

Women's Participation and Everyday Peace: A Challenge for Catholic Social Ethics

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Abstract: This article considers how to advance women's participation in peacebuilding, a major goal of the UN Women, Security and Peace (WPS) agenda. Catholic social teaching (CST) offers a compelling vision of human participation, but the tradition fails to meaningfully engage the diverse realities of women. We bring critical and feminist peace studies literature into conversation with CST to illuminate how CST's gendered and scalar biases can undermine the church's stated aspirations to equal participation. We argue that Catholic social ethics can more adequately address the needs of women peacebuilders by taking up the lens of "everyday peace," which illuminates the agency of marginalized persons and communities through attention to quotidian, mundane, and embodied realities, including care practices. We demonstrate the value of this lens through case studies of peacebuilding interventions by Caritas Uganda and the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre that promote women's participation in the Bidibidi refugee settlement in northwestern Uganda.

PARTICIPATION IS A SIGNIFICANT THEME IN BOTH CATHOLIC social teaching (CST) and the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Contestations over women's participation in peace leadership have shaped the WPS agenda and informed its implementation. In light of these debates, this article aims to demonstrate for peacebuilding practitioners and social ethicists how we might better understand and promote women's participation in peacebuilding.

This article is rooted in Catholic social teaching. The church's rich vision of participation offers a strong foundation for peacebuilding praxis. We argue, however, that magisterial documents at times limit the transformative potential of CST's participatory ethos. While strongly affirming participation in general, the tradition is more ambiguous on *women's* participation. CST documents tend to homogenize and essentialize women, resulting in a disjuncture between rhetoric and reality. CST's top-down theorizing of women's "nature" reduces the visibility and agency of women actually leading peacebuilding work.

Promoting meaningful participation requires social analysis that attends to human experience. With its genuine commitment to participation, Catholic social ethics should be alert to any discourses and material conditions that disempower women or cast their contributions to the margins.

Given CST's limited gender analysis, we engage literature on the WPS agenda from critical peace studies. This literature shares with CST a normative commitment to women's participation as a good. Critical and feminist scholars offer analytical tools for discerning and promoting women's participation in peacebuilding. We draw this literature into conversation with CST to illuminate how magisterial discourse on women can undermine the church's stated aspirations to equal participation.

We proceed by first exploring CST then critical peace literature on two intertwined topics, which we name "stereotypes" and "space." These frames aid us in analyzing *who* has agency for peacebuilding and *where* peacebuilding happens. Interrogating "stereotypes" and "space" in Catholic and WPS discourse illuminates how certain constructs, such as the public/private binary and hierarchical scales like global/local, can distort recognition of women's participation. In light of the harms resulting from stereotyped representations of women, we argue that Catholic social ethics should make use of the construct of "everyday peace." "The everyday" has been mobilized by peace theorists, including feminist and decolonial scholars, to illuminate the mundane and embodied ways that people foster peace in their daily lives. Attention to complex quotidian realities can aid Catholic social ethics in overcoming gendered and scalar distortions and so better support peacebuilding from marginalized persons and communities, including leadership from women. We advocate for "everyday peace" as a valuable lens for enacting CST's vision of genuine participation toward peace.

To demonstrate the value of the "everyday peace" lens for peacebuilding praxis, we present case studies from two Catholic organizations advancing everyday peace by promoting women's leadership. Caritas Uganda and the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre are each inspired by CST to serve refugees in the Bidibidi settlement in northwestern Uganda. Their experiences demonstrate the value of close attention to everyday lives and realities in a particular context as a starting point for enacting CST's vision of participation. We conclude with a brief analysis that proposes a trajectory for future study of everyday peace in Catholic social ethics.

PARTICIPATION IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Participation has emerged as a major theme of modern Catholic social teaching that offers a norm for peacebuilding praxis. The *Compendium*'s definition of participation alludes to a plurality of forms: participation is "expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs."¹ Participation is "a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good." It is "absolutely necessary to encourage participation above all of the most disadvantaged" (no. 189). Participation is implicated in several key themes of CST, including the common good and the option for the poor.

In particular, participation is "the characteristic implication of subsidiarity" (*Compendium*, no. 189). Benedict XVI's treatment of subsidiarity in *Caritas in Veritate* illuminates this link and related anthropological claims:

Subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because *it fosters freedom and participation* through assumption of responsibility. Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others. (no. 57, emphasis added)

In this theological anthropology, "reciprocity" is "the heart of what it is to be a human being" (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 57). The human person's capacity for participation, which can be realized as reciprocal gift, is rooted in human freedom. *Gaudium et Spes* similarly links participation to human dignity and freedom, stating that "freedom acquires new strength" when a person "takes on the manifold demands of human partnership, and commits himself to the service of the human community. Hence, the will to play one's role in common endeavors should be everywhere encouraged" (no. 31). The "aspiration to participation" is a "form" of the human person's "dignity and freedom" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 22).

These anthropological claims reflect a dynamic theology of God's creativity. Anna Rowlands presents the theological foundations of

¹ This article retains the original language of CST texts, which often use masculine language to purportedly represent humanity.

Catholic teaching on subsidiarity, wherein politics is “participation in the wider, deeper, transcendent divine governing, creating principle at work with the world, a power that acts to renew all things. Through grace the human community participates in this constant creating action through all spheres of life. . . . Given that God’s creating power is a present-tense activity, not merely a past event, the human person is both free to associate and has a duty to participate in a dynamic reality, as a co-conspirator in the constant renewal of creation.”² Participation is thus an expression of human freedom and fulfillment of a duty to co-creation with God.

In addition to being a duty, participation comes to be characterized in Catholic social teaching as a “right,” and the opposite of participation is named marginalization or exclusion. The tradition increasingly recognizes inequalities as barriers to human flourishing. As Todd Whitmore summarizes, in CST, “The primary problem with inequality is that it denies groups and persons the ability to participate in the life of the institutions that constitute civil society.” Calls for participation become so “frequent” in CST documents that “participation itself becomes the new norm guiding assessment of the health of the common good, that is, of whether groups and persons in fact have access to the conditions of flourishing.”³ The 1971 Synod of Bishops declared that “participation constitutes a right which is to be applied both in the economic and in the social and political field” (*Justice in the World*, no. 18). Participation is necessary to counter “the new industrial and technological order” that “favors the concentration of wealth, power and decision-making in the hands of a small public or private controlling group” (no. 18). The US Catholic bishops affirm the synod’s claim that participation is a right (*Economic Justice for All*, no. 35), and further characterize it as a matter of justice: “Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way” (no. 71). They diagnose poverty as not merely financial lack, but as “a denial of full participation in the economic, social, and political life of society and an inability to influence decisions that affect one’s life” (no. 187). Because “participation is an essential expression of the social nature of human beings and of their communitarian vocation,” the US bishops write, “patterns of exclusion” and marginalization—whether of individuals, small communities, or entire nations— “can be called

² Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (Bloomsbury, 2021), 226.

³ Todd David Whitmore, “Catholic Social Teaching: Starting with the Common Good,” in *Living the Catholic Social Tradition: Cases and Commentary*, ed. Kathleen Maas Weigert and Alexia K. Kelley (Bloomsbury, 2004), 69.

forms of social sin” (nos. 77–78). Therefore, “overcoming these patterns of exclusion and powerlessness [is] a most basic demand of justice” (no. 78).

In 2020, Pope Francis offered a catechetical series on Catholic social teaching in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ His reflection on subsidiarity illuminates some contemporary obstacles to participation toward the common good. Francis bemoans the fact that “many people cannot participate in the reconstruction of the common good because they are marginalized.” The status quo is unjust and contrary to Jesus’s teaching: “The largest financial companies are listened to more than the people or the ones who really move the economy. Multinational companies are listened to more than social movements . . . the powerful are listened to more than the weak, and this is not the way, it is not the human way, it is not the way Jesus taught us, it is not implementing the principle of subsidiarity!” Francis’s recommendations for participation are salient for peacebuilding efforts:

When a project is launched that directly or indirectly touches certain social groups, these groups cannot be left out from participating—for example: “What do you do?” — “I go to work with the poor,” — “Beautiful. And what do you do?” — “I teach the poor, I tell the poor what they have to do.” No, this doesn’t work. The first step is to allow the poor to tell you how they live, what they need: Let everyone speak! And this is how the principle of subsidiarity works. We cannot leave the people out of participation; their wisdom, the wisdom of humbler groups cannot be set aside.

Against injustices and “concentration[s] of huge economic and geopolitical interests” that restrict the voices of the marginalized, Francis calls for an appreciation of participation as mutual enrichment: “Let us build a future where the local and global dimensions mutually enrich each other—everyone can contribute . . . where the beauty and the wealth of smaller groups, even those that are discarded, might flourish—because beauty is there too.”⁵ In sum, participation in Catholic social thought is a right and a duty expressive of human freedom and of a plurality of approaches to social life. Participatory peacebuilding can draw forth the “beauty” and contributions of all, particularly those most affected by violence, poverty, and injustice. We now turn to discuss two lenses for exploring Catholic social

⁴ Pope Francis, “General Audience: Catechesis ‘Healing the World’: 8. Subsidiarity and Virtue of Hope,” September 23, 2020, vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200923_udienza-generale.html.

