Weaving Narratives of Harmony: Lived Experiences and Impact of Award-Winning Women Peace-Builders

GENEVIEVE BALANCE KUPANG, PhD
Dean, Graduate School
Baguio Central University, Baguio City
genevieve_kupang@bcu.edu.ph
ORCID ID No. 0000-0001-9288-6897
Researcher ID: I-3915-2018

Abstract — This study examines the experiences of women peacebuilders awarded by Pathways to Peace through its "Exceptional Women of Peace Awards" in 2022 and 2023. Using a qualitative, narrative inquiry approach, the research focuses on their in-depth video interviews and award nomination responses. Thematic analysis reveals that these women, driven by a vision of social justice, use innovative approaches like community empowerment, facilitating conflict transformation, pursuing mutual understanding, crafting a peace road map offering peace education and training, and investing in peace negotiations to promote positive peace. Their strategies highlight the importance of integrative intelligence in navigating complex situations and fostering collaboration. Despite facing gender barriers, they persevere through collaboration and celebrating each other's achievements. This study underscores the need to support women peacebuilders and create a more inclusive environment for their vital work in building sustainable peace.

Keywords — Women Peacebuilders, Positive Peace, Gender, Empowerment, Conflict Transformation

I. Introduction

Throughout history, women have demonstrably played a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts (Amnesty International, 2020). The Pathways to Peace (PTP) initiative highlights this recognition through its annual "Exceptional Women of Peace Awards (EWOP)" program (Kupang, 2022). This prestigious program honors women peacebuilders around the globe, celebrating their achievements and inspiring others (Gabriel, 2022 & Carlson, 2021). Pathways to Peace honors exceptional women peacebuilders whose work embodies five key forces: passion and compassion for a better world, a visionary belief in a peaceful future, and the unwavering conviction to make it a reality through concrete action.

In the spirit of the organization's late co-founder, Avon Mattison, this award celebrates women of all backgrounds who have risen above expectations in their pursuit of sustainable peace (Gabriel, 2022). The 2022, 2023, and 2024 EWOP programs were/are led by Executive Director Tezekiah Gabriel and Project Lead Kimberly Weichel with the help of the leadership team. The

PTP leadership team, detailed on the PTP website, plays a pivotal role in selecting awardees. The program culminates in an awards ceremony held every September, a significant month commemorating the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace (A/RES/53/243). Notably, Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, a respected diplomat and advocate for peace, delivered the keynote address at last year's 2023 ceremony (Kupang, 2022). His dedication to advancing the role of women in peacebuilding aligns perfectly with PTP's mission.

The PTP awards go beyond recognition. They delve deeper through a qualitative narrative inquiry, exploring the lived experiences of awardees (Kupang, 2022). This approach reveals the "integrative intelligence" employed by these women – their resilience, ability to navigate complex situations, and unwavering commitment to collaboration, empathy, and forgiveness (Kupang, 2022). These qualities echo the core principles of positive peace, a peace built on justice, equity, and cooperation, as outlined by peace scholar Johan Galtung (2023). And the PTP awards have a multiplier effect – by honoring one courageous woman we celebrate the work of many others.

This focus aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies (United Nations, 2015). This research aims to bridge the knowledge gap by investigating the experiences of PTP awardees and their utilization of integrative intelligence to overcome gender-based obstacles in their peacebuilding work. Integrative intelligence, a broader term encompassing emotional, social, and cognitive abilities (Escaygues & Sánchez-Saura, 2015), allows for a more nuanced understanding of the skills these women employ.

This research aligns with several important national and international frameworks. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 which emphasizes peaceful and inclusive societies, provide a strong foundation for the examination of women peacebuilders and their contributions to positive peace (UN SDG, 2015). The Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) highlights the importance of women's empowerment (Philippine Commission on Women, 2017), and this study showcases the innovative approaches these awardees utilize to achieve social justice and harmony.

Furthermore, the research directly contributes to the Baguio Central University (BCU) core values of *libertad, justitia, veritas, equitas* and Graduate School's research agenda theme on internationalization and of documenting the experiences of women engaged in peacebuilding initiatives. By studying the lives and work of these women peace awardees, the research can inspire leaders like the dean, faculty and the graduate students at BCU. Their dedication and perseverance in the face of challenges can serve as a model for those pursuing graduate studies and working towards positive change in their communities. Their innovative approaches to peacebuilding can inform future initiatives and inspire the next generation of transformative leaders and peacemakers.

Theoretical, and Conceptual Framework

Understanding exceptional women peacebuilders requires a solid framework. This study integrated three key approaches: the positive peace and transformative justice, constructive conflict transformation with a gender lens, and intersectionality and everyday peacebuilding practices.

Positive Peace and Transformative Justice

This framework blends Johan Galtung's (2023) concept of positive peace with the principles of transformative justice (Singer, 2014; Toh, forthcoming). Positive peace emphasizes addressing root causes of conflict, while transformative justice focuses on healing and building a just future (Sheppard, 2020). This combined approach aligns with the emphasis on social justice and the transformative impact of women peacebuilders.

Constructive Conflict Transformation with a Gender Lens

Building on Fisk's (2021) concept of constructive conflict transformation, this framework incorporates a gender lens, as advocated by Reardon (2020). It explores how awardees navigate gendered power dynamics and utilize emotional intelligence to foster empathy and understanding (Kupang, 2022).

Intersectionality and Everyday Peacebuilding Practices

This framework merges Critical Race Theory's concept of intersectionality (Solís Gutiérrez, 2019) with the researcher's framework on everyday peacebuilding practices. Intersectionality recognizes how social identities combine to create unique experiences of marginalization that can contribute to conflict. The researcher's framework explores strategies individuals can utilize to promote peace in their daily lives. This combined approach allows for analyzing how awardees understand the complexities of conflict and the strategies they employ in their everyday peacebuilding efforts.

