

Political empowerment of women, girls and LGBTQ+ people: post-conflict opportunities

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Question

What are the post-conflict opportunities and considerations for increasing the political empowerment of women and girls and LGBTQ+ people?

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1. Summary

The instability and upheaval of violent conflict can break down patriarchal structures, challenge traditional gender norms and open up new roles and spaces for collective agency of women, sexual and gender minorities (SGM), and other marginalised groups (Yadav, 2021; Myrtilinen & Daigle, 2017). A recent study on the gendered implications of civil war finds that countries recovering from 'major civil war' experience substantial improvements in women's civil liberties and political participation—complementary aspects of political empowerment (Bakken & Bahaug, 2020). This rapid literature review explores the openings that conflict and post-conflict settings can create for the development of political empowerment of women and LGBTQ+ communities—as well as challenges. Drawing primarily on a range of academic, non-governmental organisation (NGO), and practitioner literature, it explores conflict-affected settings from around the world. There was limited literature available on experience from Ukraine (which was of interest for this report); and on specific opportunities at the level of local administrations. In addition, the available literature on empowerment of LGBTQ+ communities was much less than that available for women's empowerment. The literature also focused on women, with an absence of information on girls. It is important to note that while much of the literature speaks to women in society as a whole, there are various intersectionalities (e.g. class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, rural/urban etc.) that can produce varying treatment and degrees of empowerment of women. Several examples are noted within the report.

Changing of norms

Violent conflict can transform patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles by:

- Opening up space for women to enter traditionally male-dominated areas and professions, challenging patriarchal norms (Lapénaité, 2021; Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).
- Creating opportunities for collective agency and women's mobilisation, through participation in armed forces and other leadership roles (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021; Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).
- Changing public attitudes toward women, stemming from their adoption of new roles in the public sphere (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).

These processes are considered to contribute to increased political empowerment for women (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Political empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept that covers inclusion and agency at the individual level and at the level of formal political institutions (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Research on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Rwanda, for example, finds that the wars in both countries resulted in women's greater political agency, as women's participation in combat roles challenged gender roles and increased the possibility of women taking part in politics at various levels (Berry, 2018; cited in Yadav, 2021). An OECD review of donor support to women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected contexts finds that donors need to focus more on addressing gender norms in their programming, in order to transform gender inequalities and violence (OECD, 2017).

New spaces and CSOs

The breakdown of social and political governance during war, and creation of new spaces, necessitates and allows for the establishment of strong CSOs, which often continue their work in the post-conflict era, evolving from humanitarian actors to supporters of human rights and empowerment (Myrtilinen & Daigle, 2017). The civil war in Lebanon provided an opening for

advancing LGBTQ+ rights (Myrtilinen & Daigle, 2017). Activists subsequently in the early 2000s created Helem, the first organisation serving SGMs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), advocating and lobbying for their legal and social rights. Growing donor support for LGBTQ+ movements in Lebanon has focused on professionalization of CSOs and service provision, however, which has in some instances undermined the radical and confrontational potential of civil society to challenge the state (Nagle, 2020). In the case of BiH, women's groups that emerged during the war have also undergone a professionalization with international support, but have become crucial organisations advocating for gender equality and women's rights (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). At the same time, donor support can clash with local realities and perceptions: in BiH, there are concerns that human rights organisations, including those dealing with women's rights, are donor-driven, with misdirected priorities that do not address everyday needs (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

Collective agency and activism

The escalation stage of civil war is a major catalyst for de-stabilising gendered social norms: women with greater knowledge of oppressive power structures and barriers to collective agency can develop new skills, interests, and platforms for mobilisation during civil wars (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Mobilisation momentum can carry over into the peacemaking process and influences the development of institutions that provide women access to formal political power (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Risks to sustained collective agency and mobilisation, however, include:

- Tension between international norms related to empowerment of women and SGM groups, on the one hand, and local realities, on the other. This can lead to tokenistic institutions, where minority groups are represented but do not have real power (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).
- The (re)emergence of identity-based politics during statebuilding, which can fragment previously unified women's networks (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). In Liberia, the strong women's movement started to fragment post-conflict, with divisions of class, religion, ethnicity and age re-emerging (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). In Lebanon, the LGBTQ+ movement has instead been able to build links and networks with many Lebanese non-sectarian groups and non-sectarian movements (e.g. anti-corruption, anti-racism) (Nagle, 2020).
- Patriarchal backlash and structural repression of women's formal political representation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

