



Memory and Transformation

Synthesis of the webinar of 1 March 2023

1. Background

The webinar Memory and Transformation took place as part of the joint project “Alliance for Women, Peace and Security: Bringing the voices of civil society to the WPS agenda”. The project is led and implemented by PeaceWomen Across the Globe, KOFF swisspeace and Frieda – the feminist peace organisation. The project aims to ensure that the experiences and knowledge of civil society are incorporated into the drafting of the 5th National Action Plan (NAP) 1325. South Africa and Switzerland co-chaired the “Women, Peace and Security” Focal Points Network in 2022. In order to contribute to a joint exchange of knowledge, civil society experts from both countries were invited to the webinars (Frieda organised another webinar).

2. Thematic focus

The organisation of this webinar started with the idea of focusing on the participation of women and the inclusion of civil society in transitional justice processes. During the discussions with the speakers, it became apparent that the experiences, voices and expertise of marginalised people in dealing with the legacy and impact of violence are not sufficiently taken into account – neither in Switzerland, South Africa, Uganda, nor Brazil. The aim of the webinar was therefore to shed light on the questions of what this exclusion means, what very real consequences it has for those affected, but also for society as a whole. Possible paths to inclusion and a feminist transformation in dealing with the past and promoting peace were also discussed.

The term “transitional justice”, which forms the basis of the webinar, is broadly defined, going beyond legal issues and taking into account social transformation processes. The webinar covered the following topics: collective memory and counter-narratives, feminist perspectives on peace, armed conflicts and their legacy, as well as the connection between sexualised and gender-based violence and the failures of the past and present.

Izabel Barros studied history and is active in various projects, such as the Living Room, an anti-racist community centre in Switzerland. Since July 2022, she has been a doctoral student at the Centre d'histoire internationale et d'études politiques de la mondialisation (CHRIM) at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland where she is researching Swiss colonial history in Brazil.

Yaliwe Clarke is interim director of the African Gender Institute and lecturer in Gender Studies at the School of African and Gender Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. Since 2000, she has worked with a wide range of women's rights activists, peacebuilders and conflict resolvers in over 11 countries in Africa.

Helen Scanlon works both as a practitioner and a researcher on transitional justice, for example as part of the ‘Unfinished Business’ project. She is also head of the Justice and Transformation Programme at the Institute for Policy Studies at UCT in South Africa and Visiting Professor at the Overseas Study Programme at Stanford University in the USA.

3. Synthesis of the input presentations and the moderated discussion

Yaliwe Clarke invited the participants to think critically about liberal feminist discourse. She described this discourse as part of a global colonialism that is racist, patriarchal, heteronormative and eurocentric at its core. In contrast, Clarke sees it as essential to understand what peace processes mean “on the ground”, for example in rural communities. In relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, it is therefore crucial to paint a more nuanced picture of the everyday

lives of people in conflict zones. Based on her research with peace groups in northern Uganda, she explained various aspects that are crucial for linking feminism and peacebuilding and thus replacing the state as the central defining power of peace and security with civil society. An example: particularly in militarised contexts it is important to analyse precisely how women's political and socio-economic power is constructed. This is the only way to understand the role of women beyond stereotypes. This is where Yaliwe Clarke sees a problem with the "Women, Peace, and Security" agenda: women and femininity are seen as essential for peace processes, but how exactly is not differentiated. Nor does it analyse how women are part of stoking wars and conflicts. Through a differentiated analysis of the role of women, their power can be understood and placed at the centre – without focusing on women as victims of violence or placing the realities of men at the centre. Militarism is a system that is closely interwoven with colonialism. One example of this is the militarised image of masculinity that was shaped in Uganda by the former British colonial power and continues to have an impact today.

Helen Scanlon reported on the incomplete transitional justice process in South Africa and her research project 'Unfinished Business'. Even though South Africa is considered a model case for a successful transitional justice process, the process is incomplete according to Scanlon. She demands that promises made during the South African process of coming to terms with the past must be honoured – because the lack of coming to terms with the past leads to the reproduction of violence. The lives of many South Africans today are still characterised by poverty and violence: South Africa has the highest rate of femicide in the world among countries that are not in armed conflict, and unemployment among young people is very high. Scanlon believes that the transitional justice process is not yet complete. The legacy and intergenerational trauma of 400 years of colonialism and apartheid cannot be dealt with in a short space of time. On the other hand, issues such as gender-based violence must be specifically addressed and it is crucial that this is recognised. Reparations continue to be of great importance, especially for women. More than ever, transitional justice must be defined broadly, beyond an exclusively legal perspective. She posed the questions: What do we want to achieve? What is our ultimate goal? In relation to the South African context, this would also mean asking: What went wrong in our attempt to organise transitional justice in a process-oriented way? She then used two cases to illustrate how the failure to come to terms with apartheid is still having an impact today.

Izabel Barros focussed on remembrance and made it clear that it is impossible to separate the "global North" from the "global South". According to Barros, making Swiss colonial history invisible is in itself a colonial practice, as Switzerland profited massively from colonisation and is still part of global trade today, which reproduces colonial structures. Barros emphasised how important it is to include the experiences of people affected by colonisation. This is the only way to scrutinise colonial continuities. She called on Switzerland to recognise that it has a responsibility to come to terms with and break through these continuities. In conclusion, Izabel Barros praised South African civil society for its progressive NAP, which – unlike the Swiss NAP – also has a strong domestic political component.

In the **moderated discussion** that followed, non-state-centred possibilities for feminist action were discussed. It was suggested that "pockets of possibilities" be created in which non-military approaches to conflict resolution can be developed. The second part of the discussion centred on restorative justice. Restorative justice describes approaches to transitional justice and conflict transformation in which those affected by violence are at the centre and solutions are sought together to make restitution for what they have experienced. It was also discussed that "restore*" should be understood as a verb and not as a noun. This is to emphasise that it is a process that must be actively continued.