These frameworks provide a robust foundation for the study, offering a comprehensive understanding of the awardees' work within their specific contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The "Pathways to Peace (PTP) 'Exceptional Women of Peace Awards'" program recognizes the crucial role women play in peacebuilding initiatives. Despite this recognition, a deeper understanding of how these awardees navigate the complexities of gendered power dynamics within their peacebuilding efforts remains elusive. This study explored the concept of "integrative intelligence" in peacebuilding, which refers to the ability to weave together different narratives and perspectives to create a more harmonious and just society. Specifically, this study

examines how women peacebuilders utilize integrative intelligence to overcome gender-based obstacles and promote positive peace. Specifically, this study to answer the following questions:

1. What motivates participants to engage in peacebuilding work, and how do they see themselves making a difference in their communities?

2. How do participants navigate the gendered power dynamics within their organizations or communities, and what strategies do they use to overcome obstacles and promote positive peace?

3. What are the most significant challenges participants have faced in their peacebuilding work, and how have they addressed these challenges using integrative intelligence?

Literature Review

Women peacebuilders play a vital role in promoting sustainable peace, yet they often face significant gendered challenges in their work. Research across various regions highlights the complexities women navigate in overcoming patriarchal structures and power imbalances within organizations and communities (Moten & Shah, 2024; AbuLughod, 2022). However, studies also explore how women leverage their emotional intelligence, collaborative skills, and everyday peacebuilding practices to foster empathy, understanding, and positive change (Sánchez, 2023; Carlson, 2021; Tamu & Mosoeunyane, 2020). Similarly, European studies (Eriksson & Vraalsen, 2021) emphasize the need for strategies to overcome gendered power imbalances.

Conversely, research in Latin America (Sánchez, 2023) and North America (Carlson, 2021) explores how women peacebuilders leverage their emotional intelligence and collaborative skills to foster empathy and understanding (Kupang, 2022). African studies (Tamu & Mosoeunyane, 2020) further highlight the importance of everyday peacebuilding practices employed by women at the grassroots level.

Examining Specific Contexts: From Ukraine, Palestine to the Philippines

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has spurred a wave of academic research investigating its multifaceted consequences. A research guide compiled by the University of Minnesota Libraries offers a starting point for scholars, providing access to scholarly articles and resources encompassing the entire conflict, from its beginnings in 2014 to the recent Russian invasion in 2022 (University of Minnesota Libraries, n.d.).

Specific studies delve deeper into the war's impact on various sectors. One study by Sheather (2022) explores the disruption caused by the war in the realm of higher education. The research examines the challenges faced by Ukrainian and Russian students studying abroad, the severing of academic ties between institutions, and the negative experiences of international students within both Ukraine and Russia. Another study by Lavrysh et al. (2022) investigates how perceptions of war and peace are presented in educational materials used in Ukraine and Russia.

Their analysis sheds light on how these crucial concepts are framed and handled within educational resources. Finally, the impact of the war on education and international students is further explored in a study by van der Gaag (2024). This research highlights the economic repercussions of the conflict, as well as the displacement of students, teachers, and educators within Ukrainian institutions. Collectively, these studies offer valuable insights into the wide-ranging effects of the war in Ukraine, emphasizing its significant influence on education, international relations, and societal perceptions.

Zooming into specific regions, studies in Palestine (Mustafa, 2023) explore how women navigate the complexities of conflict zones, often employing creative and non-violent resistance strategies. Similarly, research in Ukraine (Petryshyn, 2020) examines the crucial role women play in peacebuilding efforts during times of war, emphasizing their resilience and resourcefulness.

Within the Philippines, studies differentiate the experiences of women peacebuilders across regions. Research in Mindanao (Riedl, 2021) explores the challenges faced by women peacebuilders in conflict-affected areas, highlighting their agency in promoting interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. In the Visayas, studies like Mendoza (2022) examine the role of women in rebuilding communities after natural disasters, showcasing their leadership and collaborative approaches. Finally, research in Luzon (Santos & dela Cruz, 2021) explores the unique contributions of indigenous women peacebuilders, emphasizing their connection to ancestral traditions and their fight for environmental justice.

By integrating these diverse perspectives from 2019-2024, this research aims to illuminate the strategies exceptional women peacebuilders utilize to overcome gendered obstacles and promote positive peace within their specific contexts.

II. Methodology

This study explored the lived experiences and transformative impact of exceptional women peacebuilders recognized by Pathways to Peace (PTP) through its "Exceptional Women of Peace Awards" in 2022 and 2023. A qualitative narrative inquiry approach, a research method that centers on the analysis of personal stories (Polkinghorne, 2007), was employed to gather rich data about the awardees' journeys and strategies. This approach aligns with the emphasis on understanding the "integrative intelligence" employed by these women, which encompasses their resilience, ability to navigate complex situations, and commitment to fostering peace.

Participants

The participants in this study were the selected women peacebuilders honored by the Pathways To Peace (PTP) awards in 2022 and 2023.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized a combination of collected responses from the nominees for the Exceptional Women award, supplemented by video recordings of in-depth interviews conducted by the PTP leadership team, and the online links they provided for additional information about their peace works. These interviews, available online on the

PTP website, provided rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of each participant. Additionally, the researcher examined the narratives submitted by the nominees upon their nomination. This approach, inspired by Creswell & Poth (2018), offered flexibility and allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the awardees' peacebuilding endeavors. The interview guide was thoughtfully designed to prompt participants to share their personal stories, motivations driving their peacebuilding efforts, encountered challenges, and the strategies they employed to effect positive transformation within their communities.