An OECD review of donor support to women's empowerment in post-conflict and fragile contexts, covering Bangladesh, the DRC, Ethiopia and Nepal, finds that donors need to provide more support to women as active agents in peacebuilding and statebuilding. Rather, programming to date tends to include women affected by conflict and violence as passive beneficiaries only—resulting in lost opportunities for (political) empowerment (OECD, 2017). An exception profiled is a programme designed to strengthen political processes in Nepal, which focused on increasing the individual capacity of women politicians and their collective capacity to work across party lines in a highly politically divided context, in order to promote a shared gender equality agenda (OECD, 2017).

Involvement in peace processes and political quotas

An empirical study on the gendered implications of civil war finds that much of the post-war improvement in female empowerment is driven by negotiated settlements, in particular, peace agreements containing gender-specific provisions (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Practice has shown that quotas are needed to ensure gender equality in decision-making, especially in contexts with

ongoing male dominated political mindsets (Myrntinen & Daigle, 2017). Quotas allow for people to become accustomed to the presence of women in decision-making positions and provide opportunities for women to gain leadership skills (Warren, 2021). The presence of a critical mass of women (33%) in the first Constitution Assembly in Nepal, due to a quota, enabled them to make legislative changes in support of women's rights (Yadav, 2021). The effectiveness of quotas is not guaranteed, however: they can be counterproductive if introduced but not enforced (Warren, 2021). Institutional tokenism, and social friction between gender-based groups and other identity-based affiliations, also create risks for backsliding (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Where women do comprise leaders of institutions, they tend to be from privileged, dominant class or caste groups (e.g. Rwanda's Tutsi elites and Nepal's Brahmin women), which can fragment broader women's movements (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Transitional justice

Transitional justice is a means of dealing with past human rights violations in societies transitioning from war to peace or from autocratic to democratic regimes (Lambourne & Carreon, 2016). The experience of previous armed conflicts shows that transitional justice frequently does not fully address the needs of different groups of women and men affected by conflict (Lukianchenko, 2021). Women are often silenced in truth-seeking and truth-telling processes (Mbwana, 2020). Further, excessive focus on women in trials and truth-telling mechanisms as victims of war may obscure other forms of women's experiences such as direct participation in combat; and collective agency and mobilisation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021; Nelaeva & Sidorova, 2019). Transitional justice processes also often exclude SGM groups (Mbwana, 2020).

There are, however, various examples of progress. Following the lead of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), subsequent truth commissions (e.g. Liberia, Peru, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste) have created gender units; implemented measures to increase women's participation; and appointed women as commissioners and experts (see Haider, 2016). The Sierra Leone TRC (SLTRC) recommended in its report that new legislation require all political parties to ensure at least 30% of their candidates for all national and local elections are women (Unobe, 2022). In 2015, Colombia was the first country to include LGBTQ+ activists in the peace talk process, which included the aim of implementing a truth commission that explicitly includes LGBTQ+ rights in all of its processes (Mbwana, 2020). The commission began in 2018, with a mandate to focus on the 'most fragile of victims—women, children, old people, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups, and LGBT people'.¹

2. Background

The impact of violent conflict on a country's society, economy and political governance is devastating and encompassing. At the same time, the instability of conflict, and the upheaval it creates, can break down patriarchal structures, challenge traditional gender roles and open up new roles for men, women and non-binary people alike (Yadav, 2021; Myrntinen & Daigle, 2017). Conflict can create a positive space for women and marginalised groups to exercise agency (Yadav, 2021). The ending of destructive civil wars may create a potential for rapid and

¹ New Colombia truth commission to focus on society's 'most fragile'. <https://www.voanews.com/a/colombia-truth-commission-societys-most-fragile/4397153.html>

transformational normative and political change—and for the political empowerment of women (Yadav, 2021; Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).

