together (Smith et al. 2012). The researcher wrote each theme on a sticky note, then arranged them on their bed as it provided a bigger surface area than their table, so the researcher could group them in various categories based on how they related to each other, and assigned each set of themes a new name. The process of grouping and regrouping of the emergent themes into broader categories of themes was complex. Smith et al(2012) refer to these new categories as the 'super-ordinate' themes.

Smith et al. (2012) inspire researchers to identify superordinate themes through abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, or function strategies. Abstraction process involves clustering like themes and giving them a new name; subsumption is where an emergent theme itself brings together a series of related themes and acquires a superordinate status; polarization is where one focuses on what

makes the themes different from each other; contextualization is clustering themes based on the context in which they were narrated by the participants; numeration is taking into account the frequency with which a certain theme is supported across the cases; and function strategy can be used when emergent themes are examined on the basis of their function such as presenting the narrator in a positive or a negative way (Smith et al., 2012). The researcher utilized a mix of abstraction, subsumption, and conceptualization to identify the superordinate themes. This stage of analysis encourages organization of themes in multiple ways for creativity and higher level of analysis. Once the researcher was satisfied with their new superordinate categories, they proceeded on to visualize and create possible graphic presentations of these emergent themes through “the creation of table [Table 6]” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 99) as superordinate themes. The aforementioned steps 1 to 5 were repeated for each case, before moving on to step 6.

The final step is number 6 where identifying patterns across cases occurs. With all superordinate themes for each case identified, this stage “involves looking for patterns across cases” (Smith et al., 2012, p.101). This involved laying the superordinate themes on the floor, read across all of themes, as the researcher critically determined existing connections. Important questions to ask according to Smith et al.(2012) are: “What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are the most potent?” (p.101). Analysis at this level becomes more theoretical as a superordinate theme of a particular case or individual may be the higher context shared by other cases (Smith et al., 2012). This dual quality of “pointing to ways in which participants represent unique idiosyncratic instances but also

shared higher qualities” (Smith et al., 2012, p.101) is considered part of the best interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Representation of information at this stage is in the form of a table with a clear illustration that captures the most important information and connections between cases. The researcher proceeded further into deeper analysis of these results to provide a strong IPA with various levels of interpretation that is still connected to the overall data. For example, from a macro analysis using critical theoretical analysis, to a micro analysis of certain statements made by participants will provide a multifaceted interpretation of data. The report on findings is presented in Chapter 4.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher discussed qualitative research and interpretative phenomenology analysis as the method of inquiry. As an exploratory study, IPA is the most suitable methodology for this research. Description of the research site, Rumuruti in Laikipia is provided. A pilot study conducted in May, 2022 that paved the way for the researcher’s entry into the women’s community is highlighted. Purposive sampling and recruitment criteria outlines the kind of participants suitable for this study. In-depth interviews as the main mode for data collection is discussed. Finally, the 6 steps that the researcher used for analysing data upon completion of interviews is discussed. What are the findings?

## Chapter 4: Findings

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate women's lived experiences with ethnic violence post 2007 elections using open-ended interviews and seeking to understand the meaning of forgiveness in Rumuruti, a rural Kenyan community. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was employed to explore these women's experiences with the violence that broke out after Kenya's general elections in 2007, their perceptions of the process leading to the forgiving of the perpetrators, and the impact of their decision to forgive on individuals, families, and the community. According to Smith et al. (2009), the phenomenological methodology facilitates the exploration of how participants make sense of their lived experiences. As an inductive study, all participants were asked open-ended questions to elicit descriptive and perceptions of their experiences. The findings from analysis of these eight interviews will be discussed.

### **Descriptive Data**

A small purposive sample of eight participants were selected for this research. This sample size is in alignment with IPA's tradition of encouraging researchers to use small size samples (Turpin et al., 1997). This small size sample is for a centralized focus on detailed accounts and representation of individual participants' experience of a human phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009), as well as for a deep analysis of similarities and differences within a specific population (Turpin et al., 1997).

The participants are residents of Rumuruti, a small town in Laikipia County in the Rift Valley, and one of the six subcounties in Laikipia West Subcounty (Figure A). The

main criteria for participation was that a) the individual or their mother was involved in peace building initiatives in Rumuruti after the 2007 general elections violence, that left many dead and others internally displaced b) they were and are residents of any one of the subcounties in Laikipia county. All participants were selected from members of Wanawake Wa Amani group. Wanawake wa Amani (WWA), Swahili for women of peace, is a women's group that was formed in Rumuruti post the 2007 election violence that broke out in Kenya. Participants comprised of the natives of Rumuruti and non-natives. The natives were born and raised in the area, while nonnatives are those who sought refuge in Rumuruti when violence broke out in their neighboring communities within Laikipia County. It therefore makes sense that seeking a way to live peacefully with each other as a community and alleviate any potential threat for similar violence recurrence was critical. Notably, over 95% of them have no formal education. Only one participant (Table 2) had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education while the rest had zero education.

Participants were identified by a gatekeeper who served as a voluntary facilitator of Wanawake Wa Amani group when it was established. Fondly referred to as Madam Maximilla, she was a trusted person whom the women strongly believe they can count on anytime. Though born and raised in western Kenya, she lived in Rumuruti for several months doing her practicum after peacebuilding training. When Wanawake Wa Amani group was formed, it presented a bonus opportunity to support the local residents. She made a couple of calls and the word spread like wild fire, so those who were available showed up. Others who had gone either farming or to external markets outside of Rumuruti were not able to attend, since it was a Thursday. The turn out was almost half the number of those who turned out during the pilot study. The gatekeeper reminded

participants that it was that Kenyan student who came last year from the United States, and said she will come back to talk to more members of Wanawake Wa Amani and would like to talk to each one of you again. They remembered our meeting during the pilot study when they all wanted to be interviewed but I had to explain that I was only allowed to interview three to four people. The gatekeeper made reservations for the DCC hall again, and informed them to stop by. Since it was a Zoom interview, I spoke to each participant first about their consent to be interviewed. I informed them they were doing it out of their free will, they were not obligated to answer all questions, and that they were free to stop or leave anytime without penalty. They gave their verbal consent since it was a Zoom interview.

Research Participant #1, coded as P1, was 38 years old who reported to be married with children. She had lived in Rumuruti for 22 years and never attended school. She joined Wanawake Wa Amani because she heard about Madam Maximilla, who taught them about uniting and promoting peace in Laikipia county. She was happy to join the group because they learned a lot about living together peacefully with neighbors and with their own family. She described how choosing to forgive has been transformative and had a huge impact on her family. Her previously alcoholic husband had stopped drinking and instead he was engaged in and supporting their small scale farming business. She embraced the support from neighbors as she expressed feeling safe and not having to walk around in fear of a potential attack.

Research Participant #2, coded as P1, was a 59 year old widow with two children and illiterate. She was born and raised in Rumuruti. She described the violence that started in 2007 as “really bad”, and that it destroyed many lives, while underscoring the



significant impact it had on their children. She emphasized that this violence was the main reason they met with other women from different ethnic communities and established Wanawake Wa Amani group. As a native of Rumuruti, referencing the 2007 election violence, she stated that since they were children, they “had never seen anything like that”. Her family lost a lot of people during that violence, and all of her fifty plus cows were stolen. She struggled with survivors’ guilt as she described how her neighbor’s child who had taken cows grazing with her child was killed, and her son was the only one who came back home alive. The pain of loss and forced migration from their home to their current place in town was clear as she explained that they “were not staying in town, but the violence forced us from our homes to town with nothing. Our hearts and our children’s hearts were broken and hurt”. She shared her joy in establishing WWA to promote peace that united Samburus, Kikuyus, and Pokots through playing soccer for peace, singing songs of peace, and learning different skills from each other. She described her life today as collaborative, peaceful, and happy. As a member of WWA, she chose to forgive perpetrators of violence, “because these are people the devil used. It was the devil’s work, but not themselves”. She reminisced as a young girl, how they “lived very well together, and there was no hatred”. Since making that decision to forgive and unite as a community, her family has never slept hungry or gone without food, and her children never missed school. She described all children in Rumuruti as “united and holding each other like brothers and sisters.”

Research participant #3, coded as P3 is a 27 year old native of Rumuruti. She has not attended any formal school. She is a single mother who remembered women “uniting as a group with a goal to establish and spread peace” when her mother was alive. She

compared life being hard during the violence as they “used to stay in the house and afraid of going out”, to “traveling throughout the community freely without fear” after formation of Wanawake Wa Amani group. She decided to join WWA as an adult because the group “decided peace was a priority”, and chose to forgive the perpetrators of violence “because they used to see each other as enemies, and understood all those were the satan’s acts”. She described being “good neighbors” prior to the onset of the violence in 2007. She credits her current livelihood to the skills she learned from other members of WWA. She “learned how to farm from Kikuyus who knew farming”, because she is from an ethnic group that only knew herding. She runs a small business where she sets up a food stand and sells vegetables every Tuesday and Thursday. She points out that her family’s needs are met because of her ability to get food from farming, and the small business helps her pay her children’s school fees. As a young mother, she appreciates that the violence “is now like history’ that they tell their kids about a violence that once broke out in their community.

Research Participant #4, coded as P4 is a 73 year old widow who has been a resident of Rumuruti for the last 49 years. She remembered “houses getting burnt down, and was one of the pioneers of Wanawake Wa Amani. She described her involvement in early activities of WWA including “weaving baskets and sewing scarfs”. She expressed her joy in WWA as an inclusive group of people from all tribes working together. P4 did not personally know any of the perpetrators of violence, but chose to forgive them anyway because she believed the divisive political campaigns forced people to choose sides and led to the violence. She is also a member of the Catholic Women Association (CWA) at her church where she “teaches children and other members the importance of

forgiveness”. Acknowledging the wrongs or truth telling in relation to the 2007 violence is important to her. She is one of the WWA members who provides private counsel to those individuals having any conflict within their community. She runs a small business of selling maize and beans in Rumuruti. She also joined forces with other women and contributed money, bought a piece of land where they have built rental units. Income from these units is equally distributed to all stakeholders at the end of the year in December. That is empowerment.

Research Participant #5, coded as P5 is a 47 year old young married mother of two young children, with no formal education and thirty two years of residence in Rumuruti. She recalled “people fighting each other, Pokots fighting with Samburus”. She described people “hurting deeply” when they saw the violence and how people were getting killed”. She chose to forgive “because this world needs people to forgive each other and even God says we forgive each other”. Her community now lives in “peace and harmony” with each other. Her alcoholic husband stopped drinking, and she’s been able to send their kids to school without interruptive violence. Farming is her source of food for family, and also their small business. She sometimes goes to work for medium to larger scale farmers and gets paid. Attending catholic church and being a member of the small Christian community group where the “meet, pray, and share with each other” has been fulfilling. Positive things such as sustained peace and economic growth means everything to her.

Research Participant #6, coded as P6 is 49 years old and has been in Rumuruti for about 15 years. She previously lived in a neighboring county in Magadi. She affirmed “it was because of that fighting” that she “left and sought refuge in Rumuruti”. She was

about 34 years old and one of the founders of Wanawake Wa Amani group. Like other participants she recalled people fighting and houses getting burned down. Forming WWA meant they “all recognized that fighting and violence is not helping them in any way”. Speaking on the impact of violence, P6 reiterated that “we had our children killed, our animals and assets stolen from us”, and that “engaging in our own peacebuilding activities” was necessary. They sang songs of , played football for peace, started collaborating with each other and dancing to drums together. Playing tag war with elected political officials during their visit to Pokot was a highlight for her. P6 was on the team that traveled to Pokot where they had conversations with Pokots, whom they used to fight with. Safety, collaboration, mediating conflict, and supporting each other are her priorities in Rumuruti community.

Research Participant #7, coded as P7, is a 32 year old native of Rumuruti, married with 4 kids. She is also a daughter to a former Wanawake Wa Amani member, who shared her perspective from both her experience as a child and also from her now deceased mother’s experiences which she shared with them. She recalled her mother sharing about her involvement with WWA, including traveling to Kuki ranch to “spread the message of peace to those who live there”. Their goal was to stop the ethnic violence between Pokots and Samburus, and Maasais and Pokots,. When WWA was formed, they “went there and reconciled them” through football for peace where they had opposite tribes playing for and on each others’ team. These games were played during different trips, including one with Turkanas. She remembered them singing, praying together, and playing football. P7 described the meaning of forgiveness as a “good thing”, meaning you too can be forgiven and God says we forgive others”. She described herself as

someone who “loves peace, wants people to continue to live in peace, and teaches her family that peace is important”.

Research Participant #8, is a 28 year old native of Rumuruti, who was also born and raised in the area. She is married with 3 kids, and has an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. Although she was young when the violence broke out in 2007/2008, she remembered “people fighting in different communities surrounding Rumuruti. She recalled her “parents playing football, then traveling to other places to play those sides of Pokot”. P8 shared that they lived in Kaptura, but whenever darkness came, they crossed over to Lokeshen where there was security and it was much safer for them. A few years after this movement, her father go sick and died. Her mother joined WWA, and they suddenly observed some changes especially farming. She said “our family had never grown crops. That was new to all of us. And of course watching grown women play football was not something that had ever happened in Samburu”. She identified the cultural shift and understanding that emerged as they learned about Turkanas, Samburus and Kikuyus. Small community groups where members from different tribes met and gathered was also a new thing in their community that enhanced collaboration and support for each other. P8 “sells vegetables in various markets in and outside of Rumuruti, another change that came about as a result of peacebuilding initiatives by Wanawake Wa Amani that have united community members in Rumuruti and neighboring subcounties in Laikipia. P8 views forgiveness as a necessity for achieving peace. She asserts that its “forgiving another person of their wrongs and peace is important to keep us united”.

This highly illiterate group of mothers in Laikipia County brought their ingenuity to resolve conflict that left many families and community members dead, property and

assets destroyed, and many families from neighboring subcounties (Figure 6) displaced. Laikipia County comprises three administrative sub-counties (the Constituencies) namely: Laikipia East, Laikipia North and Laikipia West (Figure 5). The Laikipia East Sub- County lie to the east, Laikipia North to the North and Laikipia West to the west of the County. The sub-County headquarters are at Nanyuki, Dol Dol and Rumuruti respectively (Open County, 2024).