⁵ Pope Francis, “General Audience: Catechesis ‘Healing the World’: 8. Subsidiarity and Virtue of Hope.”

teaching that point toward ambiguities in women's participation in peacebuilding: "stereotypes" and "space," in turn.

Stereotypes in CST

We find an ambiguous legacy in CST: a strong affirmation of the norm of participation as applying to women, but also an anxiety about the alignment of women's participation with their purported "nature." Possibilities for women's participation are negotiated in light of a perceived public/private dichotomy. From the Vatican II era forward, the church affirms women's participation in public life.⁶ Documents highlight the awareness and claims of women themselves. In *Pacem in Terris*, for example, John XXIII remarks that "the part that women are now playing in political life is everywhere evident." He notes that "women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons" (no. 41). Here we have a recognition of women's subjectivity and the affordance of human rights and duties to women in particular. *Gaudium et Spes* also highlights women's advocacy: "Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves an equity with men before the law and in fact" (no. 9).⁷

Affirmations of women's participation, however, are typically qualified as distinct from human participation generally. Anne Patrick notes that *Gaudium et Spes* offers inconsistent treatments of "nature": "When the document speaks of human nature in general, it stresses the element of mystery, the sense that God alone can supply the full answer to the question which each person is to oneself. When *GS* speaks of woman's nature, however, it conveys a sense of fixity."⁸ For example, *Gaudium et Spes* reflects on women's work that "it is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature" (no. 60). Patrick argues that "official Catholicism has not

⁶ The earliest texts in modern CST, including *Rerum Novarum*, did not endorse women's participation in political and economic life. For a review of modern CST on women, see Meghan J. Clark, "Equal Dignity and Agency: Catholic Social Teaching and The Lives of Women," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2025): 109–28, doi.org/org/10.1177/00211400251325848.

⁷ Anne Patrick comments, "What amazes a feminist reader of this sentence is the implicit claim that women have achieved a fair situation in some parts of the world. The claim is not documented, and indeed it would be impossible to defend, given the actual status of women worldwide." Anne E. Patrick, "Toward Renewing the Life and Culture of Fallen Man: *Gaudium et Spes* as Catalyst for Catholic Feminist Theology," in *On Being Unfinished: Collected Writings*, ed. Susan Perry (Orbis, 2017), 30–31.

⁸ Patrick, "Toward Renewing the Life and Culture of Fallen Man," 29.

applied teachings about the dynamic and mysterious quality of 'human nature' so fully to female forms of that nature as to male."⁹

Paul VI's writings reiterate the concern for participation that befits women's purported nature. He qualifies any affirmation of women's "equality": "We do not have in mind that false equality which would deny the distinction with woman's proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society." Any legislative developments should "be directed to protecting her proper vocation and at the same time recognizing her independence as a person, and her equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 13). In sum, these early texts link women's participation to equality and to human rights, while evincing anxiety about the "proper" role and vocation of "woman."

The tension between equality and difference is deepened in John Paul II's papacy. While strongly affirming women's equality, John Paul II develops a defense of sexual difference as an ontological binary underlying gendered social roles (*Mulieres Dignitatem*). Meghan Clark argues that John Paul II "embodied" the "cognitive dissonance" of modern CST's treatment of women. Clark locates the roots of this dissonance in John Paul II's theology of complementarity which posits that "by nature," men are active while women are receptive and self-giving.¹⁰ In Christine Gudorf's view, "Like his predecessors, John Paul prefers the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:15, that women are saved through motherhood, to Jesus' teaching that women will be saved and venerated not through their maternity but for their participation in the larger project of the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:27–28, Mark 3:31–25)."¹¹

Clark argues that CST tends to romanticize women, treating them as either uniquely vulnerable or as exemplars of virtue with a superheroic capacity for self-giving. She notes that women's vulnerability is often naturalized as linked to "femininity"—rather than recognizing the "social sins" that in fact render women vulnerable to harm. "The fullness of [women's] lived realities" are "flattened" through these stereotypical portrayals, with consequences for women's participation. CST shows "a shifting dynamic in which the tradition recognizes the ways women are marginalized and their basic rights ignored, while also setting them up almost as having a superhuman role within both their family and wider community. Despite its insistence on everyone's right to participate in society, there is a

⁹ Patrick, "Toward Renewing the Life and Culture of Fallen Man," 29–30.

¹⁰ Clark, "Equal Dignity and Agency," 115.

¹¹ Christine E. Gudorf, "Encountering the Other: The Modern Papacy on Women," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick (Paulist, 1996), 70.

persistent asterisk when it comes to women—either as a caveat or as a romanticization—concerning women’s nature.”¹² Rather than romantic essentialism that restricts women’s contributions, Clark desires for women what Pope Francis hopes for the poor: to “become dignified agents of their own destiny.”¹³

Church texts that explicitly link women with *peace* demonstrate these same problematic tropes that romanticize women while laying tremendous responsibilities at their feet. A few examples may suffice. At the close of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI offers an address to women. He seemingly tasks women with the responsibility for all human life, and particularly, for saving humanity from men’s violence:

The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. . . . women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling. . . . Reconcile men with life and above all, we beseech you, watch carefully over the future of our race. Hold back the hand of man who, in a moment of folly, might attempt to destroy human civilization. . . . Women of the entire universe . . . you to whom life is entrusted at this grave moment in history, it is for you to save the peace of the world.¹⁴

In 2022, in a speech to women, Pope Francis quotes Paul VI’s address and commends its “prophetic force.” Francis critiques the “old logic of power” on display in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. He tells the women present: “Women can change the system if they succeed, so to speak, in converting power from the logic of domination to that of service, to that of care.” He claims that “women are the protagonists of this change of direction, of this conversion. As long as they are not conformed to the prevailing system of power. As long as they maintain their identity as women.”¹⁵

Like Paul VI, Francis relies on an essentialized and romanticized view of women as uniquely capable of bringing about peace. Women are tasked with changing violent systems while their very womanhood

¹² Clark, “Equal Dignity and Agency,” 115.

¹³ Clark, “Equal Dignity and Agency,” 111, 116.

¹⁴ Pope Paul VI, “Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Address of Pope Paul VI to Women,” December 8, 1965, vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651208_epilogo-concilio-donne.html.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, “Discorso Ai Partecipanti all’Incontro Promosso dal Centro Femminile Italiano,” March 24, 2022, vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2022/march/documents/20220324-centro-femminile-italiano.html.

is characterized as at risk of corruption. Francis goes on to affirm women's strength, while seemingly denigrating men:

A woman's strength is great. It's great! There's a saying—more than a saying, it's a reflection: if a young man becomes a widower, he's unlikely to make it on his own. A man can't tolerate such great loneliness. If a woman becomes a widow, she makes it: she supports the family, she supports everything. Explain the difference, where is it? The feminine genius: that's the feminine genius.¹⁶

Despite criticism, Catholic teaching continues to ground social responsibilities in sexual difference. As the above quotations demonstrate, gendered stereotypes tend toward incoherence—as, for example, masculinity is implicitly aligned with dominance, violence, and weakness. Modern CST simultaneously makes rhetorical moves to *restrict* women's participation—to what is “proper,” aligned with “nature,” and uncorrupted by masculinity—and to dramatically *expand* women's responsibility for all of humanity.

Critically, representations of women in official teachings fail to align with women's experiences as leaders committed to social action. Lisa Sowle Cahill offers a case study of Indigenous women's leadership in resisting destructive mining projects in the Peruvian Amazon and so demonstrates limits of CST on women's participation. She highlights disconnects between women's realities and CST's stereotyped representations: “Just as in situations of civil conflict and war, it is often women who are most active in energizing solutions to climate threats at the grassroots level,” but, “the gender symbolism of [*Laudato Si'*] places women in a dependent situation of victimization, while suggesting that women can be defined by familial, especially maternal, roles.”¹⁷ In reality:

Despite cultural and ecclesial gender barriers, women are leaders in mining resistance movements. . . . When documents of Catholic social teaching continue to reiterate traditional stereotypes of women's nature and roles, while ostensibly aiming to “respect” and “protect” women, they fail to empower women's environmental agency and women's ability to take initiative in respecting and protecting “our common home.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Pope Francis, “Discorso Ai Partecipanti.”

¹⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Social Justice and the Common Good: Improving the Catholic Social Teaching Framework,” in *Ethical Challenges in Global Public Health Climate Change, Pollution, and the Health of the Poor*, ed. Philip J. Landrigan and Andrea Vicini, SJ, Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church 1 (Pickwick, 2021), 113.

¹⁸ Cahill, “Social Justice and the Common Good,” 113–14.