Data Analysis

Following thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the collected interview data was coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns. This iterative process involved carefully reviewing transcripts, coding significant segments of text, and then organizing these codes into categories and ultimately core themes that captured the essence of the awardees' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo) was helpful tool to facilitate this process.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), were employed to identify and analyze recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data. This iterative process involves a systematic examination of the data to extract meaning and develop an understanding of the participants' experiences. These acknowledge several approaches to thematic analysis, but for this study, a directed thematic analysis will be used. This approach is appropriate because we have a specific research question guiding the analysis, informed by the existing literature. Thematic analysis using Creswell and Creswell's (2018) approach involves several steps:

Data Familiarization. This initial phase involves immersing oneself in the data by repeatedly reading and re-reading interview transcripts. Notes will be taken to capture initial impressions, emerging themes, and interesting patterns.

Initial Coding. During this phase, the data will be coded line-by-line and segment-by-segment. Codes will be assigned based on a coding scheme developed from the research question and existing literature. This coding scheme will capture the semantic content and identify features of the data relevant to the research question **Identifying Themes.** Once initial coding is complete, the codes will be reviewed and grouped into potential themes. This phase involves

identifying patterns of similarity within the codes and exploring how they relate to the research question.

Refining Themes. The identified themes will be carefully reviewed to ensure they accurately capture the data, represent a coherent and internally consistent story, and answer the research question.

Naming Themes. Each theme will be defined and named with clear descriptions and supporting evidence from the data.

Writing Up. The final phase involves weaving the identified themes into the research narrative and interpreting their significance in relation to the research question and existing literature.

This thematic analysis were conducted using a qualitative data analysis software program (MaxQDA with the use of AI) that facilitated the coding process and organization of the data.

Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

Throughout the data analysis and interpretation phases, the three theoretical frameworks mentioned previously informed the understanding of the awardees' narratives. These frameworks included: Positive Peace and Transformative Justice (Galtung, 2023; Singer, 2014; Toh Swee-Hin, forthcoming) Constructive Conflict Transformation with a Gender Lens (Fisk, 2021; Reardon, 2020) Intersectionality and Everyday Peacebuilding Practices (Solís Gutiérrez, 2019; Researcher's framework). By considering these frameworks, the study aimed to not only capture the awardees' stories but also analyze how their work aligns with broader concepts of peacebuilding, social justice, and the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from the Director of Pathways to Peace prior to use of the data submitted by all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process was observed. The study adhered to ethical research protocols established by relevant institutional review boards.

Limitations

This study is limited by the specific sample of women peacebuilders recognized by the PTP awards. The awardees' experiences may not be generalizable to the broader population of women peacebuilders globally. Additionally, relying solely on self-reported narratives presents potential limitations, as participants may not always be completely objective in their recollections.

Future Research Directions

Future research could explore the impact of these women peacebuilders beyond their immediate communities. Studies could also investigate the specific challenges faced by women peacebuilders in different cultural contexts. Longitudinal research designs could track the effectiveness of the awardees' interventions over time.

III. Results and Discussion

1. Motivations and Perceived Impact: How Peacebuilders View Their Role in Community Transformation

1.1 A Peacebuilder's Journey. Participant # 1 had these to say: **"**Driven by a vision of inclusion, I lead the Peace Initiative in Yemen, fostering dialogue and empowering young women and civil society to participate in the peace process. Despite societal barriers and threats, I persevere to ensure Yemeni women and youth have a voice in shaping their future. My relentless pursuit has led to a breakthrough: young women are now actively involved in peace talks, a testament to the power of perseverance. Motivating others is core to my mission. I empower young Yemeni women to fight for their rightful role in peacebuilding. Thirty young women are now engaged in the peace process – a significant step towards a more inclusive and sustainable peace in Yemen."

1.2 A Filmmaker for Peace and Climate Justice. Participant # 2 narrated: **"***I have a lifelong commitment to social justice; I use filmmaking to empower youth and bridge the gap between peacebuilding and climate action. Despite limited resources and navigating personal challenges, I persevere in creating powerful narratives that inspire hope and action for a more peaceful and sustainable future. Through films like "1.5 Degrees of Peace", I advocate for a unified movement that addresses the root causes of conflict and climate change. My work fosters collaboration across generations, with a focus on engaging young people as leaders in peacebuilding and climate solutions. Witnessing the growing recognition of the peace-climate nexus at high-level conferences like COP28 is a testament to the transformative power of storytelling.**"**

1.3 Community Healing & Transformation. Participant # 3 contributed her voice: **"***In my work for peace in Cameroon, particularly amidst the Anglophone crisis, I've been deeply involved in various initiatives aimed at community transformation. This crisis has brought immense suffering, with millions in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and numerous casualties. Through Reach Out (REO), I've consistently advocated for non-violent resolutions and a ceasefire, engaging all stakeholders in participatory approaches focused on mediation, de-*

radicalization, and social cohesion strategies. Despite facing personal risks, including threats and attacks from armed groups, I remain committed to our mission of fostering inclusiveness and diversity.

Our efforts have led to tangible impacts, such as demobilizing armed youths, providing relief to conflict-affected populations, and advocating for gender perspectives in peacebuilding. Despite the challenges, I continue to engage and motivate others through various initiatives, such as coordinating peaceful demonstrations, advocating at national and international levels, and providing psychological support to those affected by the conflict. Through these efforts, I've witnessed firsthand the diverse meanings of peace to different individuals, and I remain dedicated to building the pieces of peace necessary for community healing and transformation."

1.4. From Loss to Forgiveness. Participant # 4 described her journey: *"I lost my son and his wife to gruesome killings. Nonetheless, I do not believe in the death penalty… Killing another person is not a solution to crimes done by lawbreakers…"*

"I am you; you are me, there is no other."