Political empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept that covers inclusion and agency at the individual level and at the level of formal political institutions (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Women's empowerment includes the right to discuss freely, engage in civil society organisations (CSO), and access a fair judicial system—at the individual level; and formal participation and inclusion in decision-making institutions, such as national parliaments—at the institutional level (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). A recent study finds that countries recovering from major civil war experience substantial improvements in women's civil liberties and political participation (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Other case studies also demonstrate that conflict can create increased political opportunities for women: for example, in seventeen post-conflict African countries, women achieved double the rates of legislative representation of countries not recovering from conflict (Warren, 2021).

Given these new opportunities in the post-conflict period, women are often targeted by international donors during reconstruction (Pospieszna, 2015). Women's empowerment has become a key norm in international peacebuilding over the past two decades, since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000: it outlines the UN's commitment to increase women's participation in peacemaking and security sector reform, and encourages states to pledge to eliminate gender-based violence (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021; Yadav, 2021). While both conflicted and non-conflicted countries tend to experience pressure to improve gender parity due to increased protections under international law, post-conflict countries experience such pressure to a much greater extent due to the gender disruptions within their societies (Warren, 2021).

The situation for women in post-conflict societies should not be idealised, however, given the documentation of women's significant suffering during war and the potential backlash in women's status after progress has been achieved (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Women's empowerment can be short-lived in some cases, as traditional, patriarchal norms reassert themselves (Yadav, 2021; Davis et al., 2020). Backlashes against gender equality have also extended to backlash against sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) rights (Myrttinen & Daigle, 2017). Uncertainty during post-conflict recovery has been known to give rise to 'golden age-ism', a usually heteronormative longing for a time in the past when families, gender relations and social life were seen to be better (Myrttinen & Daigle, 2017).

3. Changing of norms²

Violent conflict dynamics can be associated with militarism and 'patriotic nationalism' that reinforces patriarchal norms, such as in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus. In the former, ethnic wars were closely linked to re-traditionalisation and re-patriarchisation of societies.³ At the

² "Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society. They are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self." (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020: 415-416)

³ See for example: Carter, B. (2021). Gender inequalities in the Eastern Neighbourhood region. K4D Helpdesk Report 977. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/16578>. Haider, H. (2017). Gender and conflict in the

same time, violent conflict also has the potential to produce the destruction or discrediting of traditional, restrictive gender norms; and of deeply ingrained racial, ethnic and gender inequalities— which in turn, is integral for advancing meaningful gender inclusion in peacebuilding and decision-making (Lwamba et al., 2022; Warren, 2021; Yadav, 2021; Davis et al., 2020; Myrirtinen & Daigle, 2017).

There are three key ways in which conflict may transform patriarchal norms and gender roles:

- First, war destructs the gendered divisions of labour and opens up space for women to enter traditionally male-dominated areas and professions (Lapénaité, 2021; Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). An evaluation of donor projects in various post-conflict contexts finds that income-generating activities targeted to women, based on gender- and conflict-specific needs, can have indirect effects on gender roles and norms (Brüntrup-Seidemann et al., 2021).
- Second, war fosters women's mobilisation and pro-social behaviour, creating a push for continued mobilisation (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). The inclusion of women in armed groups has the potential to change gender norms and social hierarchies—and to create opportunities for increased collective agency. Women also adopt leadership roles and responsibilities outside of organised armed groups during conflict escalation. (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).
- Third, women's entry into new jobs and the public sphere creates normative changes in attitudes toward women (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).

These processes are considered to contribute to increased political empowerment for women (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Research on BiH and Rwanda finds that the wars in both countries resulted in women's greater political agency, as women's participation in combat roles challenged gender roles and increased the possibility of women taking part in politics at various levels (Berry, 2018; cited in Yadav, 2021). Research on conflict as a catalyst for women's empowerment reveals that in thirteen post-conflict countries in South and Southeast Asia, shifts in institutional and cultural norms altered pre-existing narratives about women, gender, power and leadership; and created new political space for women (Warren, 2021). In Nepal and Syria, emerging research shows that crises have caused a re-evaluation of social norms in some circles – although this is not guaranteed to be in favour of more progressive views on SOGI (Myrirtinen & Daigle, 2017).