When it comes to administrative authorities, Laikipia County comprises four former Local Authorities namely: County council of Laikipia; Municipal council of Nanyuki; Municipal council of Nyahururu; and Town council of Rumuruti (Open County, 2024).

## FIGURE 5

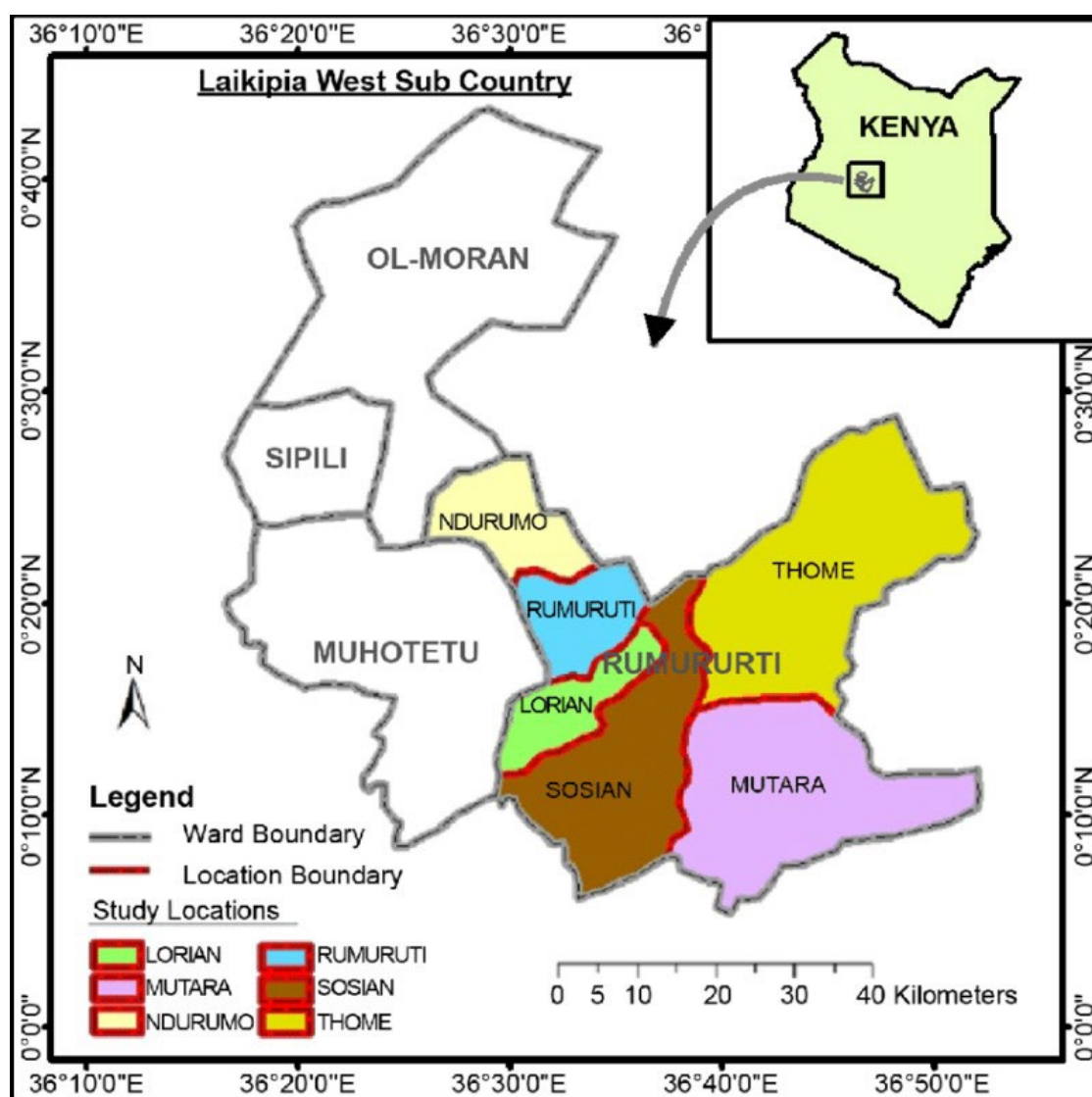
*Map Of The Three Constituencies In Laikipia County Showing The Population Density.*



The map in Figure 6 below shows the Laikipia West subcounty in Laikipia County, one of the 14 counties within the former Rift Valley Province (Open County, 2024). Rumuruti is home to one of the local administrative authorities known as Town Council of Rumuruti.

**FIGURE 6**

*Map of Laikipia West Subcounty.*



Source: Scientific Figure on Researchgate (2017).

The sample of participants was a mix of married and widowed mothers, with their ages ranging from 32-73 years old (See *Demographics of Participants* in Table 3). All participants have lived in the area for at least fifteen years and most of them also have no formal education (see Table 2), although they are now sending their children to school. All interviews were conducted via Zoom due to unavoidable challenges that prevented the researcher from traveling. However, note that a pilot study had been conducted in person a year earlier within this community.

**Table 2**

*Demographics of Participants*

	Age	Years of Residence	Marital Status	Formal Education
Participant 1	38 yrs old	22	Married	0
Participant 2	59 yrs old	59	Widowed	0
Participant 3	27 yrs old	27	Single Mother	0
Participant 4	73 yrs old	49	Widowed	0
Participant 5	47 yrs old	32	Married	0
Participant 6	49 yrs old	15	Married	0
Participant 7	32 yrs old	32	Married	0
Participant 8	28 yrs old	28	Married	Standard 8

The following are the primary questions designed to explore the participants' lived experiences with the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya. Follow-up questions were asked as necessary for clarity and further exploration of the participants' experiences.



1. Describe how you remember the events leading to the 2007 elections.
2. How would you describe the post-election violence of 2008?
3. What was the process leading to women gathering to discuss the way forward in this community?
4. Why did you choose to:
  - a) join *wanawake wa amani* (peacebuilding women)
  - b) forgive the perpetrators of the violence?
5. What have been the effects of forgiveness?
  - a) for you, individually
  - b) for your family, and
  - c) for your community?
6. What do all these experiences mean to you?

All participants were asked the same questions above. However, different follow up questions were asked to seek clarity and for confirmation of the participant's experiences. For privacy and confidentiality, participant's real names are replaced with a number. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that, "researchers need to protect the anonymity of the participants by assigning numbers or aliases to them to use in the process of analyzing and reporting data" (pp. 230-231).

### **Data Analysis Process**

Data analysis process began with transcription of the zoom interviews. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher listened to the recordings again and again. This is what Smith et al (2009) refer to as the ongoing active engagement with the data that ensures the participant is the focus of analysis. Reading and re-reading each

transcript as the first step of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) analysis allowed the researcher to deeply immerse themselves in each participant's lived experiences. This is what Saldana (2016) also refers to as first cycle of coding that was followed by identifying the various codes that were emerging from each transcript (see Table 4). By noting in the margins of the transcripts, the researcher was able to see recurring themes as well as new ones that emerged individual as well as across several transcripts. This "initial noting examines semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level, while maintaining an open mind to ensure familiarity with the transcript" (Smith et al. 2009, p. 83), is the second step in IPA analysis.

### **Themes**

According to Smith et al (2009), when using IPA for data, descriptive comments focus on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript; linguistic comments focus upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant; conceptual comments focus on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7:

Sample 1 Descriptive (Yellow), Linguistic (Italicized), And Conceptual (Green) Coding

<p>we had never thought we would go. We traveled to many places as <i>Wanawake Wa Amani</i>, to share our message of peace with other communities as well. Those communities could see that we were healing (from the violence). They were <i>very happy when we spoke to them</i>, and they said they have <i>seen a good thing in our group</i>. We have continued to unite as a group and live with each other in peace.</p> <p>R: Why did you choose to forgive the perpetrators of violence?</p> <p>P2: We chose to forgive the perpetrators because these are people who the devil used. It was the devil's work, but not themselves. Because when I was a young girl, we lived next to Pokots, we lived very well together, and there was no hatred. We wondered <i>what has actually invaded in the brains of our people</i>. We said <i>it's the devil using them to commit violence</i>. We decided to forgive them, because we did not think they intended to cause harm, they were being used. So we forgave them completely.</p> <p>R: How is choosing to forgive impacted your family and your community at large? Start with the family.</p> <p>P2: It has been really good for my family. Personally, I was hurt when I lost everything I ever had. But since I chose to forgive, my family has never slept hungry or gone without food. My children have not missed school. <i>Life is no longer as difficult or challenging</i>. Finding this group has actually made our lives much easier. We no longer see challenges, because we forgave and let go off our pain. I have been fine with my children, and they have continued to grow very well. One is now married with his children and living a happy life.</p> <p>R: How about your community?</p> <p>P2: <i>Rumuruti is now very good</i>. All our children in Rumuruti are united and holding each other (support) like brothers and sister. You will not hear anything or language of hate at all. It is rare to hear of conflicts among community members.</p>	<p><b>Sustainable Peace remains the goal</b>  <i>Travel and played "Soccer for peace" in other communities: Symbolism for Unity/Togetherness.</i>          Goal to achieve peace.  <i>"they have seen a good thing in our group"</i> - Self-esteem/Healing          Those communities could see that we were healing (from the violence).</p> <p><b>Forgiveness</b>          Decision/Choosing to forgive.  <i>"It was the devil's work, but not themselves".</i>  <i>"We wondered what has actually invaded in the brains of our people": (Seeking to understand why people could be so violent).</i>          Reasons for choosing forgiveness</p> <p><b>Human Needs fulfillment</b>          No longer struggle feeding family.          Consistent school attendance for children.          Life is much easier.  <i>"No longer experience extreme challenges"</i> means there's collaboration and a support system for sustaining each other has reduced challenges. Choosing to forgive has enhanced collaboration</p> <p><b>Evidence of Transformation</b>          Unity amongst children too          Support each other like brothers and sisters.          Conflict is rare amongst community members.  <i>"Sustainable peace is ALL we need"</i></p>
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**Figure 8:***Sample Descriptive, Linguistic And Conceptual Coding*

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<p>stay in the house and afraid of going out to places. But since forming <u>Wanawake wa Amani</u>, we are traveling throughout the community freely, without fear. We have become like sisters, and we support each other a lot. That group has helped us a lot and brought us from far.</p> <p>R: Why did you decide to a) join <u>Wanawake wa Amani</u> group? B) forgive the perpetrators?</p> <p>P3: I decided to join the group and chose to forgive the perpetrators because we used to see each other as enemies. Before the violence we used to be good neighbors, but then the violence caused us to become enemies. But <u>Wanawake wa Amani</u> decided peace was a priority in our community. That eliminated the enmity. We understood all those were the <u>devils/satan's acts</u>. We joined the group and learned a lot. For example, we went to <u>Marura</u>, and learned how to farm with <u>Kikuyus</u>, who knew farming. Because for us, we only knew how to herd, but not farm.</p> <p>We traveled to Bungoma and saw sugarcane and learned that sugar is made from sugarcane. We used to think there is a place where sugar comes from but didn't know it's from sugarcane. Similarly, when we traveled to Eldoret and saw dairy cows. You know for us we milk our own cows, letting the calf suckle on one tit, while we milk the other. We were surprised to see that a milking machine that can milk a cow once exists. We determined we needed to hold our group together because it has helped us learn a lot and make progress in our lives. Today here in <u>Rumuruti</u>, we can now sell our products to <u>Pokots</u> because we are no longer enemies. We can also go to sell at other markets like <u>Mugarat</u>, where we previously could not even dare to go there. <u>Rumuruti</u> market used to be used only by <u>Samburus</u>, but today, all women from all tribes come to sell at this market. Don't you see our Women of Peace group is very good? We love for it to continue thriving.</p>	<p><b>Enlightenment, Empowerment</b> learned how to farm, how to embrace our unique cultures. We traveled to Bungoma and we realized life can actually be good. Spreading peace.</p> <p><b>Safety and Outcomes of WWA group</b> No longer staying inside. Living without fear. Now living like sisters. Support each other.</p> <p><b>Forgiveness and Transformation</b> Chose to forgive the perpetrators because we used to see each other as enemies after the violence. Good neighbors prior to violence. WWA Prioritized peace. Peace eliminated enmity.</p> <p>We understood all those were the <u>devils/satan's acts</u>.</p> <p><b>Empowerment and skill building</b> Learned farming from Kikuyus how to farm. we needed to hold our group together because it has helped us learn a lot and make progress in our lives.</p> <p><b>Unity not enmity</b> we can now sell our products to <u>Pokots</u> because we are no longer enemies. We can also go to sell at other markets like <u>Mugarat</u>, where we previously could not even dare to go there.</p>

Through this exploration process, the researcher started developing emergent themes as the third step in analyzing the coded data( Table 5). According to Saldana (2016), the first cycle coding methods are processes that happen during the initial coding of data and they are fairly direct. Grammatical methods (attribute, magnitude, subcoding and simultaneous coding) and elemental methods (structural, descriptive, In Vivo, process, initial, and concept coding) are two of the seven subcategories in first cycle methods (Saldana, 2016) the researcher utilized. At the beginning, the researcher applied

attribute coding, a grammatical method, to identify the demographics of all participants including age, marital status, residence, and formal education (Table 3). Attribute coding is defined as “notation, usually at the beginning of a data set rather than embedded within it, of basic descriptive information such as participant characteristics or demographics” (Saldana, 2016, p.291). The researcher then utilized a combination of three elemental methods during the first coding cycle including initial, descriptive and concept coding (Saldana, 2016). Initial coding incorporated In Vivo (Saldana, 2016) where the researcher used participants quotes that were powerful and stood out. Descriptive coding “assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase, providing an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing” (Saldana, 2016, p.292). Concept coding “assigns meso or macro meaning to data or data analytic work in progress. A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action” (Saldana, 2016, p.292). Applying these elemental methods to each transcript resulted in specific codes emerging based on individual participant’s responses. While some are unique, the similarities in others is undeniable. This was then followed by the fourth step of searching for connections across emergent themes (Smith et al. 2009) utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**Table 3***Emerging Codes from First Cycle Coding*

Emerging Codes	
Participant 1	Promoting Peace, Unity, enhanced Learning, Teaching Others, Exposure, Tranformation/Change, Collaboration, Supportive System, Fearless, Safety, Impact of violence (death, assets destroyed)
Participant 2	Destruction of lives/property, Forced migration, Pain & hurt, Learning, Decision/Intent to build a peaceful community, Sustainable peace, Unity, Collaboration, Promote peace, Enlightenment, Economic Development, Impact of forgiveness, Safety, Sustainable peace
Participant 3	Establish & spread peace, Learning, Safety, Support, Travel/Exposure, Eliminate enmity, Progress & Development, Transformation/Economic Development, Forgiveness
Participant 4	Impact of violence (death, property destruction), Learning/new skill devt, Cross-ethnic collaboration, Divisive politics,Unity, Empowerment, Economic Development, Increased self-esteem, Success Story of Peace and reconciliation
Participant 5	Impact of violence, Deep hurt and pain, establish and spread peace, Unity, Learning new skills (farming, sewing, knitting, playing soccer, beading, weaving), Peace & harmony, Economic development, Tranformation, Enhanced Interpersonal relationships
Participant 6	Death, Loss of assets, Forced migration, Peacebuilding Activities (soccer for peace, songs of peace, teaching others new skills/culture, tag war, dancing to drums), collaboration, Support system, Travel/Exposure to new things, Enlightenment, Commitment to Forgive Safety, Limited Resources, New roles (mediators & peacekeepers in the community), Diverse community co-existing peacefully
Participant 7	Spread message of peace, Peacebuilding activities (football for peace, singing songs of peace, praying together), Reconciliation of fighting tribes, Reduced conflict, peacefull coexistence of diverse tribes, Economic development (farming businesses), Safety, Learning through interactive activities, Forgiveness of others, Teaching family/next generation about peace, Inter-ethnic marriages
Participant 8	Impact of violence in surrounding communities, Peacebuilding initiatives/activities, forced migration, Safety and security,Unity, Spread the message of peace, Change/Transformation, Learning about other cultures, Collaboration, Community Groups, Support systems, Freedom to do business in all markets.