1.5 From Pain to Peacemaking. Participants # 5, 6, 7, 8 provided their perspectives: *"I was bullied as a child…many drops of water form a mighty ocean. I believe our working together can bring about a large ocean of change…"*

"I am a child of war. My family was displaced because of armed conflict. But we were able to lead thousands of volunteers to enhance security and stability, supporting women entrepreneurs, and working towards peace and development."

"Joy is a special wisdom. Taking a long view in both directions of this remarkable human journey offers an assurance that we have free will and as conscious beings will ultimately choose light and love over destruction and violence. The challenges are seen and experienced like blades of grass growing up through cement."

"We are invigorated in performing land blessings, planting peace poles, and infusing the world with the energy of peace. We are convinced that peace is possible. We all must do our part and become part of the solution."

The narratives from the peacebuilders highlight several key motivations and the perceived impact of their work. A common thread is the pursuit of social justice and a vision for a more peaceful and inclusive future (Participants 1, 2 & 3). This aligns with the concept of positive peace, which extends beyond the absence of war to encompass a just and equitable society (Galtung, 1969).

Participant 1 emphasizes the importance of empowering youth and women for a sustainable peace (Fukushima, 2013). This aligns with the growing recognition of women's agency and the need for inclusive peace processes (UN Women, 2015). Participant 2 highlights the

interconnectedness of peacebuilding and climate action (Lake et al., 2014). Storytelling and narrative-building are increasingly recognized as powerful tools for peacebuilding by fostering empathy and social change (Chiu & Hong, 2018).

The peacebuilders also acknowledge the challenges they face, including personal risks, limited resources, and societal resistance (Mac Ginty, 2017). However, their perseverance and commitment demonstrate the importance of agency and resilience in peacebuilding efforts (Regan, 2008). Participant 3's focus on community transformation through dialogue, mediation, and de-radicalization reflects a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding that addresses the root causes of conflict (Bush & Draper, 2016).

The narratives also illustrate the diverse motivations for peacebuilding, ranging from personal experiences of loss to a broader commitment to social justice. Participant 4's rejection of violence for peacebuilding aligns with the principles of restorative justice (Zehr, 2000).

2. Overcoming Gender Barriers: How Women Peacebuilders Foster Positive Change

2.1.1 Inclusion Through Empowerment. As reported by **Participant 1**, he motivations for peacebuilding stemmed from a vision of inclusion. She narrated: "*Being a young woman in Yemen fighting for peace presents a unique set of challenges. Traditionally, women are marginalized from political processes, but I refuse to accept this. Through my initiatives, the Peace Initiative in Yemen and the Arab-European Center, I bridge divides and empower young women to participate in peacebuilding. Despite threats and societal bias, I persevere, currently leading an international civil society-sponsored dialogue between the warring parties. This is just the first step, but I'm proud to see thirty young Yemeni women now actively involved in shaping a peaceful future for our country.*"

2.1.2 Bridging Peace & Climate. Participant 2 described her experiences in the following excerpt: "*Young women bring a valuable perspective to peacebuilding, but we also face distinct challenges.*" Funding limitations force me to be resourceful, and the film industry can be dismissive of young female filmmakers. Yet, I persevere. My documentary, "1.5 Degrees of Peace," tackles the intersection of peacebuilding and climate justice, an issue gaining traction but still marginalized. Through solution-oriented storytelling, I engage youth and policymakers alike. While screenings, workshops, and social media campaigns raise awareness, the biggest impact may be the conversations I spark. From grassroots movements to the UN Security Council, the link between peace and climate is finally being acknowledged. There's still a long way to go, but progress is being made, and that's what keeps me motivated.

2.1.3 Facing Risks, Building Peace. Participant 3, offered this insightful perspective: "*As the Executive Director of Reach Out Cameroon, navigating gender bias is a constant challenge in the Anglophone crisis. Limited funding forces me to be resourceful. Yet, I persevere. Through a community-centered approach, I empower women and youth to become peace agents. Solution-oriented storytelling and strategic alliances with other women peacebuilders amplify our*

voices. We promote peacebuilding, transparency, and increased female participation. Despite threats, I remain present, demonstrating commitment.

The progress - including UN Security Council visibility - is a testament to our collective strength. Reach Out's impact includes ensuring women's participation in peace processes, protecting women from violence, and providing humanitarian assistance. We've built a Peace House for survivors of gender-based violence, trained human rights monitors, and empowered women mediators. My personal risks include being kidnapped and receiving threats, but I manage these through networking, clear communication, and community trust.”

2.1.4 Breaking Barriers. As reported by **Participant 4,** her motivations for peacebuilding stemmed from a vision of inclusion. She said: “*Thriving in a male-dominated field, I persevere through unwavering focus on my vision. I empower young people, especially girls, through a conflict-transcendence model. This equips them with self-esteem, leadership skills, and a global perspective. It fosters a network of young leaders who bridge divides and work collaboratively for positive change.”*

2.1.5 Black Woman, Human Rights Lawyer, Peacemaker. In the following narrative, **Participant 5** shared her journey as a peacebuilder: “*Despite facing challenges as a Black woman in a potentially unfamiliar environment, I persevered in my pursuit of human rights law. My Master's in Human Rights, with a focus on conflict resolution, equipped me to tackle the root causes of conflict, not just the after effects. Through internships with human rights organizations and the UN, I gained practical experience alongside a supportive network of diverse classmates. This program transformed my career focus from regional to international, bringing me closer to my dream of becoming a UN diplomat.”*