Such progress may regress over time but it may also develop into a lasting evolution of social structures (Myrirtinen & Daigle, 2017). In Lebanon, 'war weariness' and a continuous flow of outward migration during the civil war later resulted in greater tolerance for sexual and gender diversity, as returning expatriate Lebanese brought a globalised worldview and experiences of other cultures with them. This in turn contributed to the strengthening of local 'underground' scenes and creation of a 'queer space' in Lebanon (Myrirtinen & Daigle, 2017).

An OECD review of donor support to women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected contexts finds that donors need to focus more on addressing gender norms, in order to transform

Western Balkans. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies:
<https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/123456789/13186/1/072%20Gender%20and%20conflict%20in%20the%20Western%20Balkans.pdf>

gender inequalities and violence. This includes strengthening their programming by engaging more strategically with men and with ‘resistors’ (OECD, 2017).

Case studies

Ukraine: Research on women’s resistance to the communist regime finds that women’s involvement in guerrilla warfare resulted in the contestation of traditional gender norms and the subordination of their personal lives (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018). In particular, female insurgents postponed marriage and childbearing, instead assuming collective responsibility for the national cause (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018).

Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea and violent conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014, the involvement of women in both combat and non-combat positions in Ukraine has been increasing⁴ (Lapénaité, 2021). This has occurred alongside the international community’s attention to reforms in the security and defense sector, creating equal conditions for women and men’s military service (Lapénaité, 2021). The conflict also provided opportunities for women to play a greater role in society and seek leadership positions (Lapénaité, 2021).

Interviews with women who joined war efforts reveal that women’s empowerment was not a direct aim in their actions. Rather, they were driven by support for their country and because their husbands and sons joined the war effort (Lapénaité, 2021). There was also a desire to change the country’s existing structural foundation. Women’s participation in the war ultimately reveals a strong organisational female culture that produced positive self-assessment and opened up other opportunities for gender transformation (Lapénaité, 2021).

Nepal: During the ten-year war in Nepal, the Maoist People’s Liberation Army actively campaigned for gender equality (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Maoists promised to eliminate discrimination after the war, which appealed to women frustrated by the limitations of a patriarchal culture, particularly Dalit women, who experienced gender and caste-based discrimination (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Maoists let women fight alongside men on frontlines, and many performed the same combat duties as their male peers (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The Royal Nepalese Army also began recruiting women to combat roles in 2004 to defend against the Maoists. In 2006, the security sector, which had long been a men-only space, reserved a 20% quota for women (Yadav, 2021).

This growing participation of women in the army has brought about a transformation in traditional gender roles, with women’s roles in the security sector increasingly accepted as normal (Yadav, 2021). This challenged gender-based assumptions that women were incapable or too feminine to perform stereotypically masculine jobs (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Research on conflict-induced social and structural changes in Nepal explores the rise in women’s presence in a variety of public spaces, focusing on female tempo (vehicle that carries up to 12 people) drivers, war widows, women ex-combatants and women politicians (Yadav, 2021). In the case of tempo drivers, this livelihood gained prominence as a way for women displaced by conflict to earn money in Kathmandu (Yadav, 2021). It challenged the traditional notion of tempo driving being men’s work, with women in the driving profession becoming a new norm (Yadav,

⁴ In 2020, the number of women working and serving in the Ukrainian army under contract was over 30,000, while continuing to grow (Lapénaité, 2021).

2021). War-driven urbanisation also played a role in altering gender-based norms in rural communities and driving social change in cities (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021).

Colombia: Throughout sixty years of war, women were involved as agents of violence and peace (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021). There were high levels of female participation within all of the major nongovernmental armed groups: when the Colombian government signed peace negotiations with multiple armed groups in the 1990s, they reported that 24.3% of the disarmed ex-combatants were women (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021). Women joined these armed groups for a variety of reasons, including identification with the group's ideological agenda; and safety from sexual violence through armed group participation. Within FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)—the largest of the armed groups, for example, the secretariat of the armed group declared a zero tolerance policy against rape. FARC also offered women autonomy and encouraged female leadership, which was empowering in a traditional environment (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021).