After establishing a set of themes within each transcript, I started organizing and mapping them while analyzing how they fit together. Smith et al (2009) posit that “this level of analysis is not prescriptive and the analyst is encouraged to explore and innovate terms of organizing the analysis” (p.96). The researcher therefore used abstraction and contextualization to look for patterns and connections between emergent codes in Table 4 above. According to Smith et al (2009), abstraction is a basic form of identifying patterns between emergent themes and developing a sense of what can be called a ‘superordinate’ theme (Table 5). These “second cycle coding methods are more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing and theory building” (Saldana, 2016, p.69). They include pattern coding, focused coding, axial coding, theoretical coding, elaborative coding and longitudinal coding (Saldana, 2016). For my second cycle, I used pattern coding, which is a category label that identifies similarly coded data (Saldana, 2016) as shown in Table 5. According to Saldana (2016), pattern coding is where “development of major themes from the data, search for rule, causes, and explanations in the data; examining social networks and patterns of human relationships; or the formation of theoretical constructs and processes” (p.296) occurs. After the second cycle, the researcher developed five superordinate themes (Table 4), and processes leading to forgiveness (Table 5).

**Table 4***Superordinate Themes*

Superordinate Themes	Subthemes from emergent codes
Forgiveness & Transformation:	Improved Interpersonal relationships. Increased collaboration Enhanced Support System Increased self esteem
Sustainable Peace & Unity:	Promoting peace. Unity. Supportive Systems. Peacebuilding Activities Established community groups. Reconciliation of fighting tribes. Peaceful co-existence of diverse tribes
Personal Development & Enlightenment:	Learning new skills from each other i.e farming, sewing, knitting, beading, weaving, cultural practices. Teaching others. Taking on new roles as mediators and peacebuilders. Exposure to other cultures and practices through travel. Large Scale farming and farming equipment
Economic Development & Empowerment:	Small Scale businesses. Learning new skills Collaboration. Open markets for all.
Safety & Impact of Violence:	Death & Destruction of property Forced migration Survivor's guilt Pain & Hurt Uninterrupted education for their children Conducting Business in All Markets



### **Theme 1: Forgiveness and Transformation**

Forgiving has had a huge impact because before Wanawake wa Amani, my husband was an alcoholic, but now he stopped drinking. He never wanted to farm because he could just leave and come back in the evening, but now he is engaged and supports our small scale farming. He is born again and became a pastor.

As we can see, this decision to forgive perpetrators of violence has a ripple effect of positive transformation on multiple levels. P1 had no hesitation in acknowledging the transformation within her own family. Transformation occurred at all levels, from changes in interpersonal relationships, to embracing diversity of families who sought refuge in Rumuruti. P6 stated:

As a community of Rumuruti, we are now collaborating and supporting each other. Even one of my neighbors is a Kikuyu, another one is a Turkana, and I am Samburu, who is no longer surrounded by and living just with other Samburus. We are now a diverse community living peacefully with neighbors from other tribes

Another participant, P2 shared the changes in her household as a result of her participation in WWA group:

It has had a huge impact because before Wanawake wa Amani, my husband was an alcoholic, but now he stopped drinking. He never wanted to farm because he could just leave and come back in the evening, but now he is engaged and supports our small scale farming. He is born again and became a pastor. You see how forgiveness has really helped and transformed my life?

Experience with WWA has influenced how parenting behind closed doors happens. They believe teaching the importance of peace to their children will lessen potential violence among that future generation. P6 shared, “It has transformed my family because when I teach my children about the need for peace, and avoiding fighting each other, they listen.”

Fear is a huge factor in social life and when that is removed, that removal or reduction is significant. It transforms the social sphere and makes social interaction possible. The ability to move around freely without fear of being attacked because of your tribe is a transformation that everyone is enjoying today. P3, shared, “But since forming Wanawake Wa Amani, we are traveling throughout the community freely, without fear.”

Similarly, P2 shared her thoughts on feelings of safety. “I have seen benefits in all aspects of life, which is huge from thinking you are going to die to having a safe community where everyone looks out for each other.”

Major changes are even experienced within family members. Forgiveness extended to family members enhanced transformations. P1 emphasized her joy and peace on the changes in her family, “My husband was an alcoholic, but now he stopped drinking. He never wanted to farm... but now he is engaged and supports our small scale farming.” P1 also joined in outlining the enhanced collaboration and support system that has emerged since WWA was established:

Initially we were not united at all and we never sat together. But now we collaborate and share with each other. We also started going to each other’s home, visiting, praying, and supporting each other as a community. We have created

small Christian communities named St. Hellen, and St. Paul. Up to date we continue to support each other.

The power of no longer ‘seeing each other as enemy’ contributed to the changes experienced in all the interactive peacebuilding activities that WWA were involved in, as well as the energy they brought with them in their outreaches. P2 noted:

We learned how to co-exists peacefully with each other, and not hate each other. There is no enemy. They are your sister and brother. It was very enlightening. Because before the group, whenever you saw someone from another tribe, we saw each other as enemies. It was not good. We could travel to Pokot and played “soccer for peace” with the Pokots. So we did that with all tribes in this area. We all let go off perceiving each other as enemy. We united and started making progress and developing in various areas that we did not know. For example, farming, some of us were just pastoralists and never id farming, Sewing/Knitting scarfs, we also taught Kikuyus how to sew. We became “like school children” (kids) again. We were very happy. We went for tours to Bungoma, a place we had never thought we would go. We traveled to many places as Wanawake Wa Amani, to share our message of peace with other communities as well. Those communities could see that we were healing (from the violence). They were very happy when we spoke to them, and they said they have seen a good thing in our group. We have continued to unite as a group and live with each other in peace.

The decision to not blame the perpetrators of violence was powerful to informing the perspective from which the members of WWA group perceived the egregious deeds,

and separating the actions from the individuals. Pointing to the evil force at play, and the perpetrators' none intention to cause harm if it were not for the devil, P2 explained:

We chose to forgive the perpetrators because these are people who the devil used. It was the devils work, but not themselves. Because when I was a young girl, we lived next to Pokots, we lived very well together, and there was no hatred. We wondered what has actually invaded in the brains of our people. We said it's the devil using them to commit violence. We decided to forgive them, because we did not think they intended to cause harm, they were being used. So we forgave them completely.

Though it was not the fault of the perpetrators, acknowledging the truth about the hurt and pain that was caused by that violence was a critical part of the process leading to forgiveness. As P3 stated:

We recognized that when we live peacefully, we shall have a good life. We will live without fear. I remember we lived in fear. But since we chose to forgive each other, we are living in peace. Back then our children were just staying at home and couldn't go to school. But now we have children attending schools in Pokot. Peace has helped us with our small businesses too.

Understanding the possible cause of violence from neighbors who knew each other was important part of the process. Divisive politics was identified as an instigator of the violence, as P4 shared the following: "They fought because of the campaigns and the politicians, whose divisiveness forced people to start choosing sides. That was the beginning of the fighting."

Wanawake wa Amani's contextualization of the violence as an abnormal act that a normal person is not capable of, allowed them to separate the crime from the person. An understanding that started opening the door toward forgiveness and transformation. Choosing forgiveness that started within, was then extended to and impacted their families, friends, and community at large. Forgiveness therefore is a critical factor for transformation both personally and socially. This transformation is evidently experienced in Rumuruti at micro (individual), mezzo (families), and macro (community) levels.

## **Theme 2: Sustainable Peace and Unity**

The theme of Sustainable Peace and Unity came up the most throughout all the interviews. This was clearly their main overarching goal from the beginning as members of Wanawake wa Amani (WWA) women's group, i.e., to promote peace. Participant's responses emphasized the fact that as a community they had moved from almost getting killed to peacefully living with and supporting each other.

The majority remembered their experience with violence and reiterated that was something they had never experienced in their lives: P2 highlighted the experience:

I remember a lot of things. The violence that started was really bad. That was the reason we decided to meet with each other from various tribes including Samburu, Maasai. It destroyed many of our lives and our children were significantly affected. Since we were children, born and raised here, we had never seen anything like that. We experienced it and it was the worst experience.

Organizing themselves as women and doing whatever it took to achieve their goal of peace and unity was necessary. This included willingness to engage in activities they had never engaged in before such as playing football for peace. P1 noted:

We organized ourselves as women, promoting peace. We even played soccer for peace to unite all tribes, that also shared their history/culture. We sang songs of peace, tailored scarfs and clothing, and we did all that together as a group with people from different tribes.

The women recognized that individually they did not know everything, but as a group and with some guidance, they can learn from each other, and together find a sustainable way forward that will keep their families and community safe. P2 disclosed:

When we came to this town, we found Maximilla, who came to speak to us, and taught us that there is something called peace, uniting in peace, holding each other in peace. We all decided to do collaborate and support each other in building our peaceful community. We decided our peace will never end (sustainable), and we will never tolerate such violence in our community again.

Living as role models for peaceful coexistence with each other as they represented a variety of tribes from the entire Laikipia, was a precedence to their “spreading” a message of peace to other communities that were fighting each other. Having that unity established as Wanawake wa Amani was a necessity to their goal of promoting peace amongst the neighboring tribes. P3 recalled:

I remember us uniting as a group with a goal to establish and spread peace. We engaged in traveling to various places to play “soccer for peace”, searching for peace among us, and begun the forgiveness process with the Pokots.

As the saying goes ‘charity begins at home’, the diversity of WWA meant intentional choice of activities and determining ways to collaborate with each other instead. P2 shared:

During that time there was no peace. So when we established our group to promote peace, that united Samburu, Kikuyu, Pokot, and we were playing with each other. It was very good and strengthened our strength. We learned how to co-exist peacefully with each other, and not hate each other.

One of the participants is a daughter to a deceased member of WWA, who joined the group shortly after their mother, one of the cofounders, died a few years later. She pointed out that WWA outreach targets were communities that were still actively engaged in ethnic violence, and those that were at risk of fighting each other for one reason or another. They wanted them to reconcile and live in peace. She stated:

They traveled to Kuki Ranch, to spread the message of peace to those who live there. There was ethnic violence between Pokots and Samburus, so they went there to teach them about peace, and how they need to co-exist peacefully with each other. She shared that there were times they played football, and she always emphasized the importance of living peacefully with each other.

The most symbolic activity for promoting peace and uniting tribes was through football for peace. Grown women, most of whom had never heard about or seen women playing football, took up the challenge, learned the game and played with all their might. P7 stated:

Before that process, Maasais were not getting along with Pokots. But when WWA was formed, they actually went there and reconciled them. They did this through their Football for Peace, where they had opposite tribes playing for and on each other's team. Football for peace was just one of the ways they spread the message of peace.

This theme of sustainable peace and unity is important not only as a goal but as an outcome of forgiveness that has transformed Rumuruti as a community, neighboring sublocations, and lives of families in this rural community despite their ongoing challenges such as limited financial resources, and poor infrastructure. By choosing forgiveness, they now have peace and unity. Meaning, they can continue to support each other by sharing resources, to ensure every one is sustained inspite of limited resources.

### **Theme 3: Personal Development and Enlightenment**

All participants emphasized how learning new skills from each other was key to their successful individual and community initiatives. Forgiveness led to changes in the attitudes and perspectives of each other from a negative to a positive regard. Their ability to value and embrace personal development led to acquisition of knowledge and skills that changed their lives for better. P3 underscored this value:

When the violence begun, our lives were affected, and we didn't know where to go. Then we united as women of peace, and started learning a lot from visiting other places. We learned how to farm, and how to embrace our unique cultures.

One participant acknowledged some of the changes that happened due to their willingness to learn from each other. P8 acknowledged:

We observed sudden changes. Especially farming. Our family had never grown crops. That was new to all of us. And of course, watching grown women play football, is not something that had ever happened in Samburu. The Wanawake Wa Amani group brought all people from Turkanas, Samburus, Maasais, and Kikuyus together. They went and played football with Pokots.



Another participant, P5 bragged about the economic impact as a result of acquiring new skills:

Learning how to grow our own food to feed our families and sell to our neighbors and at the markets has transformed us forever. When someone has no money, people come and help, that never used to happen when we saw each other as enemies.

Participant 3 also shared the new responsibilities as a bread winner and making ends meet, “My family is good, because I am able to get food from farming for them, and the food business is helping me pay their school fees.”