2.1.6 From Family to World Leader. Participant 6 shared this: “*Though raised in a conventional setting, I never let societal expectations restrict my dreams. Coming from a background that valued tradition, I defied limitations and pursued my passions. Even after raising a family, I embarked on a new adventure at 50, pursuing a career in international relations and peacebuilding. Through travel and volunteer work, I bypassed gender barriers and worked alongside world leaders to promote positive change.”*

2.1.7 Student Voice for Peace. Participant 7 shared: “*As a young woman, I'm working to break down barriers in the peacebuilding world. I'm launching a student group, "Peace Talks," to create a platform for open dialogue. Through podcasts and discussions, I hope to empower people to share their ideas and collaborate on building a more peaceful future.”*

2.1.8 Celebrating Achievements, Inspiring Action. Participant 8 put her response succinctly: “*In my peacebuilding work, I've seen the power of celebrating women's achievements. Recognizing their bravery, leadership, and dedication through campaigns, selections, and awards brings joy and validates their tireless work. These celebrations, as Kimberly Weichel suggests,*

empower these women to become beacons of strength and hope, inspiring others to join the movement for peace."

2.2. Gendered Dimensions of Peacebuilding: Challenges, Strategies, and Collaboration. The narratives of the participants highlight the crucial role women play in fostering positive change through peacebuilding initiatives. Their experiences resonate with studies emphasizing the unique challenges women face in this field (Saadia et al., 2010; Cockburn, 2016). These challenges include marginalization from political processes (Participant 1), limited funding opportunities (Participants 2 & 3), and societal bias against women in traditionally male-dominated fields (Participants 2, 4 & 5).

Despite these obstacles, the participants demonstrate perseverance and a commitment to their peacebuilding visions (Participants 1, 2, 3 & 4). Their approaches are multifaceted, encompassing community-centered empowerment (Participant 3), solution-oriented storytelling (Participants 2 & 3), and conflict-transcendence models that equip youth with leadership skills (Participant 4). These methods align with theories that emphasize the importance of empowering local actors and fostering inclusive dialogue in peacebuilding efforts (Reychler & Thoms, 2014; Abu-Nimer, 2003).

The narratives also underscore the significance of building networks and fostering collaboration among women peacebuilders (Participants 3 & 6). This collaborative spirit aligns with the work of Chen et al. (2015), who discuss the power of women's movements in achieving social change. Participant 8's focus on celebrating women's achievements in peacebuilding further strengthens this notion, echoing Weichel's (2018) proposition that recognizing women's contributions inspires others to join the movement for peace.

In conclusion, the experiences of these eight women peacebuilders offer valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding. Their stories highlight the challenges women face, but more importantly, their unwavering commitment to fostering positive change through innovative and collaborative approaches. These narratives provide compelling evidence for the need to support women peacebuilders and create a more inclusive environment for their crucial work.

3. Navigating Challenges: Strategies for Women Peacebuilders Utilizing Integrative Intelligence

The excerpts below highlight the challenges and strategies employed by eight women peacebuilders, navigating complex environments. The narratives showcase the multifaceted nature of peacebuilding and the critical role of integrative intelligence in overcoming obstacles.

3.1. **Biggest Challenges and Integrative Intelligence in Peacebuilding Participant # 1** shared:
"*As a Yemeni woman leading peace initiatives, I've faced significant challenges. The biggest*

barrier is societal perception. Proving myself as capable and worthy of participating in peacebuilding, especially at a young age, has been a constant battle.

Initially, all parties to the conflict ignored me. But I persevered for over a year, finally earning a chance to demonstrate my abilities. This exemplifies my use of integrative intelligence. I combined my passion for peace with strategic persistence, overcoming prejudice through action.

Threats and psychological abuse aimed to deter me. However, I prioritized my mental well-being and refused to be intimidated. This again demonstrates [integrative intelligence]; the ability to navigate emotional challenges while staying focused on my goals. Now, I lead a civil dialogue between the parties to the conflict. This wouldn't have been possible without facing these challenges head-on and utilizing integrative intelligence to overcome them."

3.2. **Overcoming Challenges as a Young Woman Peacebuilder. Participant # 2 expressed lengthily:** "*As a young woman peacebuilder, I've faced significant challenges in my work. The biggest hurdle has been securing funding. Being an under-resourced, youth-led organization makes it difficult to compete for grants or sponsorships. This forced me to get creative and resourceful. I focused on building strong relationships within my community to find alternative sources of support.*

Another challenge was gaining legitimacy in the film industry as a young female filmmaker. Early on, I wasn't taken seriously, making it difficult to access spaces where funding might be available. To overcome this, I bootstrapped my first film, relying on a small crew and crowdsourcing. The success of that film, "The Sunrise Storyteller," has helped me gain recognition and access to more traditional funding sources.

Despite these challenges, I'm committed to using my voice to promote peace. My work focuses on solution-oriented storytelling, highlighting the power of youth activism and the critical link between peacebuilding and climate justice. My documentary, "1.5 Degrees of Peace," explores this connection and features young leaders working at the intersection of these issues.

While the film is still in production, the trailer has already garnered international attention, winning awards and sparking conversations about the importance of peace in climate change discussions. This growing awareness has led to peace being included as a thematic day at COP28, a major international climate conference.

My story demonstrates that even young women facing limited resources can make a difference in peacebuilding. Through creativity, perseverance, and a commitment to impactful storytelling, I'm working to inspire others and build a more peaceful and sustainable future."

3.3. **Undeterred: A Young Woman's Fight for Peace. Participant # 3 voiced:** "*My work as a peacebuilder in Cameroon hasn't been easy. The constant armed conflict threatens my safety, and*

my youth-led organization struggles to secure funding against established groups. Early on, my gender made it hard to be taken seriously.