4. New spaces and CSOs

The breakdown of social and political governance during war necessitates and drives the establishment of strong CSOs, which often continue their work in the post-conflict era (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). Organisations that arose to address pressing, humanitarian needs during conflict have evolved to support human rights issues and empowerment of minority groups.

Research on Nepal, Colombia, and Rwanda finds that barriers to women's mobilisation erode quickly and dramatically during the escalation of civil war (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021). Mobilisation initially occurs due to necessity: humanitarian mobilisation opportunities, in particular, provide organisational platforms for collective action and important experiences for women to mobilise against collective threats (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021). These are important not only for protecting civilians during war, but also for maintaining voice and influence for women during contested peacemaking processes. Sustained women's mobilisation also has the potential to re-shape social expectations and challenge patriarchal norms (Evlisizor & Cox, 2021).

Research finds that SGM groups have been able to forge new communities as a neutral ground in the midst of violent conflict (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). During 'the Troubles' in Belfast, for example, many lesbians and gay men took advantage of the deserted city spaces, due to curfews imposed after dark: people who were ordinarily divided by religious or political identity came together under shared experiences of sexual oppression (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). Other spaces, such as gay clubs and organisations also became neutral ground, where not only gay and lesbian people but also others—marginal or not—could come together to escape violence and leave aside the particular identities that divided them (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017).

The rise of new spaces, agency, and organisations, during times of upheaval and social breakdown, are indicative of human resilience (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). These processes are not straightforward, however, and can at times be met with repression and violence (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017).

Case studies

Ukraine: Russia's annexation of Crimea has engendered the growth of civil society and in particular the development of a volunteer movement. Civic activists have stepped in to provide assistance to IDPs and to compensate for the inefficiency and corruption inside government agencies (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018).

Women comprise the majority of humanitarian aid and service providers in Ukraine—and are generally more active than men in civil society (Warren et al., 2018). Women organised fundraising campaigns to supply the cash-strapped army with food, clothes, and medical equipment (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018). Women's CSOs operate hotlines to collect reports of violence and to relay information about resources to survivors (Warren et al., 2018). CSO providers may integrate the provision of basic necessities with psychological, legal and medical aid—to support IDPs in integrating into host communities and to build new livelihoods (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018). Some CSOs have organised employment fairs and entrepreneurship training for women (Nikolayenko & DeCasper, 2018).

Georgia: During the outbreak of conflicts in the 1990s, several women's organisations were created to provide a humanitarian response for IDPs and conflict-affected populations; and to participate in peace and reconciliation efforts between Georgia and the breakaway territories (Cárdenas, 2022). These include, for example, Fund Sukhumi, an organisation founded in 1994 by internally displaced Abkhaz women, with the aim of fostering women's participation in humanitarian assistance and in peace efforts across conflict divides (Cárdenas, 2022).

Despite the common goal of promoting gender equality and women's participation in peace efforts, women's organisations in Georgia have relied on different approaches, means and actors to materialise these goals (Cárdenas, 2022). Women's organisations that are less closely affiliated with conflict actors will be more likely to rely on an idea of conflict transformation, seeking to reframe conflict issues and divides; whereas organisations more closely connected to conflict actors will be geared towards influencing the political settlement in order to achieve the goals of associated conflict parties (Cárdenas, 2022).

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Many women's CSOs (WCSOs) started informally during the war, with women initially forming groups to provide humanitarian aid to the population in need (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). After the war, many of these groups continued to work, alongside new groups that formed in order to meet the needs of foreign-funded reconstruction efforts (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). With the support of international donors, these women's groups have undergone a professionalization, becoming crucial actors advocating for gender equality and women's rights (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

WCSOs in BiH have played an important role in promoting the national adoption and implementation of various international conventions in support of women's rights, such as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. They still play an important role in the processes of law harmonisation, raising awareness, monitoring, and assisting authorities for the successful implementation of the international conventions (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). WCSOs in BiH can thus be considered to be 'local agents' in the process of the diffusion of global norms (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). Despite local legislation in line with international norms on women's rights, activists point to various problems with implementation: in

particular, politicians, including female politicians, have largely been inactive and, in some cases, even act in contradiction to the new norms (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