She similarly finds that Francis's *Querida Amazonia* "undercut[s] women's full participation": "Women's positions and service in the Church should be respected, Francis says, but our gifts are 'simple and straightforward' (more so than men's, apparently). Women's work is approved when it 'reflects their [simple] womanhood.' This criterion does not do justice to what women are actually doing to combat environmental destruction, as scientists, theologians, political representatives, NGOs officials, and community activists."¹⁹ In modern CST, "womanhood," "femininity," and "the feminine genius" symbolize restrictions on women's participation and so stand in tension with affirmations of equality and dignity. Leo XIV's first encyclical may indicate progress towards honoring women's varied gifts and experiences. Rather than celebrating "femininity" or stereotyped traits, Leo names and affirms "courageous and generous women . . . whose commitment has contributed to making history more humane" (*Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 124). The stakes of CST's gendered discourse are high, with a world greatly in need of peacebuilding.

Space in CST

We turn now to consider *space* in relation to peacebuilding and participation in Catholic social teaching. We follow Hudson and Madsen in defining "space" broadly as "an analytical category to capture the 'immaterial location' where meaning is made."²⁰ In political geography, some spaces are *scales*. A scale is "a territorial space, existing in a hierarchical relationship with other territorial spaces, in which social, political and economic relations are organized and contested."²¹ The scales "global" and "local," for example, are ubiquitous in peace studies scholarship. With our attention to space, we seek to de-naturalize spatial labels (such as "grassroots") in order to better understand and interrogate barriers to participation in lived experience. Spaces are not natural but are "produced through strategic agency and social and political contestation."²² With this important caveat, we use spatial language throughout this article as a tool for redirecting attention to women's peacebuilding work.

¹⁹ Cahill, "Social Justice and the Common Good," 114.

²⁰ Heidi Hudson and Diana Højlund Madsen, "The Politics of Space and Relationality: Localization and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Uganda," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 18, no. 3 (2024): 349, doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2023.2295367.

²¹ Shahar Hameiri, Caroline Hughes, and Fabio Scarpello, *International Intervention and Local Politics: Fragmented States and the Politics of Scale* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 69, doi.org/10.1017/9781108242141.

²² Hameiri, Hughes, and Scarpello, *International Intervention and Local Politics*, 69.

Despite the participatory ethos of CST and the value placed on small organizations, it tends to miss the actual experiences and contributions of grassroots-level actors. CST's own commitment to subsidiarity and solidarity urges greater attention to grassroots efforts for peace. Todd Whitmore and Theodora Hawksley each discuss a spatial gap that limits the transformative potential of Catholic social teaching. Whitmore notes that CST focuses on institutions and states, so "while there is much discussion on the importance of intermediate associations, the documents describe the associations at a level of abstraction that leaves any account of their internal aims and working thin at best." He credits CST documents' institutional focus to their "theological underpinnings," namely, rootedness in "a strong doctrine of creation that stresses the activity of the First Person of the Trinity—God the Father—in bringing into being and sustaining the created order." CST's focus on order, Whitmore argues, "by itself, provides little ground for the kind of personal risk and sacrifice required in many instances of peacebuilding. For that, we need greater development of the Second Person—Jesus Christ—and his activity of redemption in the face of a world that is not merely imbalanced or out of order but threatening."²³ Whitmore advocates for "a theology of presence and personal solidarity with the victim of violence, based on the example of Jesus Christ," and finds resources for such a theology in the Christmas addresses of Pius XII and in John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.²⁴ Whitmore thus commends a christological solidarity as holding the possibility of moving us beyond a limited and limiting focus on institutional reform as a means for social change.²⁵

Whitmore's attention to the risk and personal commitment entailed in peacebuilding is welcome, though this may lend itself to a focus on heroic individuals and so miss the work of small organizations. Building on Whitmore's insights, Hawksley draws CST's lacuna into focus with scalar language. She characterizes CST as replicating a "binocular focus on the micro and macro levels: on personal conversion, on the one hand, and the structural reform of international institutions, on the other." In CST, "midlevel peacebuilding initiatives and the experience of those who engage in them are scarcely in view."

²³ Todd D. Whitmore, "Peacebuilding and Its Challenging Partners: Justice, Human Rights, Development, and Solidarity," in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Orbis Books, 2010), 178–79.

²⁴ Whitmore, "Peacebuilding and Its Challenging Partners" 157.

²⁵ Whitmore's chapter was published prior to Francis's papacy. Meghan Clark has since argued that Francis advanced christological aspects of solidarity. See Meghan J. Clark, "Pope Francis and the Christological Dimensions of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 102–122, doi.org/10.1177/0040563918819818.

In this, CST diverges from the emphasis of “contemporary strategic peacebuilding,” which “highlights the importance of midlevel and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and their capacity to initiate, cultivate, and sustain conflict transformation on a local level.”²⁶ She argues that attention to this “midlevel” of peacebuilding, including the work of “parishes, grassroots peace organizations, and religious orders,” is both practically and theologically valuable for the church. Midlevel initiatives “are where Church teaching becomes practice. . . . Theological attention to the midlevel at which the pursuit of peace is worked out, with much effort and personal cost, would go a long way to making Catholic teaching more *livable*.”²⁷ Like Whitmore, Hawksley advocates for developing christological dimensions of solidarity. She suggests that resources for this development already exist in experiences of Catholic peacebuilders.

We argue that CST’s spatial biases have especially gendered consequences. CST’s state-centric and institutional focus means that it may miss agency exercised outside of institutions and “formal” governance structures—and so of many women who operate in “informal” spaces. The missing midlevel space identified by Hawksley includes the work of many women-led organizations. As the next section on women’s participation and WPS will make clear, women’s contributions are elided when so-called intermediate, local, or grassroots organizations are neglected. Attention to space thus illuminates a gendered distortion in CST. The church must see and support peacebuilding beyond national actors and international institutions to achieve its own participatory vision.

PARTICIPATION IN THE WPS AGENDA

The WPS agenda consists of 10 Security Council Resolutions to date, starting with the original UNSCR 1325, passed in 2000. The WPS agenda can be fruitfully conceived of as a “policy ecosystem,” that is, a diverse and fluid “field of activities, actors, and artifacts.”²⁸ This frame allows for analysis beyond formal written policies, in order to attend to “what is around and behind policy texts.”²⁹ A significant body of literature explores the WPS in this holistic sense, tracing its contestations, enactments, and (re)productions in varied spaces and

²⁶ Theodora Hawksley, *Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 74, 11.

²⁷ Hawksley, *Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching*, 75.

²⁸ Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (Columbia University Press, 2024), 56.

²⁹ Kirby and Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace*, 59.

relationships. In this article, we trace the concept of “participation” as it moves within this ecosystem.

Participation is broadly recognized as central to the WPS agenda. The original UNSCR 1325 stresses “the importance of [women’s] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”³⁰ Participation is commonly glossed as one of the agenda’s four “pillars,” along with prevention, protection, and relief and recovery. Yet its meaning is far from straightforward. There are “long-running disputes among states over the reach and content of the principle” of women’s participation.³¹ The notion of participation is a significant site of contestation, as WPS actors struggle over how to conceptualize and enact progress towards the greater participation of women in peace and security.

Over the twenty-five years of the WPS agenda, policy language has evolved alongside the arguments intended to bolster women’s participation.³² Paffenholz notes that early claims for the value of women’s participation were typically normative and argued on the basis of women’s right to political participation. But after “fifteen years of rights-based advocacy [had] not led to substantial changes” in practice, the WPS frame and research agenda shifted to argue from the *effectiveness* of women’s contributions.³³ This focus on effectiveness carried with it a discursive shift to “meaningful” participation.³⁴ Paffenholz characterizes this change as a rhetorical move from “counting women” to “making women count.”³⁵ While affirming the

³⁰ United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1325 (2000),” UN Doc S/RES/1325, October 31, 2000, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n00/720/18/pdf/n0072018.pdf.

³¹ Kirby and Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace*, 44.

³² O’Rourke identifies five types of participation in the WPS agenda: participation as the presence of role models, as representation, as deliberation, as inclusion, and as expertise. Catherine O’Rourke, “‘Walk[Ing] the Halls of Power’? Understanding Women’s Participation in International Peace and Security,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 15, no. 1 (2014), [austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbJIL/2014/4.pdf](https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbJIL/2014/4.pdf).

³³ As one oft-cited example, Krause, Krause, and Bränfors find that women’s participation in peace negotiations increases the quality and durability of peace. They theorize this impact results from women signatories’ links to women’s civil society groups. Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Piia Bränfors, “Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace,” *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (2018): 985–1016, doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386.

³⁴ For example, the most recent resolution in the WPS agenda calls for the “full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes.” United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2493 (2019),” UN Doc S/RES/2493, October 29, 2019, https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforpeace/files/unsr_2493_2019_on_wps_english.pdf.