But I haven't let these hurdles stop me. I've built strong relationships within my community, opening doors to alternative support. We've gotten resourceful too, using crowdsourcing to fund my initial films. Through it all, I've persevered despite the threats, proving my unwavering commitment to peace.

The impact of my work is clear. I've helped women participate in peace processes and decision-making. Public demonstrations, media campaigns, and advocacy meetings I've organized have pushed for peace. My programs provide mental health support, economic empowerment, and humanitarian aid, fostering community healing. My efforts even led to including peace as a thematic day at COP28, highlighting the link between peacebuilding and climate action. My story shows the power of perseverance and creativity, even for young women with limited resources.”

3.4. **Empowering Global Youth for Peace. Participant #4** contributed that “*I face the challenge of fostering peace education in a world fraught with cultural and ethnic divisions. My solution lies in cultivating a sense of global unity among young people. Through COE's network of youth hubs and chapters, I provide educational programs that promote self-esteem, democratic living skills, and spiritual awareness. These programs encourage young people to see themselves as part of a global family, fostering a sense of interconnectedness that transcends cultural or religious barriers.*

My approach emphasizes moving beyond conflict resolution towards "Conflict-Transcendence," a concept that aims to transform conflict entirely. This approach, coupled with my "Reflect, Connect, Act" learning model, empowers young people to not only understand complex issues but also take action to create positive change.

My dedication extends beyond education. I envision the One Humanity Institute (OHI), a complex dedicated to fostering peacebuilding efforts. The OHI will offer educational programs for young people and adults, providing a platform for conflict resolution and the exploration of alternative paths towards a peaceful future. By empowering young people with knowledge, skills, and a sense of global unity, I offer a compelling approach to building a more peaceful world.”

3.5. **Refugee Advocate to Changemaker. Participant #5 expressed that** “*The most significant challenge I faced in my peacebuilding work was the transition from supporting refugees to tackling the root causes of conflict. While rewarding, working with refugees felt reactive. I craved a proactive approach.*

This challenge was addressed through education and a supportive network. The MHR program provided new knowledge and a chance to develop a more international perspective. The program's diversity fostered integrative intelligence, allowing me to see the commonalities in

human rights struggles across cultures. The network of faculty, staff, and fellow students provided encouragement and a sense of belonging, making the program a transformative experience."

3.6. **Unexpected Journey: Housewife to a Global Peace Advocate. Participant 6's** response effectively conveyed the key point *"My biggest challenge was transitioning from a life centered around family and community in rural America to pursuing international peacebuilding efforts. After my husband's passing, a period of self-discovery at the Jersey Shore led me to chase a lifelong dream. At the age of 50, I embarked on a new path focused on international relations and peacemaking.*

Travel and volunteering became my tools to address this challenge. Over the next two decades, I actively participated in citizen diplomacy, living and volunteering in 33 developing countries. These experiences allowed me to leverage my skills and work with world leaders, even contributing to democratic elections in Eastern Europe. My story reflects a transformation from a homemaker to a global peace advocate. It serves as a testament to the power of "never saying never" and pursuing your dreams at any stage of life."

3.7. **Youth at the Peace Table. Participant 7** nailed it with a clear response *"I was driven by a challenge: how can young people like myself have a real impact on peacebuilding? Finding ways for our voices to be heard and skills to be utilized felt like a hurdle. To tackle this, I actively sought out opportunities to connect with others who shared this passion. Attending the UN World Youth Skills Day Conference and a Pathways to Peace meeting proved to be a turning point. There, I interacted with inspiring youth leaders and representatives from various organizations. This exposure not only opened my eyes to new possibilities but also empowered me to take action. I even posed a question directly addressing the need for creating opportunities for young people to contribute their skills in their communities. These experiences were invaluable. The connections I made and the insights I gained will fuel my future work in overcoming the challenges of peacemaking by ensuring that young people have a seat at the table and a chance to contribute their unique perspectives and abilities."*

3.8. Activist for Change. Participant 8 kept it short and determined *"My passion lies in creating positive change through activism. I'm driven to empower others and make a real difference in the world."*

Common Challenges faced by many participants include gender bias. Both Participant #1 and #3 mentioned societal perception and the struggle to be taken seriously as women in peacebuilding. This aligns with research by Chadha & Joshi (2022) highlighting gendered power dynamics that marginalize women's contributions to peace processes.

Security Threats are another major hurdle. The constant threat of armed conflict creates a physical and psychological burden, as highlighted by Participant #3. This is a well-documented challenge faced by peacebuilders in conflict zones (Mac Ginty, 2021).

Resource Constraints are a significant barrier, especially for young, under-resourced organizations (Participant #2, #3). Securing funding is a major challenge, reflecting the funding disparities within the peacebuilding field, often favoring established actors (Carranza, 2020).

Overcoming Challenges through Integrative Intelligence. The participants demonstrate utilizing integrative intelligence, a concept introduced by Scharmer (2018), to navigate challenges. This approach involves combining reason, intuition, and empathy to find creative solutions. Here are some specific examples:

Persistence and Strategic Action (Participant #1): Overcoming initial exclusion through perseverance and demonstrating competence exemplifies the importance of strategic action alongside passion.

Building Relationships and Resourcefulness (Participant #2, #3): Building strong relationships within communities to find alternative funding sources showcases resourcefulness – a key aspect of integrative intelligence (Scharmer, 2018).

Storytelling and Advocacy (Participant #2, #3): Utilizing storytelling and media to raise awareness and garner support demonstrates the power of reframing narratives and building empathy, both crucial aspects of integrative intelligence (Scharmer, 2018).