A specific critique is that the issue of gender equality is at times reduced to the issue of violence against women: for example, the only support of local governments for gender issues that is continuously present is that of shelter (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). WCSOs emphasise a lack of awareness of the links between domestic violence against women and discrimination against women in politics or at the workplace (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). WCSOs seek to educate staff in political institutions, providing guidelines of how to include gender equality into all local government documents (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). Local elections in 2020 have resulted in a new, younger generation of female politicians entering the political stage in Tuzla, for example, which has been cause for optimism among WCSOs, despite prevailing patriarchal values and male-dominated style of politics (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

At the same time, existing research on public perceptions of WCSOs in BiH indicate that local populations generally prefer organisations focused on everyday problems and provision of direct assistance (humanitarian aid and provision of social services), while human rights organisations, including those dealing with women's rights, are perceived as donor-driven, with misdirected priorities (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

Lebanon: Local LGBTQ+ actors often confront deeply entrenched structural barriers that afford little opportunities for advancing LGBTQ+ rights and policy change (Fobear & Baines, 2020). The civil war in Lebanon provided an opening for advancing LGBTQ+ rights (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). Helem was created by a small number of activists in the early 2000s, becoming the first organisation serving SGMs in MENA, advocating and lobbying for the legal and social rights of people with alternative sexuality (Nagle, 2020; Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). Helem campaigned, for example, to end the criminalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination of LGBTQ+ individuals—bringing together activists from different confessional, economic and educational backgrounds (Nagle, 2020). Helem linked itself to the global LGBTQ+ movement to provide the LGBTQ+ population a sense of collective identity and to foster a unified movement (Nagle, 2020).

Despite efforts to create a unified movement, LGBTQ+ activism in Lebanon is currently split into a number of different CSOs or movements (Nagle, 2020). In addition, the abundance of foreign donors supporting LGBTQ+ movements in Lebanon has led, in part, to the proliferation of professionalised CSOs each providing niche services for the LGBTQ+ community (e.g. child protection, HIV testing, mental health) (Nagle, 2020). An emphasis on service provision has in some instances undermined the radical and confrontational potential of civil society to challenge the state (Nagle, 2020).

Myanmar: A large number of women's CSOs emerged as a result of public uprisings against the military regime, as well as in areas affected by conflict (Lukianchenko, 2021). Women's organisations have played a direct role in peace processes, assisted in ceasefire negotiations, monitored compliance with the ceasefire, and engaged in political dialogue and consultation with stakeholders in the peace process (Lukianchenko, 2021). Their involvement has led to the inclusion of several gender-related provisions in peace process agreements, including a 30% quota for women's participation in political dialogue (Lukianchenko, 2021). A key strategy for women's movements in Myanmar had been to use international platforms and mechanisms for peacebuilding and advocacy for women's empowerment in all decision-making processes (Lukianchenko, 2021).

Colombia: Many women, who did not join armed groups during the civil war, became leaders—peace activists; active community mobilisers; and negotiators of humanitarian access (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The absence of men in communities also presented an opportunity for women to mobilise and organise civic groups with political and economic power in their communities: these organisations were important in raising awareness about sexual violence, women’s rights, and harmful socio-cultural norms (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Local civic organisations worked with IDPs, sexual violence victims, widows, and orphans—addressing immediate needs, while also organising peace rallies and demanding an end to the conflict (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Although women’s groups played essential roles and created effective inter-group networks at the local level, they were initially excluded from formal peacemaking processes (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Over time, however, women’s groups effectively leveraged domestic and international norms to gain a seat at the table, which led to formal quotas and extensive legal protections (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Post-conflict, women have retained positions of power, using strong political and civil society networks to sustain mobilisation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Liberia: In order to respond to the basic needs of conflict-affected communities, women joined together to develop relief organisations and played leading roles in providing support to displaced people and war-affected communities (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). These groups were not limited to any particular class or county. In 1994, several women’s organisations joined together under the banner of the Liberian Women’s Initiative, which marked the beginning of a Liberian women’s political movement and peace advocacy (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

During the period of post-conflict recovery, women’s organisations came again to the forefront, leading a mass awareness-raising campaign to promote nation-wide voter registration and encourage women’s participation in all aspects of the first elections after the war (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). When Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected president in 2005, her election was seen as a show of solidarity among women voters; and a major victory for gender equality (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