Part of personal development included cultural acceptance and understanding of those who are culturally different and it was another factor that WWA valued. Getting to know each other at a human level and appreciating each others uniqueness enhanced their unity. P8 stated:

It was a huge impact because we used to live together as our tribe, but then with all the different tribes united and working together as WWA, we came to learn about Turkanas, about Samburus, and Kikuyus. Then they all started working together with each other.

P1 also appreciated different cultural practices as she noted, “In Pokot we saw how they beautify their daughters with barks of trees, and not scarfs/clothing.”

Additionally, recognizing that peace does not mean absence of conflict, these women took on new roles that were critical to maintaining peace and resolving conflict within the community. For leading successfully means stepping up in service of others and developing those skills on an ongoing basis. P6 shared:

When I find people fighting in another community, I tell them the need to live in peace with each other. I come in as a mediator, and peacekeeper, to emphasize the need to live alongside each other in peace.

The amount of skills garnered through WWA initiatives speaks to invaluable benefits and transformation as a result of choosing to forgive their enemy, to seeing them as a potential source of support, wealth, knowledge, and growth. This theme of personal development and enlightenment highly contributed to the next theme on economic development and empowerment.

#### **Theme 4: Economic Development and Empowerment**

Many widows were left without any source of financial support when their husbands who were breadwinners were killed in the violence that erupted in the surrounding communities. Wanawake Wa Amani group creatively thought through and engaged in activities that would not only establish sustainable peace, but also ensure members were financially able to meet their family's needs. This economic empowerment emerged from their willingness to learn new skills including farming, sewing, knitting, beading, and weaving baskets among others. P1 highlighted as follows:

I learned about farming, I learned how to play soccer, we taught others how to knit and sew to others who didn't know. We traveled to other counties like Bungoma, Eldoret, and Pokot where we saw things we had never seen before.

These initiatives opened new market opportunities, something that was unheard of. As P3 proudly shared:

I do my small business on Tuesdays and Thursdays where I go to set up my food stand. I also have a vegetable stand at home where I sell vegetables. Tuesdays and

Thursdays we are allowed to create our food stands, prepare food, and sell to everybody. I have most customers from the Pokots, remember this is a market previously dominated by Samburus.

When community members are empowered economically, it strengthens their ability to support those that struggle or still experience challenges. P3 continued, “We support each other. We visit each other and pray together as the St. Hellen community. We have become like sisters. When we see someone struggling, we go visit them and help them out.”

These activities of empowerment was also another reason some people joined Wanawake Wa Amani group. P4 shared her motivation:

The Wanawake wa Amani group started with us weaving baskets, sewing scarfs, as the main activities we started with. This time, the fighting had stopped. We weaved baskets and it included all tribes working together.

Opportunities for seasonal employment are available where people work for large scale farmers and get paid, as P5 noted, “ We are also farming and getting our own food for our families, and we also go to work on other farms as part of our businesses.”

Empowerment of these women is transformative in so many ways. It also means empowering their own families and has given them some level of peace. P5 shared:

I have been able to send kids to school with peace. Others have successfully completed school. Learning how to grow our food to feed our families, and sell to our neighbors, and at the markets has transformed us forever.

Collaboration and partnership with fellow women is financially empowering. These sustainable actions is what these women need to thrive in a community that has prioritized living in peace and harmony with each other. P4 stated:

We joined forces with other women and contributed over 50 shillings each, bought a piece land, a plot and built rooms for rental. We are still here. We have built rentals units. Others have shops in them. Others are doing carpentry in their rentals. It's going very well. We distribute earnings to all members at the end of the year.

The theme of enlightenment was highlighted by all participants, that stemmed from traveling to other places. Most notable was a trip that WWA took to western province of Kenya, the first time in their lives to ever travel outside of their county. One of the women, P1 stated:

We traveled to other counties like Bungoma, Eldoret, and Pokot where we saw things we had never seen before. Bungoma I saw sugarcane, I did not know that is what sugar is made from. In Pokot we saw how they beautify their daughters with barks of trees, and not scarfs/clothing. In Eldoret, we saw banana trees, we had never seen such so we did not know where the bunches of bananas we buy come from. Even sugar we never thought it comes from sugarcane. In Eldoret we also saw milking machines for cows. You know, we milk our cows by ourselves. We never knew there are machines that milk cows.

These outreach activities reignited the “child” inside each one of them. P2 pointed out with excitement:

We could travel to Pokot and played “soccer for peace” with the Pokots... We became “like school children” again. We were very happy. We went for tours to Bungoma, a place we had never thought we would go. We traveled to many places as Wanawake Wa Amani, to share our message of peace with other communities as well. Those communities could see that we were healing (from the violence). They were very happy when we spoke to them, and they said they have seen a good thing in our group.

This theme on economic development speaks to the effect of the women’s initiatives and their experiences. It also ties into the other themes on sustainable peace and unity, forgiveness and transformation, and the upcoming theme on safety. This is because the peacebuilding goals, activities and processes to a huge extent addressed the human needs of this community members. Forgiveness is enhanced or more likely when the goals, activities, and processes align with human needs. At the center of everything is forgiveness, as a factor whose power in personal transformations of individual members gave birth to interethnic partnerships that opened opportunities for economic growth and development. Without forgiveness of each others’ deeds, there will be no economic development initiatives.

### **Theme 5: Safety and Impact of Violence**

Wanawake Wa Amani group’s determination to ensure everyone in their community feels safe with and around each other was humbling. Some of them shared some memories about the losses they experienced during the violence. P2 said:

I remember a lot of things. The violence that started was really bad. That was the reason we decided to meet with each other from various tribes including

Samburu, Maasai. It destroyed many of our lives and our children were significantly affected. Since we were children, born and raised here, we had never seen anything like that. We experienced it and it was the worst experience. The violence killed a lot of our people. As I am talking to you, my family has lost a lot of people in the violence. All of my cows, fifty plus, that my husband left for our children were stolen.

Destruction of property/assets was painful to hear. P4 shared:

I remember houses getting burnt down. I recall seeing people coming in red outfits, running, pointing at the homes, and throwing things that blew up and burnt the homes from the top to the ground.

Another participant, P5, recalled the violence and the pain:

I remember people fighting each other. Pokots were fighting with Samburus. We were hurting deeply when we saw the violence and how people were getting killed. We decided to establish peace, and spread the message to other communities that experienced the same. We wanted to bring peace in all corners.

Similar experiences were shared by participant 6:

We decided to form WWA because we all recognized that fighting and violence is not helping us in any way. There's nothing good that comes out of it. Instead, whenever it happened, we had our children killed, our animals/assets stolen/taken away from us, etc.

Forced migration and displacement of families across Laikipia county was another impact of the violence that P6 described:

During that time, people started fighting each other, they burned houses. I was still living those sides of Magadi and had not moved to Rumuruti yet. It was because of that fighting that I left and sought refuge in Rumuruti.

Today, Wanawake wa Amani and the Rumuruti community feel a sense of safety including uninterrupted learning for school children. P5 shared, ‘I have been able to send kids to school, with peace. Others have successfully completed school.’

Safety also means the ability to do business in all markets without fear of being attacked. P8 exclaimed, “Yes, I sell vegetables in various markets in Rumuruti and outside of Rumuruti I can take my vegetables and sell to people there.” Similar sentiments were shared by P6 who express their gratitude for now having a community where everyone is looking out for each other. “When I have to leave briefly, I simply ask my Kikuyu neighbor to watch my kids (grinning 😊). That’s why we have realized this WWA group has been very helpful to our community.”

The question of safety is important as any slight distrust would mean always looking over the shoulder, and ready to fight or flee. How else could WWA start trusting each other? The fact that they were willing to meet in the same room and discuss their goals for the community was the biggest first step toward feeling safe around each other. This actualization happened through their decision to forgive each other.

### **Nexus of Themes, Processes Leading to Forgiveness, and Research Question**

The phenomenon under this qualitative study is forgiveness, with the main research question asking : How do women survivors make meaning of forgiveness following ethnic violence? The above themes from Rumuruti women’s experiences with ethnic violence data shows that all roads begin with forgiveness, a concept that appears to

traverse through the success of all activities, including the following processes leading to forgiveness. Processes leading to forgiveness including acknowledging the violence, establishing a common goal, deciding to forgive, learning and openmindedness, and collaboratively engaging in peacebuilding activities are highlighted. Also, most notable is that the violence was the prime driver of their engagement in peacebuilding activities.

### **Processes Leading to Forgiveness**

The members of Wanawake Wa Amani group went through the following steps and ongoing processes throughout their work to achieve a peaceful community. The process is not linear, instead there are occurrence of overlaps with new members joining the group at different times during the formative stages. Important questions that are key at each process and the possible responses are below in Table 6.

### ***Acknowledgement/Recognition That Violence is Bad***

Violence was the prime driver of formation of Wanawake Wa amani. The power of telling the truth and your experiences, pain, hurt, and losses being acknowledged was necessary. Truth telling and ability to process everything with people who have gone through similar experiences is therapeutic. They may not be formally educated or social workers, but they understood the impact of allowing themselves to go through that process of truth telling. This is the ‘facing the elephant in the room’ moment. The theme of safety and impact of violence is woven in this step as members reflected on their personal experiences with the violence. For example P2 emphasized, “As I am talking to you, my family has lost a lot of people in the violence. What we saw was really, really bad.” Naming these experiences and acknowledging the pain became the motivation for the women to come together, engage each other and ask themselves, ‘what really



happened in our community?’ They wanted sustainable peace and unity in Rumuruti and surrounding communities. And P3 said, “I remember us uniting as a group with a goal to establish and spread peace. We engaged in traveling to various places to play soccer for peace, searching for peace among us, and begun the forgiveness process with the Pokots.

This step in the process demonstrates the courage and depth from which forgiveness of perpetrators of such heinous emanates. Validation of those experiences by fellow women from other ethnic groups whose members were involved in these acts showed the survivors that they acknowledge and recognize the harm caused. This is because these are women whose gender roles were traditionally confined to taking care of the family i.e cooking, cleaning, and feeding the children, while their husbands and adult sons went out herding or fighting. So these women were not directly involved with the violence, but their spouses and sons were actively involved. That acknowledgement and validation was the beginning of the processes leading to forgiveness, and agreement that working toward safety, sustained peace and unity were the goals they wanted to achieve as a community. The key questions they asked themselves during this process were: What happened? Why did it happen?

### ***Establish a common goal***

As a ‘rainbow’ community of different tribes with a shared experience of violence, discussing what they wanted to happen or see changing in their community was important. Having a community where everyone lived peacefully with their neighbors, walked around without fear, and felt safe was a common goal. A reminder that the themes of sustainable peace and unity, and safety and impact of violence in Rumuruti are still interwoven as the overall objectives.

In order to establish a common goal, everyone must be willing to do their part. So trusting everybody's active involvement and commitment is key. How can you plan a goal with an enemy? You can't! This cycles back to forgiveness. When they chose to forgive, they were simultaneously saying that 'I trust that we have each others back after all we have been through. I trust that I and my family are going to be safe around you'. As P3 shared, forgiveness here means "good neighbors, who no longer see each other as enemies". To P4, establishing a common goal is a collaborative process that means "including people from all tribes working together". The key questions to guide this process are" What do we want as a community? What is important to us? There's no doubt they all want safety, and sustainable peace, goals that can only be achieved through collaborative work with each other.

### ***Decision to Forgive Each Oother***

Forgiveness and Transformation is the key theme in this process. Making a decision to forgive is the core and the most powerful process for any individual who has been wronged in such a deep way with violent acts. Forgiveness is the thread that weaves all other steps together. If they cannot acknowledge the pain/experience, how can they agree or establish a common goal? How can they be willing to learn from each other or teach each other new skills? How can they collaborate and engage in peacebuilding initiatives if they still see each other as enemies? How can they achieve that goal of sustainable peace? The worst is the potential of recurrence violence if they chose unforgiveness, and continue to perceive each other as enemies.

Since Wanawake Wa Amani chose to forgive each other, P5 shared that "living in peace and harmony with others" has been beneficial to her family. Being recognized for

her skills and contribution is what allows her “to go to work on other farms and run her own small business”, something that would be impossible if she were perceived as an enemy. Forgiveness and transformation extended beyond the WWA group, as P7 noted “ I am here because I love peace and I want people to continue to live in peace. I teach my family that peace is very important”. Forgiveness here for P7 means modeling to your family and helping them understand what P5 refers to as “the positive things” that happen when you choose forgiveness over hatred. Another participant, P6 who stated, “We cannot allow hatred to breed between our children. If they fight each other, we must choose to forgive each other” sees forgiveness as the right thing to do. Reflection on the key question ‘What will happen if I don’t forgive?’ during this process leaves the choice unquestionable, hence making the alternative i.e decision to forgive a no brainer.

### ***Open Mindedness and Learning***

The themes of personal development and enlightenment; forgiveness and transformation; and economic development and empowerment must be underscored during this process of openmindedness and learning. Investing in learning about each other’s identity, culture, and lifestyle was the key to economic development initiatives that transformed their lives. One participant, P8 highlighted their enhanced cultural understanding and acceptance across ethnic groups as she stated, “ with all the different tribes united and working together as Wanawake Wa Amani, we came to learn about Turkanas, about Samburus, Kikuyus and they all started working together”. Similarly, on personal development, forgiveness and transformation, economic development and empowerment themes, P1, excitedly shared “I learned a lot about forgiveness. I learned about farming. I learned how to play soccer. We taught others how to knit and sew”.

From this, it seems like forgiveness that starts from within i.e internal, and is exemplified in the external results in a wave of transformation.

This process of openmindedness and learning enhanced the establishment of new connections, partnerships, and support systems once they started knowing about each other. Above all ,was their willingness to learn about and discovering that living peacefully really means finding that internal peace first. And forgiveness is the key that paves that path to internal peace.

***Implement/Engagement in peacebuilding initiatives***

What is planning or words without action? The activities were as diverse as the members of WWA themselves. That diversity of ideas was a strength that led to partnerships and support systems as each person was determined to work for that which they wanted i.e., sustainable peace. Their goals and desire for sustainable peace, unity, safety, and economic development implied intentional engagement in activities that were empowering for them as women. Traditional gender roles were no longer determinants of their ability of what they could or could not do. Instead creative ways from a cultural strengths perspective, of meeting the needs of their families and achieving the overall community goals was the way forward.