³⁵ Thania Paffenholz, “What Works in Participation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, ed. Sara Ellen Davies and Jacqui True, Oxford

move to emphasize women's substantive and influential participation, Paffenholz argues that this discursive shift is not yet reflected in practice.

Participation Against Stereotypes

In WPS literature, critiques of the thinness of participation rhetoric are often accompanied by concerns about stereotypes that undercut women's agency. The WPS agenda portrays women simultaneously as victims in need of protection and as naturally equipped to foster peace. For Kirby and Shepherd, "the seeming clash of *vulnerability* and *agency*" is a "constitutive paradox" of the WPS agenda. They note that "participants in the WPS circuit have emphasized the horizon of rights, knowledge, and leadership that positions women as the impetus for peace and the engine of change, but have also relied on women's marginality, violation, and hurt to make the case for the agenda." As this tension plays out, "'protection' measures emerge in ways that displace and even suppress the grander potentialities of 'participation.'" ³⁶

In the initial UNSCR 1325, Shepherd finds "logics of identity that characterized women as fragile, passive and in need of protection and constructions of security that locate the responsibility for providing that protection firmly in the hands of elite political actors in the international system."³⁷ Tracing subsequent resolutions, Shepherd identifies a shift from women as "objects or instruments of security policy" to women as "actors." She warns, though, against conflating activity and agency. If women's mere presence is assumed to be a peacebuilding force, women become constructed "as superheroines, agents of their own salvation."³⁸ In the UNSCRs, Matfess notes, women's participation—understood as mere presence—"is portrayed as a panacea to a variety of social ills."³⁹ Hudson similarly critiques the UN's "uncritical, utopian assumptions that a female presence will result in positive change." She argues that the UN's attempts to

Handbooks Online Political Science (Oxford University Press, 2018), 148–49, doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190638276.001.0001.

³⁶ Kirby and Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace*, 216–17.

³⁷ Laura J. Shepherd, "Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 4 (2011): 506, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611659.

³⁸ Shepherd, "Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es," 511–12.

³⁹ Hilary Matfess (she/her), "Convergence and Contestation: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Central Mali," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 27, no. 2 (2025): 412, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2025.2477528.

promote even a “thin version” of women’s agency are undercut by WPS interpretations that homogenize and essentialize women.⁴⁰

Discursive constructions of women’s participation do not merely live in policy documents but are felt in women’s experiences of (dis)empowerment. Parry, Komane, and Williams find that the experiences of African women mediators reflect the dual and paradoxical positioning of women in relation to violence, as “society expected them to be both victims of conflict and peacebuilders.” Interviewees reported that “the WPS agenda used stereotypical gender roles to make women ‘naturally’ responsible as peacebuilders,” while “these same restrictive gender norms limited their access to and participation in [peace] processes.” Parry, Komane, and Williams argue that through their exercise of agency toward peace, though, the women subverted gendered norms. They advocate for the necessity of women’s “active, agentive participation in peacebuilding.”⁴¹

In an ethnographic study of Kenyan women, Mueller-Hirth finds that women themselves link their peacebuilding to gendered social roles. The women’s accounts highlight maternity and experiences of victimization, reflecting gendered stereotypes while also representing their experiences as they enact “critical peacebuilding agency, in the sense of improving the social conditions of everyday life.” Mueller-Hirth advocates for understanding “how women can and do exercise peacebuilding agency in their specific (and gendered) cultural and social contexts.” Women can and do develop valuable skills for peacebuilding through gendered social roles and stereotypically feminine experiences, and women’s peacebuilding practices should “not be dismissed outright as essentializing or stifling gender equality.” This is not to be uncritical of how gender shapes women’s perceived responsibilities for coping with violence. Mueller-Hirth identifies “duties that disproportionately fall to women, largely in the absence of men: to raise their children to be peace-loving, to cope with ongoing violence and poverty, and to be actively engaged in mediating conflict and building peace.” She argues that “women’s agency in communities is at once empowered and constrained by this gendered responsibility for peace.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Heidi Hudson, “A Double-Edged Sword of Peace? Reflections on the Tension Between Representation and Protection in Gendering Liberal Peacebuilding,” *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4 (2012): 450, doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2012.709753.

⁴¹ Bianca Rochelle Parry (she/her), Kgomotso Komane (she/her), and Tyne Williams (she/her), “Negotiating Gender Role Expectations: Understanding the Gendered Experiences of Women Mediators in Africa,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 28, no. 1 (2026): 157, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2025.2604687.

⁴² Natascha Mueller-Hirth, “Women’s Experiences of Peacebuilding in Violence-Affected Communities in Kenya,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2019): 172–174, doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1509701.

Gendered constructions, including the binaries public/private and formal/informal, shape whether and how women's contributions to peace are perceived. For Olaitan, underappreciated ways that African women exercise agency challenge the women-as-victims narrative. She critiques a liberal dichotomy between formal and informal peace practices, through which liberal peacebuilding tends to exclude indigenous practices. Women's underrepresentation in peacebuilding is in part due to the invisibility of the practices they do engage in.⁴³ Matfess similarly argues that "the focus on public, formal, and male-coded forms of participation has obscured important ways in which women contribute to peace and security matters." She discusses women's contributions in Mali to assert the "importance of considering the private sphere—and especially the home—as an important venue in which the WPS agenda is contested, implemented, and reproduced." Matfess argues for confronting "the ethical and operational implications of the diffusion of a narrative that prioritizes women's participation in traditionally male spaces as the 'correct' form of participation, to the detriment of considering how women frequently exercise influence."⁴⁴

Women's participation can be better accounted for when our sense of what constitutes peacebuilding practice is broadened. This could mean "redefining what constitutes a peace table," that is, looking beyond formal processes like high-level dialogues, to recognize how women build peace and sustain communities.⁴⁵ We argue for greater attention to the purportedly "informal" and "private" realms to better recognize the overlooked ways in which many women already foster peace, and for adopting a critical view of gendered stereotypes to better discern restrictions on women's leadership.

⁴³ Zainab Olaitan, "Feminist Rethinking of the Representation of African Women in Peacebuilding: A Theoretical Analysis," *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development* 12, no. 1 (2023): 185–207, doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2023/v12n1a9.

⁴⁴ Matfess, "Convergence and Contestation," 403, 401, 418. See also Dipti Tamang (she/her/hers), "Rethinking 'Participation' in Women, Peace and Security Discourses: Engaging With 'Non-Participant' Women's Movements in the Eastern Borderlands of India," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (2020): 497, 485, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1803098.

⁴⁵ Helen Kezie-Nwoha, "Feminist Peace and Security in Africa," *Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peace Building: A Collection of Essays* (Oxfam, 2020), 30, doi.org/10.21201/2020.6447.

Participation Across Space

Spatial analysis reminds us that “peace takes place some *where* and is always connected to other *wheres*.”⁴⁶ In debates on the WPS agenda, the above-discussed concerns about stereotypes are entangled with questions about *scales*. As noted, scales are spaces understood to exist in hierarchical relationships. A common scalar move is, for example, to differentiate “the global” and “the local.” “The local” is a critically important but “nebulous” concept linked with women’s participation in the WPS agenda.⁴⁷ Some of the literature on the “localization” of the WPS agenda is explicitly situated within the trajectory of the so-called “local turn” in peace studies.

To contextualize the relevance of spatiality for WPS, we briefly discuss the import of the local turn for peacebuilding. The local turn aims to shift attention to the agency and diverse resources of local communities.⁴⁸ This trajectory developed in opposition to liberal peacebuilding theory.⁴⁹ The “liberal peace” assumed that Western models of democratic governance and neoliberal market economics should be universalized, and that these institutions would necessarily advance peace, understood negatively as the absence of war. This ideology is instantiated in international institutions, including the UN and World Bank, and underlies international military and development interventions. Against liberal theory, the local turn aims to situate peacebuilding authority with those most affected by conflict and violence. “The local” is thus “a shorthand for those who are on the receiving end of applications of overwhelming concentrations of military might and economic resources, and whose voices are least likely to be heard.” The local is not a particular place but “a lived experience that connects different spatial and temporal points and

⁴⁶ Claske Dijkema, Priscyll Anctil Avoine, and Sara Koopman, “Making Space for Peace in Contexts of ‘Non-War’ Violence: Challenging War-Peace Binaries Through Feminist, Spatio-Temporal, and Decolonial Approaches,” *Geopolitics* 29, no. 5 (2024): 1515, doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2379316.

⁴⁷ Columba Achilleos-Sarll (she/her/hers) and Yasmin Chilmeran (she/her/hers), “Interrogating the ‘Local’ in Women, Peace and Security: Reflections on Research On and In the UK and Iraq,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (2020): 596, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1803097.

⁴⁸ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–83, doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.800750.

⁴⁹ Liberal peace theory draws on Immanuel Kant, particularly his 1795 essay “Perpetual Peace.” For a translation of Kant’s thesis into contemporary liberal policy, see Michael W. Doyle, “Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace,” *The American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005): 463–66, doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051798.

networks of individuals through human agency.”⁵⁰ The local turn was in part influenced by John Paul Lederach’s peacebuilding theory and praxis, which aims to center grassroots actors.⁵¹ “The local” is not an uncontested concept, though, and the local turn has been critiqued and advanced by critical scholars, including those writing from feminist and decolonial commitments.