Research on Liberian NGOs finds that there were concerns that they had to implement the agendas of international NGOs, without any guarantees for the longer-term survival of their organisation (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). Another problematic aspect is that the projects requested by international organisations were often focused on ad hoc service delivery, which did not allow for organisations to get involved in research, policy monitoring or advocacy (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

Rwanda: During the war, Rwandan women took on roles in civil society that existed outside of a connection with either side of the conflict: they hid and protected Tutsi families; organised national peace rallies; and aided conflict-affected communities (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Women’s movements confronted rural poverty; promoted microcredit lending, community development programmes, and income-earning activities; advocated for legal aid and workers’ rights; promoted girls’ education; contributed to vocational training and civic education; and contributed to health services, trauma counseling, and HIV/AIDS awareness (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Active participation in civil society legitimised women as effective community and political leaders; and challenged the narrative of passive women (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Many women’s organisations continued to have a voice in the peace negotiations (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

5. Collective agency and political activism

Research on women's mobilisation in civil wars in Nepal, Colombia, and Rwanda finds that collective mobilisation emerges and fades during conflict escalation, peacemaking, and recovery processes (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The initial escalation stage of civil war is a major catalyst for de-stabilising gendered social norms: women with greater knowledge of oppressive power structures and barriers to collective agency can develop new skills, interests, and platforms for mobilisation during civil wars (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). This, in turn, can lead to social, institutional, and structural transformations, which create resilience and empowerment for previously marginalised groups (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Mobilisation momentum can carry over into the peacemaking process and influences the development of institutions that provide women access to formal political power to pursue shared goals (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Whether or not women's groups are able to sustain collective agency and mobilisation, and exercise power over the course of a long-running peace process, depends upon various conflict dynamics and processes (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). There are three sites of contestation that develop during the peacemaking process that can, in some cases, create barriers for women's collective agency and stifle mobilisation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

- First, tension between international norms related to empowerment of women and SGM groups, on the one hand, and domestic politics of institutional development and local realities, on the other. This clash can lead to tokenistic institutions, whereby women are present in leadership roles, for example, but still do not have enough power to set the agenda (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The LGBTQ+ movement in Lebanon experienced this dilemma of whether to 'upscale' activism by courting powerful international actors or 'downscale' by constructing modes of activism that are specifically designed to deal with the local character of the sectarian system (Nagle, 2020).
- Second, statebuilding processes and competition for power can result in the (re)emergence of identity-based politics (e.g. ethnicity, religion, class, and caste). This can fragment previously unified women's networks, erode shared goals, and undermine gender-based social cohesion and collective mobilisation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).
- Third, women's formal political representation can create tension with highly localised, deeply embedded social structures. Patriarchal backlash and structural repression, in turn, increases the cost of participation in local forms of collective action focused on women's protection and rights (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The inclusion of women in post-war politics thus does not always lead to the protection of all women, nor to long-term sustainable peace (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

An OECD review of donor support to women's empowerment in Bangladesh, the DRC, Ethiopia and Nepal finds that programming to date tends to include women affected by conflict and violence solely as passive beneficiaries only, resulting in lost opportunities to foster women's collective agency and activism (OECD, 2017). An exception given is a project in Nepal (see below).

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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Interviews with WCSOs, many of which emerged informally during the war, reveal that there are few politicians in the country that they consider to be important

partners (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). The rise of a few younger, supportive politicians in recent years has provided political allies, who gather and act on information from activists (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). However, the majority of voters in BiH still support ethnonationalist parties. Human rights organisations, many of whom receive international financial support, engage in activities to overcome the ethnonationalist political landscape of BiH and promote solidarity among women regardless of their ethnicity (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). WCSOs in the country work with all women in politics regardless of party affiliation, trying to create citizen and women-friendly institutions (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

In recent years, WCSOs together with women from non-ethnonationalist parties have been lobbying for gender parity in election lists: WCSOs from Tuzla, for example, have established a lobby group consisting of activists, female politicians, and different groups of women (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022). The initiative is, at least formally, backed up by a liberal party, Our Party (Naša stranka) and the Social Democratic Party of BiH, yet even within these two parties, there are only a few persons who are fully committed to gender equality (Popov-Momčinović & Meier, 2022).