All these themes are intertwined and it is clear that without forgiveness, there's no unity, without unity there's no safety, without safety there's no sustained peace, without peace, there's no economic development, and without economic development, there's no empowerment. It is evident that forgiveness is the foundation for all the goals, processes, and activities that Wanawake Wa Amani were engaged in and succeeded in sustaining peace in their community. P7 attested to "neighbors living very well with each other.

There is reduced conflict. They go to the same church and pray together”. Several participants spoke about providing food for the families from their farming businesses, and paying school fees for children whose education is no longer interrupted because of the unity and collaborations, conflict and violence is rare.

**Table 5**

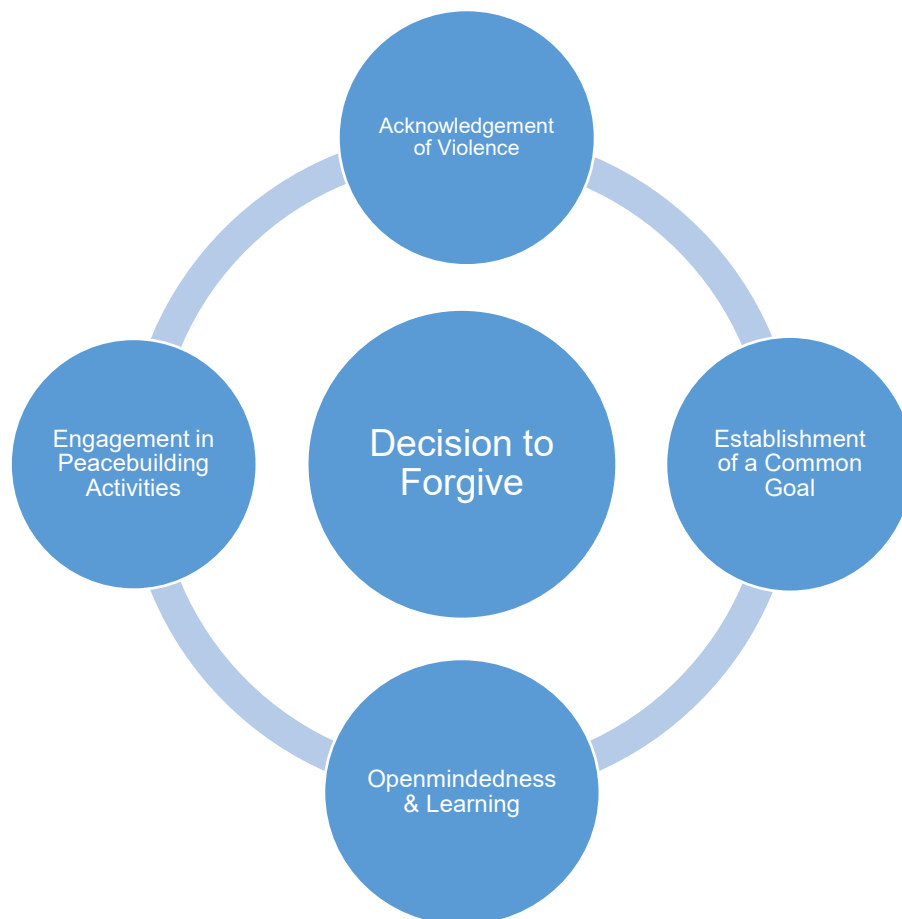
*Summary of Processes leading to Forgiveness*

<b>Process</b>	<b>Important Questions</b>	<b>Possible Responses</b>
Acknowledgement that Violence is Bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• Why did it happen?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fighting each other.</li> <li>• Killing each other</li> <li>• Destroying assets/property</li> <li>• Divisive politics</li> </ul>
Establishing a Common Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we want?</li> <li>• What is important to us?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable peace</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Social cohesion and economic development</li> </ul>
Decision to Forgive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will happen if I don't forgive?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hatred</li> <li>• Enmity</li> <li>• Violence Recurrence</li> </ul>
Learning & Openmindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who am I? what makes me unique?</li> <li>• Who is my neighbor? What makes my neighbor unique?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tribe (Samburu, Kikuyu, Pokot, etc)</li> <li>• Culture &amp; practices</li> <li>• Identity in general</li> </ul>
Implementation/Engagement in Peacebuilding initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we achieve our common goal?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration &amp; Partnerships</li> <li>• Learning from each other</li> <li>• Teaching each other</li> <li>• Teaching families about peace</li> </ul>

The five themes intertwined with the processes leading to multi level transformation demonstrate the multiple lenses through which WWA perceived the meaning and role of forgiveness in sustaining peace in Rumuruti. These perceptions ranging from transformational function at the personal, family, or community level emerging from their lived experiences have the ‘decision to forgive’ at the center of everything (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9:**

*Forgiveness at the Center of the Transformational Processes*



In recognition of the hurt and pain that members of the community were experiencing at the time of its formation, Wanawake Wa Amani remained an open group that allowed people to join at their own time of choosing when they were ready. Similarly, the choice to forgive was a personal decision that was made by individuals at different stages whenever they were ready. This made the process nonlinear as people continued to join later after hearing about this group of women, united from different tribes, with a goal to sustain peace in their community. Each member participated in activities of their choice, learning new skills, and teaching each other about their unique cultural practices.

Coming up next, in Chapter 5 is a discussion of the 5 superordinate themes, theoretical explanations, significance of this study, conclusions, and recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, a brief summary of research findings is provided, that is followed by discussion of the following 5 themes that emerged from the data: Sustainable Peace and Unity, Personal development and Enlightenment, Economic development and Empowerment, Safety and Impact of Violence, and Forgiveness and Transformation. Theoretical underpinnings include conflict transformation theories, human needs theory, and constructivism. Overlaps of forgiveness and sustainable peace explains why they are interdependent factors. Significance of this study, limitations, and recommendations conclude this chapter.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate women's lived experiences with ethnic violence post 2007 elections using open-ended interviews, and seek to understand the meaning of forgiveness in Rumuruti, a rural Kenyan community in Laikipia County. Eight women, who met the participant criteria for this study as members of Wanawake Wa Amani women's group were engaged in indepth interviewing via Zoom.

Analysis of the findings that were extracted from the transcripts using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) steps by Smith et al (2012) resulted into five superordinate themes. Sustainable Peace and Unity, though a theme, was also the ultimate goal of Wanawake Wa Amani (WWA) group, that made it their mission to establish piece among themselves and then promote it to other neighboring counties that were ravaged by violence. Personal Development and Enlightenment highlights how their



openmindedness and willingness to learn from each other opened avenues for success. We always have something to learn from each that can be transformative and beneficial to all. The other themes include Economic Development and Empowerment; Transformation and Forgiveness; and Safety and Impact of Violence. These findings point to some of what it takes to have sustained peace, while amplifying the critical role of women in peacebuilding initiatives at grassroots level. Forgiveness as a core factor was the thread that held the processes leading to sustainable peace together. The following is a discussion of these findings.

### **Discussion of Themes**

#### **Theme 1: Forgiveness and Transformation**

Forgiveness is defined differently by various people. One legendary icon, and activist for nonviolence protests, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, ‘Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude. Forgiveness is not just a compassionate attitude towards others; it's a more compassionate attitude towards yourself’ (King, 1991). Forgiveness happens when “you make a conscious decision to release your negative feelings of hostility, resentment and revenge — and replace them with positive ones such as compassion, understanding and empathy ( Edward-Elmhurst Health, 2017). Meaning the choice to forgive is done for one’s own personal peace and not necessarily for the perpetrator. That internal peace is achieved when the pain, anger, hurt, and hate are released by the survivor. When one possesses that internal peace, only then can they cultivate the same among others. Forgiveness is more about letting go of that anger, and less about excusing the act of violence because killing others and destroying their property is unexcusable.

The power of forgiveness to achieve transformation in Rumuruti is undisputed. It is evident that when the survivor chooses to forgive the wrong doer, even if the latter doesn't ask or seek forgiveness, or deserve forgiveness, life can take a 360 degree transformation for the better. As some of the participants described their ability to separate the heinous act from the person informed their decision to forgive perpetrators of violence despite not knowing who some of them were specifically. P2, explained:

We chose to forgive the perpetrators because these are people who the devil used. It was the devils work, but not themselves. Because when I was a young girl, we lived next to Pokots, we lived very well together, and there was no hatred. We wondered what has actually invaded in the brains of our people. We said it's the devil using them to commit violence. We decided to forgive them, because we did not think they intended to cause harm, they were being used. So we forgave them completely.

Transformation and success WWA members have individually achieved is accorded to the fact that they chose forgiveness over vengeance, and that by nature of their humanity, they might make mistakes and they too can be forgiven. They recognize that without forgiveness, life will not transform for the better if they continue to see each other as enemies and keep living in fear. P3 shared her experience:

You know if you don't forgive others, then you will not be forgiven. We recognized that when we live peacefully, we shall have a good life. We will live without fear. I remember we lived in fear. But since we chose to forgive each other, we are living in peace. Back then our children were just staying at home

and couldn't go to school. But now we have children attending schools in Pokot.

Peace has helped us with our small businesses

Most notable reason for choosing forgiveness in order to bring transformation was based on gender role, as mothers. Naturally mothers play a major role in raising children, nurturing, caring, and why not add forgiving on that list as P6 noted:

We forgave them because we are mothers. We cannot allow hatred to breed between our children, if they fight each other, we must choose to forgive each other. We see that forgiveness is good for each one of us.

They take their responsibility to raise the next generation that understands the magnitude of what violence breeding from hate can do to them, their families, and the community at large. It sounds important that they change the trajectory of their sons and daughters generation, by modeling and teaching them how to live peacefully with each other. They can only pass the torch to those who understand the need to keep that path of peace sustained and lit. And participant six, P6, was happy to share, "It has transformed my family because when I teach my children about the need for peace, and avoiding fighting each other, they listen."

Spiritual transformation and forgiveness embraced by WWA traversed tribal lines. Belief and reliance on some supernatural power as they started gathering together, praying together, resulted in formation of small Christian groups that have transformed their lives. The aspect of 'Faith in God', whose unconditional love looks beyond our own mistakes demands we do the same for our brothers and sisters. Many participants evoked the name of God as an important piece of their process to forgiveness. That transformation has evolved to where they go to church together, pray together, visit each

other, pray for each other, and most important, support any member who is in need as a Christian group. Some members of WWA group confidently shared, including P8, who couldn't hide her gratitude explained, "We are living together with each other today. We work together. We have small community groups where members from different tribes meet and gather together. Previously, that was never happening in this area."

Transformation is also happening within families of some WWA members. Another participant, P1 similarly spoke to the impact and transformation she has experienced herself in her family and at the community level:

*Researcher: How did choosing to forgive impact your family?*

P1: It has had a huge impact because before Wanawake wa Amani, my husband was an alcoholic, but now he stopped drinking. He never wanted to farm because he could just leave and come back in the evening, but now he is engaged and supports our small scale farming. He is born again and became a pastor. You see how forgiveness has really helped and transformed my life?

*Researcher: Yes, I can see that. Wow! That is good to hear. How has it impacted the Rumuruti community in general?*

P1: Initially we were not united at all and we never sat together. But now we collaborate and share with each other. We also started going to each other's home, visiting, praying, and supporting each other as a community. We have created small Christian communities named St. Hellen, and St. Paul. Up to date we continue to support each other.

Forgiveness can also be seen as a spiritual act indeed, whose transformation from within is experienced at a very personal level through an intimate relationship with a higher power.

## **Theme 2: Sustainable Peace and Unity**

Peace is not necessarily absence of conflict. Ibeano (2006) highlights the intrinsic value of peace as he notes that some sources take an instrumental perspective to peace, seeing it as a means to an end and others take a functional view of it. The instrumental approach “portray women as instrumental in bringing about sustainable peace, and focusing narrowly on what women can do for peace neglecting the issue of what peace can do for women” (Agbaje, 2018). The latter is the functional view that focuses on the transformational aspect of sustainable peace for women. However, for Ibeano, peace is “a process by which activities that led to development are increased and those that generate conflict are reduced within specific societies” (Ibeano, 2006, p.10).

The main reason Wanawake Wa Amani group was formed is to ‘promote peace’ and reduce conflict in their community following the pain, hurt, and losses experienced by members of that community post the 2007 election violence in Kenya. According to COPA (2014), in many conflicting societies around the world, women are engaging in peace initiatives often operating from the grassroot level and at the peripheries from where they are hardly seen or heard. This is due to the patriarchy that dominates society. Nevertheless, their impact in leading successful informal peace initiatives is notable and must be acknowledged. Wanawake wa Amani women’s group is an example of such efforts that despite the challenges including limited resources, and illiteracy, they did everything in their capacity to ensure peace and safety in their community.

Establishing inclusive community groups , engaging in interactive activities, conducting outreach activities promoting peace and unity , supporting each other, and reconciling fighting tribes were strategies utilized by WWA to achieve sustainable peace. Their belief in their ability to change their community is worth noting. Establishing an inclusive community of families from various tribes that just fought and killed each other, and engaging in interactive activities opened an avenue for discussing what is important to their community was courageous. After all, “the fact that socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization are major sources of conflict and instability in Africa” (Uchem et al., 2014, p.1), these women recognized that political divisiveness contributed to the violence that destroyed lives and left marginalized communities broken. P4 shared this perspective

*Researcher: Okay, you didn't know them. Why do you think they engaged in such violence.*

P4: They fought because of the campaigns and the politicians, whose divisiveness forced people to start choosing sides. That was the beginning of the fighting.

Another approach to sustainable peace was using interactive activities that were intentionally selected to enhance interactions between members. These included playing soccer, sewing, knitting, beading, and weaving that forced them to speak to each other and learn. Through that process, they came to know each other at a human level, learned new skills, and established strong relationships. Playing soccer for peace placed them in positions where they had to rely on each other, built trust, and work as a team to achieve their goal. The symbolism of “Soccer for Peace” was ingenious, for such old women who had never played soccer in their lives, let alone even knowing that women can play

soccer too. The creativity and diversity of WWA motivated more women to join. They were excited to wake up and go to engage in these activities with each other, as one woman, P6, noted:

...we decided to engage in our own peace building activities. We sang “songs for peace” , we played “football for peace”, everything we did was for peace. We did it all together from all tribes, including Samburus, Turkanas, Kikuyus, etc. We started collaborating with each other, and dancing to drums together. Later, we started playing football together.