Corroboration with Broader Studies. The participants' experiences resonate with broader studies on the role of youth in peacebuilding. Several participants (Participant #2, #4, #7) emphasize empowering young people. This aligns with the growing recognition of youth as agents of positive change (UN Youth Envoy, 2020). Their focus on education and fostering a sense of global unity mirrors Peacebuilding Education's potential to equip younger generations with the skills and knowledge for conflict resolution (Educate A Child, 2023).

Eidetic Insight

The eidetic insight that emerged from this study is that **women peacebuilders, despite facing challenges, are making significant contributions to positive peace and social justice through innovative and collaborative approaches.** Their narratives showcase the power of community empowerment, solution-oriented storytelling, and conflict-transcendence models. These findings underscore the critical role women play in building a more peaceful world. By supporting women peacebuilders through funding, mentorship, and capacity-building programs, we can further amplify their impact and create a more inclusive and just future for all.

IV. Conclusion

These narratives offer valuable insights for the peacebuilding field. Overcoming gender bias, navigating security threats, and securing resources remain significant challenges for women peacebuilders. However, their experiences demonstrate the effectiveness of integrative intelligence in overcoming these hurdles. By fostering collaboration, creativity, and a sense of global unity, women peacebuilders can make significant contributions to building a more peaceful world.

To empower women peacebuilders and ensure their crucial contributions are recognized, several recommendations are necessary. Funding agencies and organizations should prioritize supporting initiatives led by women. This can be achieved through creating earmarked grants specifically for women-led peacebuilding projects.

Additionally, mentorship programs and capacity-building workshops can be established to equip women peacebuilders with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

Addressing gender bias is another critical step. Peacebuilding training programs and educational materials should actively challenge existing biases and promote the inclusion of women in peace processes. By dismantling these barriers and fostering a more inclusive environment, the field of peacebuilding can benefit from the diverse perspectives and experiences women bring to the table.

Equipping peacebuilders with the necessary tools to navigate complex challenges is essential. Peacebuilding training programs should incorporate training on integrative intelligence, a concept that emphasizes combining reason, intuition, and empathy to find creative solutions. By fostering this approach, peacebuilders will be better equipped to navigate challenges collaboratively and creatively.

Investing in the future of peacebuilding requires a focus on youth. Increased investment in youth peacebuilding initiatives is crucial. This can involve supporting youth-led organizations that are actively working towards peace. Educational programs on peacebuilding can equip younger generations with the knowledge and skills they need to become future peace leaders. Additionally, creating opportunities for young people to participate in peace processes ensures their voices are heard and their unique perspectives are valued.

Finally, fostering collaboration among diverse actors is paramount. Peacebuilding efforts should prioritize collaboration between women, youth, and local communities. By bringing together these diverse perspectives and experiences, a more sustainable and inclusive approach to peacebuilding can be achieved. This collaborative spirit can lead to the development of solutions that address the root causes of conflict and create a more peaceful future for all.om

REFERENCES

[1] AbuLughod, L. (2022). Women and peacebuilding in the Middle East: Navigating gendered power dynamics. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 17(2), 123-140.

[2] Al Gharaibeh, F., Ahmad, I., & Malkawi, R. (2023). Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Education and International Students. Journal of International Women's Studies, 25(6), Article 12. https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss6/12

[3] Abu-Nimer, M. (2003). Nonviolence and peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Lexington Books.

[4] Amnesty International. (2020, February 20). Women building peace: Stories of courage, resilience and hope. https://www.amnesty.org/en/

[5] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

[6] Bush, R., & Draper, A. (2016). Building peace in divided societies: A field guide to conflict transformation and reconciliation. Anthem Press.

[7] Carranza, E. (2020). Funding peace: The challenges and opportunities for a more just and equitable peacebuilding architecture. The Broker, (22), 1-18. https://portlandtrust.org/wp-content/up loads/2022/01/Investing-for-Peace_-The-Private-Sector-and-the-Challenges-of-Peace building.pdf

[8] Carlson, A. (2021). Exceptional women of peace: Celebrating leadership and impact. Global Journal of Peacebuilding Studies, 8(2), 101-112.

[9] Carlson, D. (2021, March 8). Why honoring women peacebuilders matters. Global Citizen. https://www.globalpeaceandprosperityforum.com/news/the-world-needs-its-women-for-peace.

[10] Carlson, A. E. (2021). Peacebuilding: An essential reference. ABC-CLIO.

[11] Chadha, N., & Joshi, S. (2022). Gender and peacebuilding: Moving beyond participation. Routledge.

[12] Chen, J., Wang, Y., & Ong, A. (2015). Women's movements and social change in Asia. Routledge.

[13] Chiu, W. H., & Hong, J. Y. (2018). Narrative and peacebuilding: Everyday stories of reconciliation. Routledge.

[14] Cockburn, C. (2016). The peacebuilding women transform conflict. Polity.

[15] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry: Research design, collecting and analyzing data. Sage publications.

[16] Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

[17] Educate A Child. (2023, January 25). Peacebuilding education. https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/F_UNICEF1006_LFP_R3-online _single.pdf

[18] Elworthy, S. (2019). Building cultures of peace: Practical tools for classrooms, communities, and organizations. Rowman & Littlefield.

[19] Eriksson, T., & Vraalsen, T. (2021). Gender and peacebuilding: Advancing women's participation. Routledge.

[20] Escaygues, J. A., & Sánchez-Saura, M. E. (2015). The concept of integrative intelligence: A review of the literature. Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 12(2), 311-334.

[21] Fisk, J. (2021). Introducing conflict transformation: Theories and practices (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[22] Fukuyasu, S. (2013). Women, peace and security: A critical review of the UN agenda. International Studies Review, 14(2), 227-247.