Advocacy for “localization” has migrated from critical scholarship to liberal institutions. International interventions are now commonly justified as promoting “local participation” or “local ownership.” Suffla, Malherbe, and Seedat argue that when liberal peacebuilding focuses on participation, these aims “rarely materialize and are usually conceived of in politically and metaphysically hollow ways that evoke concern for people’s everyday lives only to keep intact local hierarchies.”⁵² Richmond, a proponent of the local turn, argues that “participation” and “local ownership” have become “buzzwords” used to legitimate paternalistic international intervention. In Richmond’s view, the language of “participation” is thin, indicating merely local compliance with agendas and regimes owned by international actors.⁵³ Basini and Ryan apply Richmond’s frame to argue that WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) are ineffective means to the goal of local ownership. Local ownership “allows local actors to exercise meaningful choice, expressed through local understandings of legitimacy, and to exercise the full depth and breadth of their capacity and agency.”⁵⁴ Sierra Leone’s and Liberia’s NAP processes demonstrate that participation alone does not enable the achievement of ownership. From their study of NAPs in the Western Balkans and North Africa, della Valle and Strazzari agree with Basini and Ryan’s conclusion about the ineffectiveness of NAPs. They argue that international narratives that promote militarism and essentialized images of women-as-victims “do not fit the reality of women in our [study], nor

⁵⁰ Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal, and Isabell Schierenbeck, “The Struggle Versus the Song—The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: An Introduction,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 818, 821, doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1029907.

⁵¹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (US Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

⁵² Shahnaaz Suffla, Nick Malherbe, and Mohamed Seedat, “Recovering the Everyday Within and for Decolonial Peacebuilding Through Politico-Affective Space,” in *Researching Peace, Conflict, and Power in the Field*, ed. Yasemin Gülsüm Acar, Sigrun Marie Moss, and Özden Melis Uluğ (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 346, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44113-5_18.

⁵³ Oliver P. Richmond, “Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding,” *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 4 (2012): 354, doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2012.697650.

⁵⁴ Helen Basini and Caitlin Ryan, “National Action Plans as an Obstacle to Meaningful Local Ownership of UNSCR 1325 in Liberia and Sierra Leone,” *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 3 (2016): 394–395, doi.org/10.1177/0192512116636121.

do they incorporate their diverse voices and forms of agency." The nations influenced by the international WPS "paradigm" have "failed to recognize women's everyday resistance as a valid exercise of political power, thereby narrowing the definition of participation in their NAPs."⁵⁵ They advocate instead for a critical and contextualized local-level focus on participation.

Attention to scalar power dynamics often intersects with critiques of gendered constructions of women and of local communities. In her study of WPS NAPs, for example, Martin de Almagro critiques constructions of "the woman victim who needs to be empowered to become a woman participant." She finds that NAPs "function to frame the woman participant as a target of intervention and fabrication, rather than as the agent of societal transformation."⁵⁶ Against top-down and restrictive constructions of gendered roles, Shepherd advocates for "a translocal, multiperspectival politics" and the refusal "to effect arbitrary and ultimately regressive closure on what 'women' might be, do or want in the field of gender and security."⁵⁷

Localization, Leclerc argues, is a "spatial politics, deciding whose voices are amplified and which geographies are legitimized."⁵⁸ One localization strategy in WPS has been Localization Action Plans (LAPs), which engage subnational actors to contextualize the WPS agenda. Ideally, this process engages diverse and inclusive coalitions in recognition that women hold varied intersectional identities, including differences of race and ethnicity. Uganda's LAPs have developed in collaboration with the Coalition for Action on Resolution 1325 (CoACT), an alliance of women's organizations promoting the WPS agenda. LAPs may treat the local as "generative" spaces that may diverge from visions of WPS "from the Global North, or more specifically from the Security Council, with its prior assumptions about what matters in pursuit of security and whose security matters."⁵⁹

Chilmeran takes a "politics of scale" approach to consider "the spatial nature of women's participation." Global, national, and local

⁵⁵ Clara della Valle and Francesco Strazzari, "Grasping Local Participation: The Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Western Balkans and North Africa," *Global Society* 37, no. 4 (2023): 541, doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2022.2153330.

⁵⁶ Maria Martin de Almagro, "Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace and Security," *Global Society* 32, no. 4 (2018): 402, 399–400, doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2017.1380610.

⁵⁷ Shepherd, "Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es," 516.

⁵⁸ Katrina Leclerc, "Localising Women, Peace, and Security: Community Agency and Ownership Beyond National Policies," *Development in Practice* 36, no. 6 (2025): 1055, doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2025.2565609.

⁵⁹ Kirby and Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace*, 173–174.

scales have a “relational, nested and political nature,” and each scale “(re)produces exclusions and opportunities for participation.” For example, women may “use the WPS agenda, its frameworks or its events to highlight gendered insecurity, to hold governments accountable, to organize their domestic and local strategies and efforts, and access funding,” while exclusions “allow some women access to spaces and policy-making conversations (and national leadership), while leaving some women out.” LAPs, she finds, may create opportunities for women actors who are excluded at a national level.⁶⁰ Yet a construction of the “local woman as an essentialized peacebuilder” is a “double-edged sword,” creating some genuine openings for women’s participation while simultaneously limiting their contributions by “placing discursive and utilitarian limits of her intended impact built on assumptions about the local and its distance from national level politics and conflicts.”⁶¹ Chilmeran’s studies underscore “the political and agential nature of women’s participation within and across” scales.⁶²

As this literature review has demonstrated, stereotypes and space are entangled and salient in recognizing and promoting women’s participation in peacebuilding. With these critical interventions in mind, we turn to consider a frame with promise for Catholic social teaching-inspired peacebuilding: the everyday.

EVERYDAY PEACE

With the local turn, peace scholarship has become increasingly attentive to “the everyday.” “The local” is limited by its perceived position at the bottom of a hierarchy in relation to the global and national, and the notion of “the local” has already been co-opted for liberal interventions. Unlike “the local,” “the everyday” calls attention to grassroots space without implying a hierarchical geographic scale. The everyday refers to “the familiar and dynamic experiences that inform people’s quotidian lives.”⁶³ The everyday is not a particular static space, but is instead characterized by motion, interaction, and

⁶⁰ Yasmin Chilmeran, “Women, Peace and Security Across Scales: Exclusions and Opportunities in Iraq’s WPS Engagements,” *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (2022): 764, 748, 753, doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab211.

⁶¹ Yasmin Chilmeran, “Constructing the Local Woman Peacebuilder in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Iraqi Women’s Participation in Local Peacebuilding Programmes,” *International Political Science Review* 45, no. 5 (2024): 613, 620, doi.org/10.1177/01925121241259019.

⁶² Chilmeran, “Women, Peace and Security Across Scales,” 750.

⁶³ Sarah Day, Nick Malherbe, Shahnaaz Suffla, and Mohamed Seedat, “Building Decolonial Peace into the Everyday: A Feminist Intervention,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 18, no. 4 (2024): 443, doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2023.2241754.

participation in varied spaces and relations. The everyday draws into view mundane and embodied experiences, including practices of care.

With the lens of the everyday, peace can be understood as the “daily process of caring for humans and non-human beings, of refusing and resisting violence, which involves all of us, and is experienced through relationships and bodies.”⁶⁴ “Everyday peace” scholarship is interdisciplinary and greatly indebted to feminist theorizing on the everyday. Everyday peace draws into view the agency and activity of actors typically resigned to the margins of scholarship and practice.⁶⁵ The study of everyday peace is epistemically unsettling, as “it is to embrace human experiences not just as objects of study but more fundamentally as sources of knowingness and political change.”⁶⁶ A focus on everyday peace necessitates taking experience, particularity, and embodiment seriously.

Suffla, Malherbe, and Seedat argue for the everyday as central to decolonial peacebuilding and the exercise of agency. The everyday is “a socially situated, collective, fluid and negotiated set of constructs” that prompts attention to “habitual, embodied, and invisibilized ways of knowing and being, as well as the broader social systems in which [the everyday] is embedded.”⁶⁷ In practice, decolonial peacebuilding prioritizes “the primacy of local actors’ constructions and enactments of peace, participatory and situated rather than top-down and universalized approaches to peace, the mobilization of community voices, agency and resources to build peace, and acknowledgement of community members as contributing and competent citizens and peacebuilders.” Rather than “subscribing to a liberalized peace that is enforced universally, community members work to make, purpose and pluralize peace through resistant everyday agencies that challenge notions of the monolithically victimized, powerless, disaffected poor.” While grounded in particular communities, decolonial peacebuilding “is not insularly constellated” but engages “external agents and solidarity networks.” Through these collaborations, “the performance and diffusion of critical agency can create motional peaces that are

⁶⁴ Dijkema, Avoine, and Koopman, “Making Space for Peace in Contexts of ‘Non-War’ Violence,” 1515.