As Coleman et al (2019) asserts, “today, the international community's efforts to build, make, and sustain peace are largely focused on the important task of identifying the factors that contribute to peace: the primary conditions and policies for promoting peace, and the target goals and indices for measuring and evaluating sustainably peaceful nations” (p. 85). Wanawake wa Amani group meets some of the factors associated with the social networks of peaceful intergroup relations identified by an anthropological study of peaceful societies (Fry, 2006, 2007, 2013). These include an overarching social identity that unites groups across their differences by ‘expanding the Us to include the Them’; interconnections among subgroups whether they be through trade, intermarriage, or shared ceremonies among social units such as lineages, sports teams, schools, workplaces, and social clubs that bring together members of different groups to peacefully live, work, learn, and play together; cooperative forms of interdependence or shared goals, resources, or fates due to mutual ecological or economic dependencies or common security interest (Coleman et al. 2019).

### **Theme 3: Personal Development and Enlightenment.**

Personal development is all about engaging in activities that develop an individual's capabilities and potential to enhance the quality of their life. While in formal organizations, people have the privilege to go to conferences, attend workshops, and seminars, for WWA, it was completely different. For a group of illiterate women, who have been raised, got married, and have never set foot in a classroom, learning and putting their knowledge to use was of the essence. Maximilla was a gatekeeper whom they trusted and only she could share her knowledge about the concept of peace, and also acted as their middle person with the county officials, keeping them in the loop about the newly formed women's group and their goal.

Wanawake wa Amani group immediately challenged themselves to figure out what was important for each one of them and their community by engaging in what De Coning (2016) and Chandler (2016) describe as “pluralistic bottom-up, or hybrid, conflict management approaches that do not have the ambition to resolve conflict, but instead invest in the resilience of local social institutions to prevent, cope with and recover from conflict, i.e. to sustain peace” (p. 167). Resilience (Chandler, 2014), built from adversity of losing spouses, children, friends, and important assets became the building blocks for sustainable peace. The newly established hybrid community of Rumuruti with families from various tribes that had engaged in the violence, and native families that have never left this small rural town, learning and planning together for a future that will prevent recurrence of similar violence was of utmost importance. How else could they guarantee that the different tribes that just moved in will not fight each



other again? That is when establishing and promoting peace became everyone's mission and goal.

Learning from each other's cultures, and the things they did opened the path for teaching sewing, weaving, and knitting skills to each other, and then selling those items to earn some money was the entrepreneurial piece that wrapped and brought everything full circle together. These skills were lifechanging and transformational when they realized the economic impact, especially for the widows, who no longer had the bread winner. Some partnerships developed where several women brought their financial resources together, bought a small piece of land, and built rental properties that they lease, and share the earnings at the end of each year. That is sustainable economic development from empowered women.

Enlightenment is simply the act of understanding, acquiring knowledge, and insights. As Decker (2015) posits, "enlightenment is vital to our understanding of the deeper assumptions" (p.7) that influence our actions. WWA group shared about their experiences when they traveled to other cities, which was also the first time they ever left their small rural town home. Their trip to Bungoma, a town in western part of Kenya exposed them to successful businesses including large scale farming of sugarcane a cash crop used to make sugar. On the other hand in Eldoret, they learned about raising animals on a large scale and using machines to milk. These trips were eye opening, and empowering for WWA mothers who had no formal education, and only knew herding was the only way to make a living. Most important was recognizing that these can be done on a small scale and still be successful. Maxxie, their gatekeeper, shared that these trips were made possible by government sponsors who heard about WWA and they

recognized that their work was transformative. In fact, WWA group was included in “Brand Kenya after elections” initiative due to their success story of their peace initiatives in their community as a success story of reconciliation. They stayed in accommodations, all expenses paid for by the government, to spread their message of peace to other communities. They also secured some scholarships for their school children.

#### **Theme 4: Economic Development and Empowerment**

Economic Development are activities that seek to improve the economic wellbeing and quality of life by tapping into the existing opportunities, to address the current challenges. As previously discussed, engaging in personal development activities and the insights from exposure to other cultures became a game changer for WWA group members. The biggest challenge for any widow who has relied her entire time on their husband to provide for the family is how they will continue to make ends meet for their children without their father. Although some of the WWA women were now married, when your role is confined to raising children, and taking care of your husband, then you learn that you too can actually contribute to the breadwinning role, it changes everything.

On economic development post conflict, (Subedi, 2012) argues that “while the short-term priority should target at delivering the economic dividends of peace in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, the long-term priority should be geared towards addressing the economic root causes of the preceding armed conflict as well as laying the foundation for an inclusive economic development” (p. 313). Wanawake wa Amani’s economic development initiatives were intentional in uniting different tribes and changing their perspective of each other as enemies, one of the root causes of ethnic violence.

Their participatory approach focused on individual empowerment as well as community empowerment through strengthened support groups that now share resources instead of fighting over limited resources.

Subedi (2012) further states that “agendas pertaining to long-term priorities could be building new physical infra-structures, job and employment creation, building safe and secure business and economic environment and the private sector’s confidence, and strengthening the government’s institutional capacity and good governance” (P.316). Rumuruti still has a long way to fulfill all those agendas. However, when it comes to job and employment reation, those engaged in large scale farming hire and employ the women who already have farming skills from their own small scale farming. Majority of the women are self-employed and running their own small businesses. All the efforts of Wanawake Wa Amani are meant to sustain peace by building a safe and secure community for all residents.

### **Theme 5: Safety and Impact of Violence**

The complexity of safety and ethnic violence involves a combination of social, political, economic, and historical factors. Social dynamics of identity and belonging causes tensions between different ethnic groups as each perceives the other to be a threat. Due to forced immigration of people from neighboring sublocations within Laikipia County, Rumuruti is now a hybrid of multiple tribes including Samburus, Maasais, Kikuyus, and Pokots as the major groups. It was important for WWA to consider all factors and agree on the way forward including not seeing one another as enemy or a threat. How could they feel safe around each other when they are enemies? One participant, P2, shared her perspectives:

We learned how to co-exists peacefully with each other, and not hate each other.

There is no enemy. They are your sister and brother. It was very enlightening.

Because before the group, whenever you saw someone from another tribe, we saw each other as enemies. It was not good.

Ethnic violence was also attributed to the divisive politics during the general elections campaign. As Schild (2023) points out, these are political boundaries that incite violence and radical disagreement. Use of divisive rhetoric to earn political points exacerbated tensions between tribes, hence contributing to the ethnic violence. Herding tribes then blame the farming tribes for stealing their animals, while farmers blame the herders for allowing their animals to feed on their crops. Remember participants who grew up as herders were just starting to learn about farming. It turns out the herders did not intend to cause harm because to them, anything green was simply grass for their animals, including corn fields. These lessons were learned in WWA group, and members took it upon themselves, to teach their families behind closed doors. Participant 7 shared, “I am here because I love peace, and I want people to continue to live in peace. I teach my family that peace is very important”. Just imagine how many times have conflicts occurred because of such lack of knowledge? Could it be true that when we know better we do better? Both herders and farmers needed assurance of safety of their assets including animals, and farms to prevent future destruction of each other’s property. Because almost 90% of the participants have no formal education, everything is based on trusting each others word. Trust is therefore a huge factor in this community where verbal commitment is all they rely on.

Forced migration is an experience that interrupts stability of families, loss of property, survivor's guilt that leaves on questioning 'why me' while dealing with the pain of losing those they know are other impact of violence that had everyone worried about their continued safety. One participant, P2, recalled her experience:

All of my cows, fifty plus, that my husband left for our children were stolen. A neighbor's child who had taken cows grazing was killed and my child was the only one who came home alive. All the cows were taken. What we saw was really, really bad. We were not staying in town, but the violence forced us from our homes to town with nothing. Our hearts and our children's hearts were broken and hurt.

To WWA group safety means a lot of things. Uninterrupted education for their children and conducting business in all markets by buying/selling their products to people from other tribes was their way of determining safety of their children and peacefully managing conflict amongst the community members. Taking on new roles as mediators who also provide counsel for those in disagreements is part of their sustainable work to manage conflict within the community and alleviate potential eruption into violence. They are encouraging dialogue between different ethnic groups and facilitating mediation efforts.

Everything Wanawake Wa Amani (WWA) did, affirms the new perspectives on safety by Sidney Decker in her book *Safety Differently: Human Factors for a New Era*. Decker (2015) outlines the following as key transitions for a new era when it comes to safety: "We need to transition from seeing people as a problem to control, to seeing people as a solution to harness. We need to transition from seeing safety as a bureaucratic

accountability up, to seeing it as an ethical responsibility down.”(p.vii). WWA took it upon themselves as an ethical responsibility to establish peace in their community. They changed their attitude toward each other, by tapping into each other as a resource and solution to their community’s needs and building the trust that they had lost when the violent conflict occurred.

Additionally, Decker (2015) asserts that we need to transition from seeing safety as an absence of negatives to seeing it as the presence of positive capacity to make things right. Recognition that human beings are not perfect, and that conflict is inevitable is the forecast that led WWA to volunteer as mediators within the community, who have normalized disagreement while emphasizing that it should however, never result in violent conflict. A focus of safety and risk should become a focus on resilience (Decker, 2015), in the face of adversity. Furthermore, “we need to embrace a language of complexity of change and evolution, of holistic relationships, rather than individual components. We need to trade our vocabularies of control, constraint, and human deficit for new vocabularies of empowerment, diversity, and human opportunity” (Decker, 2015, p.vii) that fulfills our shared human need for physical and psychological safety.

### **Theoretical Relevance**

#### **Conflict Transformation Theory.**

Galtung’s (1996) work has been the most influential in conflict transformation theories, as he suggests that conflicts have both life-affirming and life-destroying aspects because they “form contradictions in the structure of society, that manifest in attitudes and behaviour” (Miall, 2004, p.4). Once formed, conflicts undergo a variety of transformational processes: articulation or disarticulation, conscientisation or de-

conscientisation, complexification or simplification, polarisation or depolarisation, escalation or de-escalation (Galtung, 1996). The political rhetoric of divisiveness during the 2007 political campaigns in Kenya was polarizing, hence escalating the violence along tribal lines. Wanawake wa Amani's choice to engage in articulating individual experiences with the violence and acknowledging its impact on their lives was a crucial part of their transformation process.

The most comprehensive statements of conflict transformation thinking for practitioners comes from Lederach's work (1997), where peacebuilding is a long term transformation of a war system into a peace system inspired by a quest for values of peace and justice, truth and mercy (Miall, 2004). Wanawake wa Amani group embraced the values of peace, truth, and mercy, as part of their process. Justice does not come into play as the Kenyan system did not invest any efforts in arresting and holding perpetrators of violence accountable. According to Miall (2004), when it comes to conflict transformation theory, "it is also possible for conflict to be transformed, as parties shift positions and adopt new goals, new actors emerge and new situations develop allowing for new relationships and changed structures" (p.7). As violence was instigated by divisive politics, WWA women's approach involved a powerful shift of members' perceptions about each other, establishing new goals and new relationships in a structure that recognized them as change makers. This recognition by government officials was a validation that what they are doing is destined to make a difference.

According to Lederach (1997), key dimensions of conflict transformation process are changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods (short-, mid- and long-term) and affecting different

system levels at different times. In Rumuruti community, these processes were evident as the women integrated personal resolve to forgive wrongdoers, relational aspect to teach and learn from each other, and embracing each other's unique cultural aspects that previously contributed to the violence. Structural transformation resulted from the economic development initiatives that empowered Wanawake Wa Amani(WWA) women. These processes initiated by WWA are the reasons the Rumuruti community has gone through three more general elections without any violence erupting in their community. Their efforts and goal to sustain peace is still an ongoing transformative process.

Proposing a comprehensive, eclectic approach to conflict transformation, Rupensighe (1995, 1998) embraces multitrack interventions. He suggests “building peace constituencies at the grassroots level and across the parties at the civil society level (where it exists), and also creating peace alliances with any groups able to bring about change” (Miall, 2004, p.5). Wanawake wa Amani as a grassroots peacebuilding group employed diverse ideas derived from its members who are from different tribes and willingly shared their skills/knowledge inherent in their rich cultural backgrounds.

Vayrynen (1991) takes an analytical and theoretical approach to conflict transformation by arguing that “the bulk of conflict theory regards the issues, actors, and interests as given and on that basis makes efforts to find a solution to mitigate or eliminate contradictions between them. Yet the issues, actors, and interests change over time as a consequence of the social, economic, and political dynamics of societies” (p.4). Though analytical and theoretical, Vayrynen's perspective suggests considerations for the types of interventions to be implemented in peacebuilding. Building on Vayrynen's approach to conflict transformation, Table #6 presents the type of transformations or



transformers in Rumuruti community. The three main transformations are structural, actor, and personal transformations.

Structural transformations are changes in the basic structure of the conflict, that is to the set of actors, their issues, incompatible goals and relationships (Miall, 2004). The unbalanced and contested tribal relationships that saw each other as an enemy was exacerbated by political rhetoric, leading to violence in the entire Laikipia County.

Actor transformations are decisions on the part of the actors to change their goals or alter general approach to conflict including decisions to seek peace or initiate a peace process (Miall, 2004). These actor transformations (Table 6) were effected by WWA who intentionally engaged in specific conflict transformation work within their community, by setting a common goal and opening involvement of all who were interested.

Curle (1987), Miall (2004), and Mitchell (2000) identify personal and elite transformations as “changes of heart or mind within individual leaders or small groups with decision-making power at critical moments to bring about personal change. Of course, conciliatory gestures by leaders, which express personal changes, would play an important role in this context (Miall, 2004, p.10).