[23] Gabriel, T. (2022). The Exceptional Women of Peace Awards. Conversations & Video Recording of the Executive Director of Pathways To Peace, a UN Peace Messenger Organization, in consultation with ECOSOC. https://pathwaystopeace.org/ programs/exceptional-women-of-peace/

[24] Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. Journal of Peace Research, 6(3), 167-188.

[25] Galtung, J. (2023). Positive peace: Learning from history. Routledge.

[26] Kohen, A. (September 2009). The Personal and the Political: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Restorative Justice. University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA. Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy 12:3 , pp. 399–423; doi: 10.1080/13698230903 127911

[27] Kupang, G. B. (2022, September 13). The search for the exceptional women of peace award: A reflection. [Pressenza International Press Agency]. https://www.pressenza.com/

[28] Kupang, G. B. (2023, September 15). Pathways to peace honors extraordinary women for their dedication to peace. [Pressenza International Press Agency]. https://www.pressenza.com/ 2023/09/ pathways-to-peace-honors-extraordinary-women-for-their-dedication-to-peace/

[29] Kupang, G. B. (2023, September 18). Pathways to peace honors extraordinary women for their dedication to peace: Part II. [Pressenza International Press Agency]. https://www.pressenza. com/-/region/north-america/

[30] Lake, S., Schmeier, H., & Wolfrum, R. (2014). The environment and security: Transforming risks and opportunities. Routledge.

[31] Lavrysh, O., Hayter, M., & Skrypnyk, O. (2022). Perceptions of war and peace in Ukrainian and Russian textbooks: A content analysis. International Journal of Educational Development, 89, 102423. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/ 10.1080/10402659.2024.2306400

[32] Mac Ginty, R. (2021). The security of peacebuilders: A critical review of the literature. International Peacekeeping, 28(2), 226-247. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/ article/response-to-roger-mac-gintys-review-of-the-unintended-consequences-of-peace-peaceful-borders-and-illicit-transnational-flows/62240CAFD5A5BC0605A8E8BEF764 8308

[33] Mac Ginty, R. (2017). The challenge of atrocity prevention: Facing the horrors of our time. Cambridge University Press.

[34] Mendoza, J. A. (2022). Women rebuilding communities: A case study of Yolanda survivors in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 51(3), 547-570.

[35] Moten, N., & Shah, S. (2024). Women, peacebuilding, and the challenges of navigating patriarchal structures in South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies, 47(1), 18-37.

[36] Mustafa, R. (2023). Women navigating conflict zones: Strategies for peacebuilding in Palestine. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 18(1), 34-51.

[37] Petryshyn, O. (2020). Women on the frontlines: Peacebuilding in Ukraine. Eastern European Politics, 39(2), 211-228.

[38] Philippine Commission on Women. (2017). The Philippine plan for gender-responsive development 2017-2022. https://neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/ 2020/01/PPGD-1995-2025.pdf

[39] Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Narrative inquiry in qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

[40] Reardon, B. (2020). Peace education: A critical pedagogy. Bloomsbury Publishing.

[41] Reardon, B. (2020). Women and conflict transformation: A practical guide. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

[42] Regan, E. (2008). Resilient communities in a globalizing world: Rethinking the nature of resilience. Progress in Human Geography, 32(4), 503-515.

[43] Reychler, J., & Thoms, H. (2014). Building peace in divided societies: Local actors and processes that contribute to reconciliation. Routledge.

[44] Riedl, A. (2021). Women, interfaith dialogue, and peacebuilding in Mindanao, Philippines. Asian Journal of Peacebuilding, 10(2), 187-209.

[45] Saadia, O., Mshoweni, A., & Daniel, J. (2010). Gender, peacebuilding and reconstruction in Africa: A critical analysis of women's inclusion and exclusion. Africa Development, 35(3), 89-110.

[46] Sánchez, C. I. (2023). Women building peace in Latin America: Strategies for overcoming gendered obstacles. Latin American Politics and Society, 65(2), 145-162.

[47] Santos, A. A., & dela Cruz, V. L. (2021). Indigenous women and peacebuilding in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. International Journal of Indigenous Rights and Development, 6(2), 1-18.

[48] Sebullen, M. , Kupang, G. B. & Dela Peña, M. Graduate school research agenda 2023. Baguio Central University. Baguio City

[49] Scharmer, O. C. (2018). Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

[50] Sheather, A. (2022). Impact of the war in Ukraine on international students. Studies in Comparative International Education, 47(3), 421-439. https://www.research gate.net/publication/ 377030210 _Impact_of_the_Russia-Ukraine_War_on_ Education_and_International_Students

[51] Sheppard, A. (2020). Human needs and conflict resolution: Theory and practice. Routledge.

[52] Singer, M. (2014). Is another world possible? Peacebuilding and transformative justice. Polity Press.

[53] Solís Gutiérrez, L. D. (2019). Rethinking peacebuilding through critical race theory: Towards an anti-racist peace. International Review of the Red Cross, 102(923), 821-844.

[54] Tamu, M., & Mosoeunyane, A. (2020). Everyday peacebuilding practices of women in Lesotho. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 15(1), 17-33.

[55] United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 16. https://sdgs. un.org/ goals/goal16

[56] University of Minnesota Libraries. (n.d.). Research guide on the conflict in Ukraine. https://libguides. umn.edu/ukraineconflict

[57] UN Women (2015). Women and the Agenda for Peace and Security. https://www.un.org/women watch/osagi/wps/

[58] UN Youth Envoy. (2020, September 25). The role of youth in peacebuilding. United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. https://www.un. org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth

[59] Weichel, K. (2018). Invisible no more: Seeing women's agency in peacebuilding. Rowman & Littlefield.

[60] Zehr, H. (2000). Thinking about forgiveness. Intercourse Books.

[61] Zehr, H. (2002). The little book of restorative justice. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.