⁶⁵ For an overview of the field, see Helen Berents, “Everyday Peace,” in *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*, 2nd ed., ed. Roger Mac Ginty (Routledge, 2024), doi.org/10.4324/9781003293408. See also Laura A. Ring, *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Shine Choi, “Everyday Peace in Critical Feminist Theory,” in *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, ed. Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, and Catia Cecilia Confortini (Routledge, 2021), 60, doi.org/10.4324/9780429024160-7.

⁶⁷ Suffla, Malherbe, and Seedat, “Recovering the Everyday Within and for Decolonial Peacebuilding Through Politico-Affective Space,” 348. Citations omitted.

able to embed themselves within and across diverse everyday contexts.”⁶⁸

Singh demonstrates the value of an everyday lens for analyzing women’s participation. She defines the everyday as “a fluid site of activity, densely populated with actors, objects, and practices.” Analysis with the everyday lens “embraces a multiplicity of actors, traverses sites, and brings mundane and presumed insignificant practices into contact with globally scripted norms.” In particular, Singh studies how “everyday experiences of women are structured by a multiplicity of sites, actors, and practices, which interact with, impinge upon, align with, or resist global normative frameworks such as the WPS agenda” in Afghanistan. The everyday lens brings into view Afghanistan’s “gender segregation, everyday forms of insecurity, and the militarization of communities.” She finds that “the translation of the participation norm in the WPS agenda is contested at the community level” through “contestation between religious, customary, and global scripted norms.” Singh’s approach enables attention to fluidity in everyday encounters, including spatial dynamics.⁶⁹

An everyday lens can also illuminate women’s contributions to peace in ways that can be missed, as discussed previously, by liberal or gender-stereotyped lenses. Vaittinen, Donahoe, Kunz, Ómarsdóttir, and Roohi link everyday peace to feminist care ethics, arguing that everyday peace cannot be grasped without attention to mundane practices of care. Through a set of case studies spanning the Global South and North, they find care “emerges as a site, source, and catalyst of everyday peace.” Everyday care practices “not only sustain life through direct acts of caregiving, but in various gendered ways involving caring human beings they also sustain and help to build trust among and within communities” and thus open possibilities for peaceful transformation. They argue that “understanding particular relations and practices of care as everyday peacebuilding helps us to better comprehend the localized and particular needs of people—that is, the everyday sources of suffering and deprivation—that must be responded with care, in order for trust and peaceful transformation to emerge.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Suffla, Malherbe, and Seedat, “Recovering the Everyday Within and for Decolonial Peacebuilding Through Politico-Affective Space,” 351, 359.

⁶⁹ Shweta Singh (she/her/hers), “In Between the Ulemas and Local Warlords in Afghanistan: Critical Perspectives on the ‘Everyday,’ Norm Translation, and UNSCR 1325,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (2020): 505–6, 519–20, doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1810587.

⁷⁰ Tiina Vaittinen, Amanda Donahoe, Rahel Kunz, Silja Bárá Ómarsdóttir, and Sanam Roohi, “Care as Everyday Peacebuilding,” *Peacebuilding* 7, no. 2 (2019): 196, 208, doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1588453.

Blomqvist, Olivius, and Hedström likewise attend to women's care practices. They offer a reminder that "the everyday is a space permeated by gendered relations of power." They theorize "women's everyday peacebuilding, through which women sustain peace, ensure survival, and minimize violence in their families and wider communities." Among women in Myanmar, they argue that "practices of care and silence enable women's agency and facilitate everyday peace, but simultaneously contribute to entrench gendered insecurity, inequality and marginalization in the transition from war to peace." Everyday peacebuilding practices may foster peace, but they are also "conditioned by and may contribute to gendered insecurity and marginalization for women." This nuanced conclusion emerges from careful attention to the everyday lived experiences of women in a particular context.⁷¹

Hudson and Madsen demonstrate how an everyday lens can aid analysis of WPS localization efforts. They contrast "localization from above" with "localization from below" as reflecting different concepts of "the local." In "localization from above," the global dominates the local (while perhaps being perceived as benevolent). The local is where norms are applied but not generated. Imported "WPS scripts and packages" carry gendered stereotypes that instrumentalize women's participation, entrench established powers, and subvert women's agency.⁷² Hudson and Madsen find an example of "localization from above" in Ugandan LAPs, including that of Yumbe District, the site of our own case study. Compared with Uganda's NAP, they find that Yumbe's LAP demonstrates better contextual analysis of conflict dynamics, including attention to the needs of refugees. However, the LAP evinces the same top-down and elite-driven logic as the NAP and so tends towards abstract solutions while neglecting local knowledge.

In contrast, "localization from below" is everyday-centered. A particular "local" is prioritized but not reified. Hudson and Madsen argue that "WPS spatial knowledge . . . needs to be grounded and embedded in a specific place, where indigenous principles of connectedness form part of everyday security practices." In northern Uganda, for example, women's everyday practices, emerging from local traditions, foster "social relations through material and immaterial forms of support." They argue for "seeing the local relationally as part of the global" toward "making grounded indigenous knowledge integral to the path towards peace." This appreciation for indigenous

⁷¹ Linnéa Blomqvist, Elisabeth Olivius, and Jenny Hedström, "Care and Silence in Women's Everyday Peacebuilding in Myanmar," *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 3 (2021): 223, 225, doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2021.1933031.

⁷² Hudson and Madsen, "The Politics of Space and Relationality," 361.

knowledge recalls Pope Francis's reflection on participation and subsidiarity.⁷³

CASE STUDY: PEACEBUILDING AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN BIDIBIDI

Hawksley claims that "the Church's practice is running significantly ahead of its teaching on peace."⁷⁴ While formal church teaching tends to focus on macro-level institutions, its commitment to subsidiarity and participation notwithstanding, many Catholic peacebuilders engage in "strategic peacebuilding," engaging a multiplicity of actors toward social transformation. Strategic peacebuilding aims at "*justpeace*, a dynamic state of affairs in which the reduction and management of violence and the achievement of social and economic justice are undertaken as mutual, reinforcing dimensions of constructive change."⁷⁵ This approach draws inspiration from Mennonite peacebuilder John Paul Lederach, who has significantly influenced Catholic peacebuilding efforts.⁷⁶ Strategic peacebuilding involves "the effort to validate and empower local actors, even while calling the global community to become a transparent and robust force for peace." It is guided by "the principle of indigenous empowerment," which "suggests that conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting." In this view, external agents "take as the primary task of accompaniment the validation of the people and the expansion of resources within the setting."⁷⁷ We propose that everyday peace offers a useful lens to study how Catholic agencies strive for effective accompaniment and promote meaningful participation in peacebuilding.

In this section, we turn to Catholic peacebuilding practice to consider women's participation in a particular place, namely, Bidibidi refugee camp in the Yumbe district of northwestern Uganda. We first introduce the case study context, including WPS implementation efforts in Uganda, to underscore how social and economic challenges

⁷³ Hudson and Madsen, "The Politics of Space and Relationality," 358–369, 361.

⁷⁴ Hawksley, *Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching*, 109.

⁷⁵ John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview," in *Strategies of Peace*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (Oxford University Press, 2010), 23, doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195395914.001.0001.

⁷⁶ As one example, Lederach co-authored Caritas Internationalis's influential peacebuilding manual. See John Paul Lederach, "The Long Journey Back to Humanity: Catholic Peacebuilding with Armed Actors," in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Orbis Books, 2010), 23–55.

⁷⁷ Lederach and Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding," 33, 28.

interact as barriers to justpeace for refugees and host communities. We then share learnings from two Catholic agencies that have promoted women's participation in peacebuilding in Bidibidi. This case study shows the value of an "everyday" analytic lens for illuminating how women's peacebuilding practices might complicate gender stereotypes and simplistic notions of space.

Context

As of mid-2026, Uganda hosts an estimated two million refugees, predominantly originating from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The protracted conflict in South Sudan has led hundreds of thousands to migrate. Uganda's Yumbe District, near the border of South Sudan, has become a major destination for those displaced. Refugee settlements serve as hubs for relief aid and social services. Bidibidi hosts over two hundred thousand refugees.⁷⁸ Refugees are allocated plots of land to pursue agricultural activities and build homes. They are able to interact with host communities and local economies, sometimes resulting in land disputes and competition over resources.⁷⁹ Uganda's refugee management policy is challenged by several compounding factors, including increasing numbers of refugees, dwindling foreign aid, shifting geopolitical tides, and rapid depletion of natural resources. Host communities also face challenges in building sustainable peace and livelihoods after Uganda's own violent conflicts. Mbugua summarizes the West Nile region's "complex, intertwined post-civil war challenges" as "a large number of aggrieved ex-combatants . . . a traumatized population, unimplemented reparations for non-combatant survivors of the war, conflicts over natural resources and other aspects of structural violence, and tensions between the host community and thousands of South Sudanese refugees inhabiting the sprawling Bidibidi refugee settlement."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Uganda—Refugee Statistics April 2026—Active Population by Settlement," UNHCR Operational Data Portal, data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/122320.