**Table 6***Researcher's Analysis of Conflict Transformers*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Structure transformations	<p>Change from asymmetric to symmetric relations</p> <p>Change in power structures i.e economic empowerment of women as breadwinners is embraced</p> <p>Markets are open to everyone for business</p>
Actor transformations	<p>Changes of goals i.e focus on common goal of a peaceful and safe community</p> <p>Changing actors i.e active collaboration from all tribes</p>
Personal transformations	<p>Changes of perspectives i.e See each other as support systems.</p> <p>Gestures of conciliatory i.e leaders sponsoring WWA travels to spread peace, giving scholarships for their children.</p>

**Human Needs Theory**

Human Needs Theories are anchored on the premise that violent conflicts are a result of unmet needs. Maslow's Hierachy of Needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising of a five-tier model of human needs that is often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid (McLeod, 2018). From the bottom of the pyramid, the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self actualization.

**Figure 10:***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

Maslow's argument is that the needs that are lower in the pyramid must be satisfied before individuals can attend to those needs that are higher. Burton (1990) however, argues that human needs are ontologically grounded in emotions and that negative emotions are triggered in humans when there is a threat to the survival of either the physical organism or the developing self. This helps us understand the potential reason for those who engaged in the violence, as a response to the threat. According to Burton (1979), there are fundamental drives and motivations for human behavior that cannot be repressed. He argues that these drives and motivations are based on universal and genetic basic needs, such as needs for identity, development, meaning and consistency in response (Vaymen, 1998). If reflected in the context of Rumuruti community, the violence that erupted in Laikipia county was going to happen some day, in spite of their ethnic or cultural differences. This is because "human needs do not lead to

conflict, rather, conflict emerges from the frustration caused by unfulfilled needs” (Vayrnen, 1998, p.7). Residents of Laikipia county had lived through years of unfilled needs, and the opportunity presented itself and they responded violently due to their frustration.

“Needs can get cultural expressions, but they are not, according to Burton, determined by culture” (Vayrnen, 1998, p.5). In Burton’s perspective, human needs will be pursued by individuals and social groups regardless of consequences (Burton, 1979). In support, Vayrnen(1998) adds that in every society, there are elite groups and structures that help to maintain the status quo, therefore resisting the demands of other groups’ needs. In the context of the 2007 general elections in Kenya, political rhetoric is partially attributed to the violence that broke out after the elections. Politicians are considered some of the elites who develop policies meant to fulfill their own personal interests, that can only be maintained by staying in power.

In Burtons theory, conflict is considered to be endemic, hence it’s thought that conflict can be found regularly in human relationships (Vayrnen, 1998). This perspective can be connected to the conflict in Rumuruti, and it’s neighboring sublocations because of their historical cattle rustling that was constant between pastoralists and farmers in the area. Although, it never reached the magnitude of violence experienced post the 2007 elections. The cattle rustling is what Burton would consider functional conflict and the 2007 elections violence as the dysfunctional conflict. Burton’s theory assumes that functional conflicts i.e group binding functions of a conflict can be differentiated from dysfunctional i.e destructive ones (Vayrnen, 1998). This is because the aim is to retain conflict which has functional value, and “to control it so as to avoid perversions which

are destructive of human enjoyment and widely held social interests (Burton, 1987a, p.138). The violence in Laikipia county, that caused hundreds of lives and hundreds seeking refuge in Rumuruti subcounty was destructive. Participants saw houses burnt, people killed, and their property destroyed. Wanawake Wa Amani, was created after that destruction, and its peacebuilding initiatives are oriented to maintain the functional value of conflict. As part of their problem-solving, WWA's ability to unite members from all tribes, develop interactive peacebuilding activities, and establish a support system, that included mediating before conflict escalates within that community recognizes that conflict is inevitable and can be contained at a functional level.

Speaking of problem-solving, Burton advocates that facilitators employ a filter as a metaphor for problem-solving workshop participants (Burton, 1990b). He states that, "what is required in problem-solving forum is a 'filter' to screen out false assumptions and implications from existing knowledge, cultural, and ideological orientations and personal prejudices" (Burton, 1990b, p.208). Part of the processes leading to forgiveness among Wanawake Wa Amani included openmindedness and learning, where they were willing to learn from and about each other's unique cultural identities. This transformative process played a role in changing the members' perceptions about each other, and alleviated the enmity as they recognized the value of the skills and knowledge they were acquiring through this process.

This human needs theory shines light on the reality experienced by WWA who saw houses getting burned, cattle stolen, and people getting killed. Their immediate concern was the threat to their physical survival as they had no shelter, food, clothing etc. This is a combination of physiological and safety needs according to Maslow that ought

to be satisfied first as they are at the bottom of the pyramid. Physiological needs are biological requirements for human survival. The human body cannot function optimally if physiological needs are not satisfied. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met (McLeod, 2018). Forced migration left many surviving families seeking refuge in Rumuruti, to try to figure out where to begin in life. The peacebuilding initiatives aimed at addressing some of these physiological needs through skill learning, and empowering each other to thrive economically was transformational.

Maslow's safety needs is when people want to experience order, predictability, and control in their lives (Maslow, 1954). McLeod (2018) affirms that these needs include emotional security, financial security, freedom from fear, social stability, property, health etc, and they can be fulfilled by family or society. Wanawake wa Amani shared the concerns they had and their need to have an uninterrupted school learning for their children, to walk around without fear etc, that all make this need for safety a priority. In peacebuilding, lives that have been disintegrated by war are faced with safety challenges , and so ensuring that the survivors are safe must be addressed right away.

On the hierarchy of needs, love and belongingness needs refers to a human emotional need for interpersonal relationships, affiliating, connectedness, and being part of a group (McLeod, 2018). Wanawake wa Amani brought families together. This unity created friendships and provided a sense of love and belonging to all members. Esteem needs are the fourth in Maslow's hierarchy and include self-worth, accomplishment, and respect (McLeod, 2018). Recognition of their peacebuilding initiatives by government, choosing them as part of "Brand Kenya for Peace" after election violence, local officials

participating in their “soccer for peace” events playing tag war, and seeing themselves on television boosted these women’s self esteem and respect from the entire community.

Self esteem needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory are categorized into two: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige), both of these have been achieved. The major basis of self-esteem is approval by others (Burton, 1990, p.20), and there’s no doubt WWA group received that approval.

Taking on the roles of mediators and counselors , willing to intervene whenever conflict arises, and learning skills from each that resulted in establishing small business is an expression of their creativity and self-actualization. This does not imply that WWA group is perfect, they still experience challenges including limited resources, but their ability to navigate through life, doing everything in their capacity to sustain peace in Rumuruti. From the Human Needs Approach is worth noting that navigating these challenges is an ongoing part of life as a journey.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism is a learning theory which holds that knowledge is best gained through a process of reflection and active construction in the mind (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005). Brau (2018), notes that Constructivism is split into radical and social camps. The first form radical (or cognitive) constructivism, proposes that the process of constructing knowledge is dependent on the individual's subjective interpretation of their active experience (Brau, 2018). The second form social constructivism affirms that human development is socially situated and that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (Brau, 2018; Mascolo et al., 2005). The researcher was informed by these

schools of thought as participants were allowed to share their own interpretation of their lived experiences. Validating those experiences is affirming that it is the truth from the experiencer.

Popular psychologist and radical constructivism theorist, Jean Piaget's posits that humans create knowledge through interaction between their experiences and ideas (Brau, 2018). Hence the individual is at the center of the knowledge creation and acquisition process (Brau, 2018) throughout their life. Peacebuilding processes by WWA involved interactions of diverse individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. Learning from each other was at the core of their successful economic development initiatives, where they taught each other a variety of skills including basket weaving, making scarfs, knitting, dancing to drums, and playing soccer. Most important is their decision to forgive and start creating new perceptions about each other in an effort to replace the negative political rhetoric of hate that had led to them to thinking of each other as enemies.

According to Brau (2018), Piaget identified processes of accommodation i.e., reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences, and assimilation i.e., the process by which a person or persons acquire the social and psychological characteristics of a group, which are key in the interaction between experiences and ideas. It is evident that WWA had to reframe their beliefs in order to change their views about each other. By going through the previously discussed processes that led to transformation, establishing new ways to relate to each other enhanced their learning and successfully achieveing their goal to establish and promote peace.



Lev Vygotsky is the social constructivist theorist whose scope focused on the social aspects of acquiring knowledge. He contends that through the process of working with others, learners create an environment of shared meanings with peers (Brau, 2018). To Vygotsky though, culture plays a major role in cognitive development through learning. It is important also, to recognize that just as Piaget and Vygotsky did not believe in rote memorization and repetitive lecturing, Dewey's work proclaims that learners who engage in real world activities will be able to demonstrate higher levels of knowledge through creativity and collaboration (Behling & Hart, 2008). Wanawake wa Amani group members acquired their knowledge that resulted in various small businesses from hands-on activities with each other. Remember all but one with an eight grade education, have no formal education, so reading books is not an option. The selected activities allowed them to bring out their creativity, and built on their individual strengths to enhance each others cognitive development and growth. The newly constructed meanings including their interpretation of forgiveness, became the anchor upon which sustainable peace was built.

### **Forgiveness and Sustainable Peace**

Forgiveness is a relative term defined differently by different people. However, I like the description of forgiveness by the staff at Mayo Clinic, a top ranked hospital in the world (Theimer, 2023) that prides itself in healing and transforming lives. "Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the harm done to you. It also doesn't necessarily mean making up with the person who caused the harm. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that allows you to focus on yourself and helps you go on with life" (Sparks, 2014). Sustaining the internal peace therefore means, sustainability in the external environment

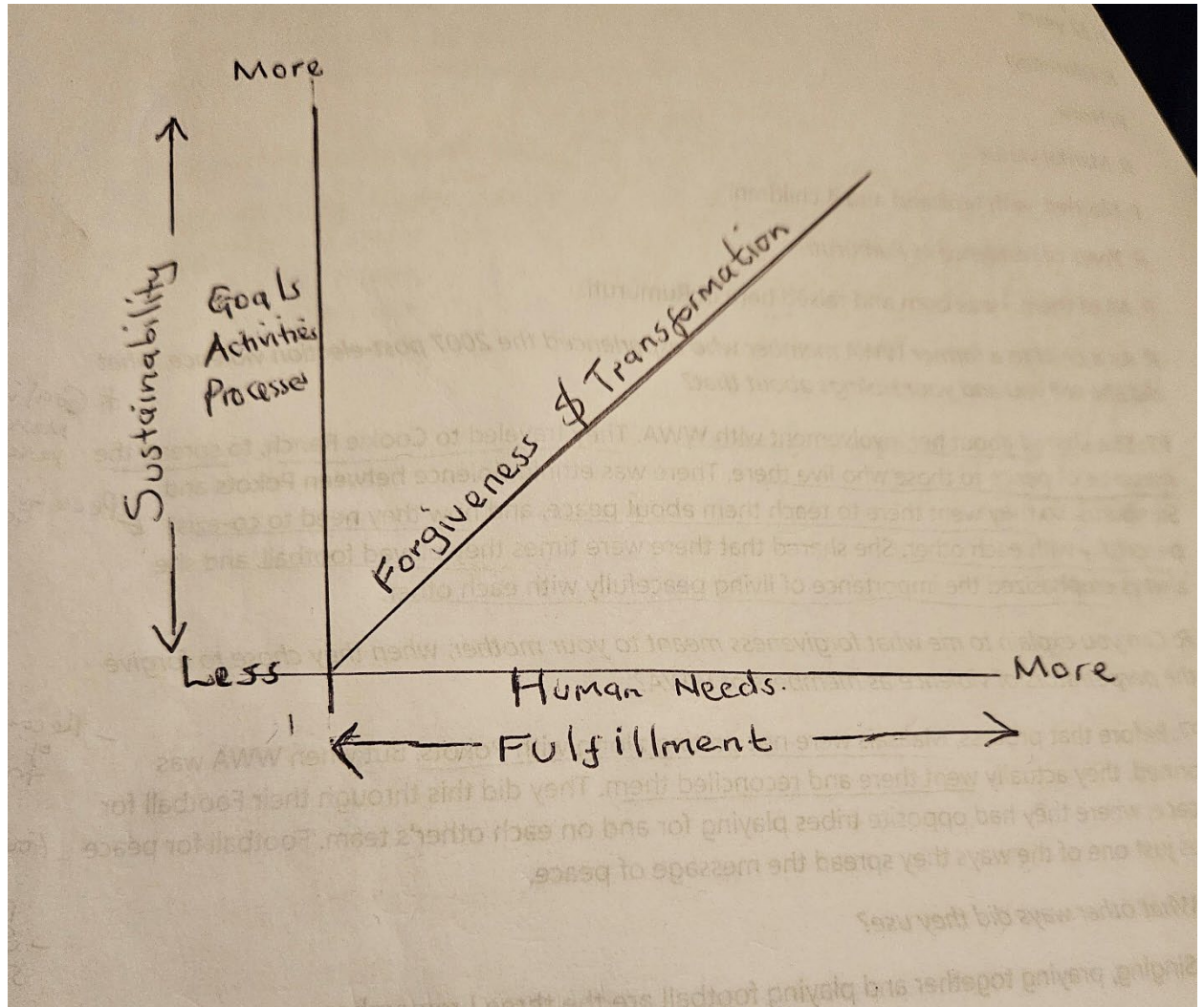
because the energy and resources are directed towards sustainable living, and sustainable living in turn, enhances the internal peace.

The former President of South Africa, a legendary leader, and personal hero, Nelson Mandela in his autobiography, shared his thoughts upon his release, after 27 years in prison: “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison. Courageous people do not fear forgiving for the sake of peace” (Mandela, 1995). A statement that is both literal and metaphorical. Wanawake wa Amani(WWA) group in Rumuruti found the courage and adopted a sliver of Mandela’s ideals. Carrying the anger, bitterness, and hatred of your perpetrator is like imprisoning yourself mentally, psychologically, spiritually, socially, culturally, etc, denying yourself the freedom to actually live life. In deciding to forgive WWA chose freedom.