⁷⁹ Augustine Bahemuka, "Refugee Land User Policy and Its Impact on Refugee-Local Community Co-Existence in Nyumanzi Settlement, Adjumani District -Uganda" (MA Thesis, Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations, 2020).

⁸⁰ Patrick Karanja Mbugua, "Re-Building Muslim-Christian Relations and Everyday Peace in West Nile, Uganda," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Religion, Peacebuilding, and Development in Africa*, ed. Susan M. Kilonzo, Ezra Chitando, and Joram Tarusarira (Springer, 2023), 619.

WPS Localization in Uganda

About 107 countries have adopted UNSCR 1325 and formulated NAPs, including 30 out of 54 countries in Africa.⁸¹ Africa, and especially East Africa, has seen significant progress in women's political influence.⁸² Uganda pioneered implementation of the WPS agenda in establishing its first NAP in 2008. It is now implementing its third cycle (NAP III). The focus of NAP III is "rigorously confronting the challenges that hinder lasting and inclusive peace through women's meaningful participation and leadership in conflict prevention and conflict resolution," including among refugees.⁸³ Uganda aims to implement NAPs by engaging the districts, which are the main political and administrative units of service delivery. According to a government official at the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, this strategy allows for contextualization of NAPs to suit the specific needs of a given district. By 2021, only ten out of the 146 districts in Uganda had localized NAPs into their development plans. However, the number of districts that have LAPs has since increased, with progress in refugee-hosting districts including Yumbe.⁸⁴

The Yumbe district's LAP offers contextual analysis of local challenges and opportunities for peace, noting a "refugee crisis, land disputes, GBV, and women's participation in peacebuilding processes."⁸⁵ The LAP identifies firewood collection as the most significant issue between host communities and refugees. It notes that "daily negotiation" over firewood "triggers hostilities, tensions, and perceptions of insecurity." Without formal land rights, refugees face "a constant risk of violence, assault, and extortion," while they are "considered by the host communities to be temporary visitors, who do not respect the land or care about sustainability." The LAP concludes that "the need to promote social cohesion and peaceful co-existence is paramount."⁸⁶

⁸¹ United Nations, "National Action Plans," un.org/shestandsforpeace/content/national-action-plans-0.

⁸² Liezelle Kumalo, "Empowerment Delayed: Trends in Women, Peace, and Security in Africa," 5, Training for Peace Policy Brief, January 2022, trainingforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/TfP_WPS_Policy-Brief.pdf.

⁸³ Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, "National Action Plan III on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2030," 1, March 2021, mglsd.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/FINAL-NAP-III-WPS-2021-2030-1.pdf.

⁸⁴ Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development official, personal interview, September 30, 2025.

⁸⁵ Yumbe District Local Government, "District Local Action Plan on Prevention of All Forms of Conflict and Violence, 2020/2021–2024/2025," 2021, vii, coact1325.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/YUMBE-LAP-.pdf.

⁸⁶ Yumbe District Local Government, "District LAP," 8.

Peacebuilding Accompaniment: Caritas Uganda and the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre

This case study integrates learnings from two Catholic nonprofit agencies serving in Yumbe District.⁸⁷ Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development, and social service organizations that aim to support communities to become more resilient and peaceful. A Confederation-wide strategic objective is the full participation of women in leadership and decision-making.⁸⁸ Caritas Uganda embraces the “Triple Nexus” model, which integrates humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding. In all activities, inspired by CST, Caritas Uganda strives to promote human dignity and participation. From 2022 to 2025, Caritas Uganda implemented the Resilience and Livelihoods Improvement Program in Yumbe District to foster social cohesion, improve living conditions, and strengthen community resilience. This program included the “Women Peace Dreams” initiative, which aimed to center women’s participation in peacebuilding.

The John Paul II Justice & Peace Centre (JPIIJC) was co-founded in 2006 by five religious congregations: Congregation of Holy Cross, Missionaries of Africa, Mill Hill Missionaries, Comboni Missionaries, and the Society of Jesus. This consortium grew to seven when the Comboni Sisters and Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa joined in 2008 and 2015, respectively. The founders were motivated by the deteriorating state of social justice in Uganda, including rising economic inequalities and poverty, domestic violence, human rights violations, and the urgent need for post-conflict peacebuilding following the 2008 Juba peace talks that brought an end to the two-decades long war between the government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The founders chose the motto “Faith Doing Justice.” JPIIJC operates with the vision “to build an empowered people of God living in a just and peaceful Uganda.” Like Caritas, JPIIJC has implemented peacebuilding programs in Yumbe District with hopes for promoting women’s participation.

⁸⁷ Our discussion of Caritas draws from a broader research project by Flora Gicquel, a summary of which is published here: Flora Gicquel, “Enhancing Peacebuilding for Integral Human Development: Caritas Good Practices and Lessons Learnt,” *The Journal of Social Encounters* 9, no. 2 (2025): 169–215, doi.org/10.69755/2995-2212.1371. Data on JPIIJC were provided by the agency’s staff members, drawing on their own experiences and on unpublished reports.

⁸⁸ Caritas Internationalis, “Equality, Encounter, Renewal,” March 2024, caritas.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Caritas-Internationalis-Equality-Encounter-Renewal.pdf.

Challenges to Refugee Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

Prior to any programming or interventions, women in Bidibidi refugee settlement already practice everyday peacebuilding, including “through information sharing, motherhood and childcare, intermarriages between communities, social support, [and] psycho-social and spiritual healing.”⁸⁹ Women’s contributions to everyday peace resist any simplistic binaries of informal/formal practices or public/private spaces. Yet women do face significant challenges to community engagement and leadership. Here we name four major factors shaping women’s experiences of peacebuilding in Bidibidi: sociocultural norms, economic and familial responsibilities, security risks, and resource constraints.

First, patriarchal cultural and gender norms remain a significant barrier to women’s leadership, voices, and social influence. Women in Bidibidi are sometimes discouraged or even prohibited from speaking outside the home. Some women report fear of being trivialized and ridiculed by the community for assuming traditionally male-dominated “public” roles.

Second, refugee women are disproportionately affected by economic strain. The majority of refugee households in Ugandan settlements are women-led. Displacement can disrupt traditional social and gender roles, as refugee women are forced to assume all responsibilities for family survival and care. Shifting roles can exacerbate women’s vulnerabilities by expanding their responsibilities amidst significant cuts in food and cash refugee assistance. Familial commitments can also limit the time and energy that women can devote to community projects beyond meeting immediate survival needs.

Third, women in Bidibidi face significant security risks. Participation in peacebuilding efforts can expose women to social retaliation, harassment, and violence. Gender-based violence is a major risk to refugee women. Yumbe’s LAP notes “physical and sexual violence, economic violence, social and emotional violence,” and “dowry related violence and other traditional practices harmful to women” as “critical concerns in Yumbe District.” “Sexual slavery, systematic rape and forced pregnancy” from conflicts “have been ignored and the survivors and victims have not received justice.”⁹⁰

Finally, resource constraints limit women’s ability to take on leadership roles or to sustain some peacebuilding activities. Many

⁸⁹ Irene Dawa, “The Role of South Sudanese Refugee and Ugandan Women in Peace and Conflict Transformation, Uganda” (PhD diss., Durban University of Technology, 2022), i, doi.org/10.51415/10321/4731.

⁹⁰ Yumbe District Local Government, “District LAP,” 7–8.

humanitarian actors prefer to work with well-established organizations with documented structures and strategies. While this approach has value for reporting and accountability purposes, it excludes many grassroots women-led groups. This has prevented refugee women-led organizations in the West Nile region from seeking grants and other funding opportunities,⁹¹ and limited women's groups from peacebuilding collaboration across scales. These challenges underscore the need for agencies like Caritas and JPIIJC to develop contextually-specific, responsive strategies that enable sustained, safe, and meaningful women's engagement in peacebuilding.

Building Everyday Peace in Bidibidi

As discussed, an everyday peace lens underscores the dynamism of quotidian experiences. Any "local" or "grassroots" space is necessarily in movement in relation to other spaces. In this case study, women in Bidibidi interact with Caritas and JPIIJC, organizations informed by CST's vision of participation, but also with other institutions, policies, and norms (such as those governing refugee camps and those promoting WPS agenda "implementation" in Uganda). These experiences demonstrate real contributions to justpeace that cannot be reduced to gendered stereotypes yet cannot be understood without a gendered analytic lens.