Their decision and choice to forgive perpetrators of violence, whether they knew them or not, was the foundation to everything else that was achieved. It is impossible to sustain a tree of peace in one hand , while carrying a hot coal of anger and hatred in the other hand. Releasing the hot coal means opening up that hand so that it can engage in nurturing the tree by watering and weeding any potential dangers to its sustainability. Holding onto the hot coal is burning oneself and letting the tree of peace slowly die. Broadening and deepening their social cohesion with informal ties and interactions is the fabric that continues to hold this community together. Since 2007, the country has gone through several other general elections, after which some violence has broken out in various pockets, however, similar violence has not broken out in Rumuruti. That is the power of WWA group’s work to sustaining peace with each other.

How does forgiveness help sustain peace? Forgiveness and reduced ethnic prejudice represent mechanisms driving the restoration of relationships between different groups (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016; Staub & Pearlman, 2003; Staub, 2006). Similarly, Sparks (2014) identifies several benefits of forgiving including Healthier relationships; Improved mental health; Less anxiety, stress and hostility; Fewer symptoms of depression; Lower blood pressure; A stronger immune system; Improved heart health; and Improved self-esteem. Wanawake Wa Amani's decision to forgive perpetrators of violence that cost so many lives has resulted in healthier inter-ethnic relationships, improved self-esteem, and significantly reduced hostility. Majority of them also are less anxious, and less stressed because of the strong support system they have established.

Forgiveness leads to restored relationships among different groups, that no longer harbor ethnic animosities and prejudice, which is transformative. Therefore peace is sustained at the intersection of forgiveness and transformation that occurs within the self and others in the community. Most important, this study demonstrated that forgiveness and transformation occurs where the peacebuilding Goals, Activities, and Processes (GAP) meet the human needs as shown in Figure J below. The more sustainable the GAPs are, the higher they are likely to fulfill the human needs. When people's needs are fulfilled, there's less conflict, and more sustained peace. Conversely, less sustainable GAPs are less likely to fulfill human needs, which increases potential for conflict. The forgiveness and transformation zone (Figure J) increases with more sustainable GAPs.

**Figure 11:***Forgiveness and Transformation Zone***Significance of the Study**

This research is significant because it gives a voice to women's experiences with ethnic violence. When violence occurs, victims and survivors are left figuring out and trying to make sense of what happened. Resettlement in new communities in the aftermath of the violence, is also not a guarantee of sustained peace. The women in this

study saw it as necessary and took it upon themselves to initiate sustainable peace activities in their multiethnic community.

The findings make a significant addition to existing literature and strengthen the critical role that women have in sustainable peacebuilding. Their creative use of knowledge and experiences to achieve their goal for sustained peace and safety in their community superseded their illiteracy. It can also be used for reference purposes and as an important resource for practitioners in the field of conflict resolution who might be inclined to only working with formally educated individuals in communities at grassroots level.

This study provides additional reasons, challenging peacebuilding organizations and teams to be consistent in creating opportunities for and including women in identifying, planning, and executing peacebuilding initiatives. Women who have been directly affected by violence, have a deeper understanding of what it means to be in the midst of heinous attacks. Such women should be included in development of policies that will address the needs of families impacted by ethnic violence, as well as those policies addressing peacebuilding processes. Most of the participants were illiterate, yet they came together, brainstormed, and implemented what they knew was the best for their community. The need for provisions for such individuals to sit on policy and peacebuilding committees to contribute their ideas is paramount.

### **Limitations of Study**

This study interviewed only women who shared their experiences with ethnic violence and process of peacebuilding initiatives that have transformed their lives. The purposive sampling was limited to only members of Wanawake wa Amani group. The

voice of other parties who supported them such as the local officials who support the group, the gatekeeper who facilitated part of the learning process, as well as those men said to have changed their behaviors because of their wives' participation in the group is missing. Also, the perspectives of non-members of WWA on the impact of the peacebuilding activities in this shared community, and as an external eye are missing.

The study was also conducted via Zoom about a year after an in person pilot study, so a couple of the original women at the pilot study were not available, and unfortunately one had also passed away. The interviewees, having never seen or used a computer and headphones were sometimes fascinated by the screen in front of them that sometimes affected their focus. One participant could not hear through the headphones, so the headphones were removed which opened up our conversation to others waiting in the room.

The impact of their travel across the country to promote peace in communities outside of Laikipia County is not known. Whether those communities engaged in their own peacebuilding initiatives and transformed their lives or not was not captured in this study, therefore a comprehensive study of that impact in external communities from their outreach is worth looking into. Finally, the voice of the direct perpetrators who were forgiven is also missing, although they were never actively seeking forgiveness. A separate study of this group of individuals in relation to forgiveness by survivors from their violent acts, changes in their interactions, and transformation.

### **Recommendations**

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN Peacekeeping, 2000) is a call for increased participation of women in peacebuilding initiatives. Sharing data

from studies like this one is one way to expose the meaningful work by marginalized women in remote communities like Rumuruti, where their efforts were locally established by simply tapping into their own personal skills. Their creativity and successful processes despite the challenges of limited resources, need to be acknowledged and recognized as 1) a lesson or model for those communities experiencing similar violence 2) invaluable assets that need to be sought out by policy makers to intentionally involve them in policy making, planning, and identifying sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

More studies of women's community development work in poor rural communities need to be conducted, to identify the processes leading to their success for comparison, and determine how such groups can be supported to expand and sustain their peaceful community development initiatives. Forgiveness is a concept that is rarely considered when international organizations engage in peacebuilding processes. This study shows the need for more research to be conducted where forgiveness is the key factor that enables the success of the rest of the processes leading to achieving sustainable peace following ethnic violence in a community.

Another study that includes perspectives of other stakeholders such as the government officials, the facilitator, and other family members of Wanawake wa Amani is recommended. The outcome of the results can be compared to this study. Most important is one that directly involves the perpetrators of violence, who were forgiven. Understanding their experiences, reasons why they engaged in such atrocities, their feelings about WWA and the fact that they were the forgiven for such unforgettable traumatizing experiences would shed light to some of the underlying causes of ethnic violence, and power of forgiveness in sustainable peace.

For peacebuilding organizations, understanding the processes utilized by WWA in this study, and using such to assess their viability to determine their applicability and potential success for similar communities is recommended. Recognizing that sustainability is more likely when the resourcefulness emanates from within the community, and that sustainable peace is possible if the transformation is personal first. More research on the role and power of forgiveness in communities that have experienced ethnic violence needs to be conducted, as we live in a world where protracted conflict prevails as a humanitarian crisis. This study showed that forgiveness and transformation happens when peacebuilding goals, activities, and processes (GAPs) are sustainable and designed to meet the needs of the people, therefore sustaining peace. The more sustainable the GAPs are, the more they will fulfill human needs. The more the human needs are fulfilled, the greater the transformation.



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## **Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Protocol and Questions**

### **Forgiveness as a Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya**

**Participant #** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Education:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Marital Status:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years of Residence:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** Genevieve M. Sabala

#### **Interview Approach:**

Open ended, semi-structured questions will be used

**Interview Background Reiteration:** Based on details from the consent form, before the interview begins, each interviewee will be reminded that the topic of the interview and dissertation is on women's lived experiences with ethnic violence in Kenya post 2007 elections.

**Researcher Disclosure:** I will inform the interviewees of my relationship to the topic, and any possible biases. As a doctoral student in Conflict Resolution Studies, I am interested in understanding women's experiences with war, as well as peacebuilding processes specifically the forgiveness approach to sustainable peace in rural communities. As a Kenyan citizen, I was born and raised in a rural community in western Kenya, which is far from the study site in Laikipia. As a former undergraduate student at Egerton University, I lived close to the research area for four years and visited the city of Laikipia a couple of times.

#### **Interview questions:**

The following interview questions are designed to draw detailed descriptions of experiences from interviewees.

1. Describe the 2007 post election violence which *Wanawake Wa Amani* addressed
2. What was the process leading to women gathering to discuss the way forward in this community?
3. Why did you choose to:
  - a) join *wanawake wa amani* (peacebuilding women)
  - b) forgive the perpetrators of the violence?
4. What have been the effects of forgiveness?
  - a) for you, individually
  - b) for your family, and
  - c) for your community?
5. What do all these experiences from violence to peacebuilding mean to you?

*Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions for me?*



## **Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Protocol and Questions (Pilot Study)**

Women's lived experiences with ethnic violence in rural Kenya post 2007 elections

**Participant #** \_\_\_\_\_

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Age:

Education:

### **Interview Approach:**

Open ended, semi-structured questions will be used

**Interview Background Reiteration:** Based on details from the consent form, before the interview begins, each interviewee will be reminded that the topic of the interview and dissertation is on women's lived experiences with ethnic violence in Kenya post 2007 elections.

**Researcher Disclosure:** I will inform the interviewees of my relationship to the topic, and any possible biases. As a doctoral student in Conflict Resolution Studies, I am interested in understanding women's experiences with war, as well as peacebuilding processes specifically the forgiveness approach to sustainable peace in rural communities. As a Kenyan citizen, I was born and raised in a rural community in western Kenya, which is far from the study site in Laikipia. As a former undergraduate student at Egerton University, I lived close to the research area for four years and visited the city of Laikipia a couple of times.

### **Interview questions:**

The following interview questions are designed to draw detailed descriptions of experiences from interviewees.

1. How long have you lived in this community?
2. Describe how you remember the events leading to the 2007 elections.
3. How would you describe the post-election violence of 2008?
4. What effect has it had on you personally, and your family?
5. What was the process leading to forgiving the perpetrators like?
6. Why did you choose to forgive the perpetrators of the violence?
7. Before arriving at opting to forgive, were there any other measures undertaken in response to the post-election violence?
8. What was your role throughout the process leading to forgiveness?
9. What have been the effects of forgiveness?
  - a)for you, individually
  - b)for your family, and
  - c)for your community?
10. What do all these experiences mean to you
  - a)Personally?
  - b)as a peacemaker?
11. Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions for me?

## **Appendix C: Participant Consent Form**

### *Forgiveness as Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya*

My name is Genevieve Sabala. I am a doctoral student in Conflict Resolution Studies at Nova Southeastern University. My proposed study on *Forgiveness as Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya*, is for my dissertation towards a doctoral degree. I am therefore soliciting your participation in this study.

#### **What is the study about?**

The proposed study seeks to investigate the lived experiences of women with ethnic violence and to understand the meaning of forgiveness as an approach utilized in peacebuilding processes.

#### **Why are you asking me?**

As a woman and resident of this community, who has experienced ethnic violence and your active involvement in peacebuilding initiatives with emphasis on forgiveness, your participation and contribution will inform the methodology and design of the full research to better understand your experiences for possible future project and policy formulation.

#### **What will be doing if I agree to the study?**

If you are to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experiences with ethnic violence, including post 2007 election violence in Kenya. The interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to tape this interview and take some notes. Your personal information will not be asked or recorded on the audio recording. Your participation in this study is voluntary, you have the option to withdraw at anytime during this study. If you decide not to take part or skip any questions, there is no penalty.

#### **Risks and benefits**

It is important to note that the only risk is that you may find some of the questions about your experiences to be sensitive. There will be minimal, or no risk involved, however, if there is any indication of any danger to you because of your participation, the interview will be called off. There are no specific benefits to you individually.

#### **Is there any audio or video recording?**

This study will include audio recording of the interview. You will be informed when the recording starts and when it ends. Your personal and identifying information will not be recorded. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher and kept securely in a locked file. The recording will be kept for 36 months and then destroyed after that time by burning the tape. There will be no video recordings.

### **What if I have any questions?**

You are encouraged to ask questions now. However, if you have any other questions about this study, you may contact the researcher Genevieve Sabala at [gs965@mynsu.nova.edu](mailto:gs965@mynsu.nova.edu). If you have any concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 954 262 5369 or access their website at <https://www.nova.edu/irb/staff.html>.

### **Voluntary Consent by Participant**

By signing below, you indicate:

- This study has been explained to you
- You have read this document, or it has been read to you
- Your questions about this research study have been answered
- You voluntarily agree to participate in the study on women's lived experiences with ethnic violence

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Site Approval Letter



Office: KAPKATENY MARKET MT ELGON  
 Address: P.O Box 334 – 50202, BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA  
 Contact: +254(0) 0715206658 mobile: +254(0) 723 493 633  
 E-mail: [ajjoedyfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:ajjoedyfoundation@gmail.com)

### SITE APPROVAL LETTER

Nova Southeastern University  
 3301 College Avenue  
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314-7796

**Subject:** Site Approval Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by *Genevieve M. Sabala* to conduct a research project entitled “*Forgiveness as Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya*” and I approve of this research to be conducted at our facility.

When the researcher receives approval for her research project from the Nova Southeastern University’s Institutional Review Board/NSU IRB, I agree to provide access for the approved research project. If we have any concerns or need additional information, we will contact the Nova Southeastern University’s IRB at (954) 262-5369 or [irb@nova.edu](mailto:irb@nova.edu).

Sincerely,

Winfred Maximilla Okello  
 254715206658  
[murembemax@gmail.com](mailto:murembemax@gmail.com)

## Appendix E: IRB Approval



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
 3301 College Avenue  
 Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796  
 PHONE: (954) 262-5369

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Genevieve Sabala  
 Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

**From:** Deanne Roopnarine, D.P.M.  
 College Representative, Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

**Date:** March 23, 2023

**Subject:** IRB Exempt Initial Approval Memo

**TITLE:** Forgiveness as a Critical and Transformative Factor in Sustainable Peace: Peacebuilding Women in Rumuruti, Kenya– NSU IRB Protocol Number 2023-157

Dear Principal Investigator,

Your submission has been reviewed and Exempted by your IRB College Representative or their Alternate on **March 23, 2023**. You may proceed with your study.

*NOTE: Exempt studies do not require approval stamped documents. If your study site requires stamped copies of consent forms, recruiting materials, etc., contact the IRB Office.*

**Level of Review:** Exempt

**Type of Approval:** Initial Approval

**Exempt Review Category:** Exempt 2: Interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations of public behavior, and other similar methodologies

**Annual Status of Research Update:** You are required to notify the IRB Office annually if your research study is still ongoing via the *Exempt Research Status Update xForm*.

**Changes:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation using the *Amendment xForm*.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
3301 College Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7756  
PHONE (954) 262-5369

**Translated Documents: No**

*Retain this document in your IRB correspondence file.*

CC: Deanne Roopnarine, D.P.M.

Ismael Muvingi, Ph.D.

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