Both Caritas and JPIIJC facilitated the formation and training of grassroots peace groups in Bidibidi. JPIIJC found that refugee-led peace groups were able to resolve many social conflicts without recourse to official governance authorities in the settlement. Caritas trained 150 people as peacebuilders from 2018 to 2021. This initiative especially engaged women as leaders, with particular outreach to mothers of former child soldiers. Women trained by Caritas chaired peace committees, led community dialogues, contributed to fact-finding missions, participated in mediation processes, and facilitated reconciliation ceremonies. Through training and practice, women developed into confident facilitators of social dialogue and reconciliation events. Laura Okello of Caritas Uganda reflected: "At first, they were very quiet. But after training, their voices were coming out clearly. They are very good at remediation. Conflicting parties are also listening to them. They are demonstrating leadership."

Caritas provided training and institutionalized spaces that supported women to engage in some peacebuilding practices that they were already and often doing "informally." For example, women creatively leveraged their social networks to gather information needed for

⁹¹ Oxfam, "Oxfam's Engagement with Refugee-led Organizations in West Nile (Uganda)," December 2023, 7, [uganda.oxfam.org/latest/publications/oxfams-engagement-refugee-led-organisations-west-nile-uganda-lessons](https://www.oxfam.org/latest/publications/oxfams-engagement-refugee-led-organisations-west-nile-uganda-lessons).

conflict resolution efforts. In one such case, women confronted a conflict between two groups of refugees who were fighting for the same plot of land, both claiming that they were renting it from a local landowner. The women conducted fact-finding and learned that the landowner from the host community had indeed rented out the same piece of land twice. The conflict was solved peacefully in a mediation meeting, and the landowner was directed to refund the money. One of the groups continued their farming and the other group was able to rent a different field.⁹²

While women's peacebuilding efforts at times leveraged stereotyped or socially accepted roles, like exchanging information, women's participation sometimes challenged sociocultural norms. For example, Caritas found that to achieve inclusive participation among Bidibidi's Muslim community, it was necessary to initially engage with men. After participating themselves, Muslim husbands became more open to their wives' engagement in peacebuilding programs. Women's participation in peace processes, Caritas reports, helps shift perceptions of their roles and creates new pathways for collaboration. Caritas evaluations indicate increasing acceptance and recognition of women as agents of peace in the Bidibidi community.

For women in Bidibidi, social relations cannot be disentangled from survival and care. Conflicts between refugee and host communities often relate to resources, such as water, firewood, and pasture for grazing. The testimony of Esther Kemisa, a South Sudanese refugee and Bidibidi resident, is indicative of the mutual imbrication of everyday peace and livelihoods: "When I came to Uganda in 2016, I did not know how to start a new life as a refugee. I had no friends around, and I was violent. But . . . I joined the peace committee. We were trained by Caritas in peaceful conflict resolution, hence I became a peace builder. I started friendships within the host community, which gave me one acre of land to cultivate cassava. . . . I just collected one sack of processed cassava flour to improve my family feeding. All of this was due to a peaceful coexistence with the hosting community." Everyday peace, in this example, takes shape as transformed social relationships and shifts in access to physical space and material goods that enable care practices.

To promote social cohesion, every Caritas program targeting refugees also includes host communities as direct or indirect beneficiaries. Caritas interventions fostered mutual learning between refugee and host communities to build understanding through dialogue. Some participants shared that these events were the only occasion they had to engage peacefully with people from different

⁹² Caritas Denmark, "2020 Performance Report," June 2021, caritas.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Caritas_Denmark_Performance-Report_2020_FINAL.pdf.

communities. Woko Zaida, a member of a Caritas peace committee from the Mulondo host community, reported that prior to these events, refugees had limited access to farming land and fuel. Sessions on peaceful coexistence created new spaces in which communities could discuss improved livelihoods as a shared desirable goal. According to Zaida, refugees and host community members became more able to maintain positive relationships and to discuss peacefully when points of tension arose. Social cohesion efforts thus helped to shift perceptions, reduce conflict, and improve access to farmland and natural resources.

Beyond social cohesion efforts, fulfilling everyday security and care needs of Bidibidi residents demands advocacy for justice. Women and girls often have to trek long distances daily to secure water and firewood, increasing their risk for physical and sexual violence. To promote safety and well-being, women leaders in Bidibidi settlement successfully lobbied for placement of water points and clinics in closer proximity to the settlement. Women leaders have also been at the forefront of advocating for the use of improved cooking stoves in order to reduce firewood use, thus decreasing both the risk of violence and environmental harm.

In addition to practicing advocacy and leadership that transforms daily interactions with material spaces, women have (re)shaped relationships with varied institutions across scales. Through networks of refugee-led organizations, refugee women try to ensure that resources are equitably distributed, and they often serve as intermediaries between government and humanitarian actors. In 2022, JPIIIPC and partners successfully advocated for a permanent seat for women leaders on the Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) in order to increase women's representation in "formal" decision-making on issues affecting refugee communities.

For women in Bidibidi, everyday peace necessitates confronting gender-based violence and promoting trauma healing. Caritas trained peace committee members to provide psychosocial support to individuals and families affected by violence and displacement. JPIIIPC addressed gender-based violence through participatory programs with talks, skits, and open sharing. Women's groups became spaces for support and open communication, enabling women to openly share experiences without fear of ridicule. These programs build on women's existing social roles as the community's primary providers of emotional support, while stretching women's participation towards new forms of leadership and advocacy. Caritas reports that through participation in peace committees and in trauma healing sessions, many women became able to speak against domestic violence for their neighbors, family members, or for themselves. Women peacebuilders found ways to support the victims and to

resolve some of these conflicts. Caritas-trained peacebuilders also led school-based peace clubs in Bidibidi, where they provided training in conflict prevention and raised awareness about gender-based violence. These community-based and women-led responses to trauma and conflict demonstrate the dynamism of women's participation in everyday peace efforts that help (re)weave social fabric. Such peacebuilding builds resilience by transforming spaces and by creatively both leveraging and challenging gendered norms.

CONCLUSION: EVERYDAY PEACE AS RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL ETHICS

Applying a lens of “everyday peace,” we reject abstraction. We are too easily taken away—sometimes via the distortions of stereotypes and space, as we have shown—from the material, embodied, and mundane realities of people living amidst violence and striving for peace. In peacebuilding, attending to the everyday aims to draw the margins into view and to draw marginalized persons and communities into participation. This article has particularly sought to bring into view the (at times assumed to be informal and apolitical) efforts of women to build peaceful everyday in Bidibidi.

The everyday cannot and should not be romanticized, nor should it be dismissed as parochial. A variety of spaces entangle in the everyday. Our case study, for example, indicates that international commitments, including in the UN WPS Agenda and those of CST-inspired organizations like Caritas, inform the daily lives of refugees in Bidibidi. Peacebuilding and development interventions become part of the spatial and social fabric in refugee camps. Attention to the quotidian does not mean a neglect of structural violence; rather, as Ada María Isasi-Díaz's *mujerista* theology argues, structural change must be rooted in *lo cotidiano*.⁹³ Rather than analyzing a reified and assumed-to-be static “local,” we ask ethical questions about peace and violence in light of a dynamic and relational everyday.

Theologically, the turn from abstraction to embodiment can be called incarnation. We aspire, then, to an incarnational social ethic for peacebuilding. We augment Whitmore and Hawksley's calls for christological solidarity with its twin principle of subsidiarity, and we argue for an inclusive vision of participation rooted in reality. We aim to see and support the efforts of persons and communities embedded in particular places and co-creating everyday peace with God. Methodologically, this calls for creativity. Catholic social ethics needs

⁹³ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10, no. 1 (2002): 5–17.

methods that strive to capture more of the texture and complexity of human experience.

As Cahill contends, for CST to “realize its ideals concretely”—including, we argue, for women’s participation—“both the theology and the politics of CST must be refocused.” CST’s “top-down teaching approach and the social model based on the modern Western nation-state . . . will no longer do,” and so “the voices and sources on which it draws must be much more local, bottom-up, and diverse.”⁹⁴ The growing field of theological ethnography has methodological wisdom to share here.⁹⁵ Scholars such as Traci West, Todd Whitmore, and Emmanuel Katongole engage everyday realities of persons and communities resisting violence.⁹⁶ Future research can illuminate the theologies and spiritualities emerging from communities building everyday peace. Such research might challenge CST’s tendencies to stereotype and homogenize women, especially by attending to how varied intersectional identities shape persons’ experiences of conflict and peacebuilding. Catholic peacebuilding and social ethics will accompany women’s efforts to build everyday peace only insofar as we are able to see women in their everyday multiplicity and dynamism, beyond the abstraction of “woman.” **M**

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⁹⁴ Cahill, *Social Justice and the Common Good*, 108.

⁹⁵ See Aana Marie Vigen and Christian Scharen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, 2nd ed. (T&T Clark, 2024).

⁹⁶ See Traci C. West, *Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality: Africana Lessons on Religion, Racism, and Ending Gender Violence* (New York University Press, 2019); Todd Whitmore, *Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology* (T&T Clark, 2019); Emmanuel Katongole, *Who Are My People? Love, Violence, and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

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