Nepal: The Nepalese Civil War presented an opportunity for women to advocate against the war, resulting in the expansion of women's leadership and influence in communities across the country; and the expansion of female participation in previously male-dominated sectors. This, in turn, instilled confidence in women to challenge discriminating social structures and demand an end to the violent conflict (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The Maoist movement responded positively to women's groups, and women's organisations expanded in Maoist controlled regions (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Some women's organisations and campaigns were not affiliated with either side of the conflict, and many civic groups united under a pro-peace agenda (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

The key mechanisms that sustained women's mobilisation included displacement and urban relocation; patriarchal norms erosion; humanitarian mobilisation opportunities; and grassroots political pressure. Women's post-war recovery gains have been limited though due in part to institutional tokenism; statebuilding and caste-based fragmentation; and embedded, patriarchal social structures (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

An OECD review finds that projects to implement the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan have mostly tended to involve women as beneficiaries, recipients of services, or participants in training, with few interventions strongly focused on supporting women's active roles in peacebuilding and statebuilding (OECD, 2017). A positive exception is a programme designed to strengthen political processes in Nepal: it emphasised increasing the individual capacity of women Members of Parliament as effective politicians, as well as their collective capacity to work across party lines in a highly politically divided context, in order to develop and advocate for a shared gender equality agenda (OECD, 2017). It took advantage of key reform moments, such as constitutional reform, and sought to strengthen links between women in politics at the national and local levels. However, there was little direct and systematic engagement with male political leaders on gender equality and women's political inclusion (OECD, 2017).

Lebanon: In order to ground the LGBTQ+ movement in the local environment, Helem and other activists have sought to positively change the cultural values and norms of key policymakers, practitioners and the wider public in relation to the LGBTQ+ population (Nagle, 2020). For example, Helem has contested discursive language and textual practices that construct Lebanese sexual minorities as deviant (Nagle, 2020). A number of judges in the country have

refused to apply Law 534, which criminalises homosexuality on the basis that it is supposedly 'unnatural', by arguing that conceptions of nature are socio-cultural constructs (Nagle, 2020).

Many activists in the Lebanese LGBTQ+ movement link their campaign against homophobia with the wider fight to oppose the sectarian system, which is considered by many to be divisive and patriarchal—requiring compulsory heterosexuality (Nagle, 2020). In so doing, Helem and other LGBTQ+ activists have built links and networks with many Lebanese non-sectarian groups and non-sectarian movements (e.g. anti-corruption, anti-racism, rights for migrant workers, labour movements, and movements protecting public spaces from privatisation). Many activists involved in protests against corruption, for example, have now also become interested in the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements (Nagle, 2020). They consider that the people who are against rights for sexual minorities are the same people involved in sectarianism and corruption (Nagle, 2020).

Liberia: The Liberian conflict generated a significant level of collective female activism during and after the war (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). Despite being victims of grave and systematic gender-based crimes, women found ways to organise themselves against (gender-based) violence and advocate for peace, which was invaluable to the peace process and in bringing an end to Liberia's civil war (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). In post-war Liberia, women gained influence not by invitation to the peace negotiations, but again by extensive activism and political lobbying that contributed to placing women's rights on the agenda (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). The Accra Agreement that marked the end of the civil war included references to gender, including institutional reform to promote women's rights (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).

Although the war officially ended in 1997, violence continued and expanded regionally. This prompted peace activists from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to come together in 2000 under the banner of Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET). This network, consisting of 'elite professional women', was funded by the international community (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). The strong women's movement in Liberia has started to fragment post-conflict, however: since the most pressing need for cooperation has ended, societal structures and divisions of class, religion, ethnicity and age have come to the forefront again, following similar patterns of women's movements in other post-conflict settings (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). While there are still NGOs that operate in thematic areas, some gender advocates find that there is no longer a women's movement (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

The lack of cohesiveness and absence of a shared, forward looking vision has resulted in a failure to transform peace activism into ongoing political activism (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016). Unless the structure of political opportunities shaped by the government and the international community becomes more inclusive, and the Liberian women's movement becomes more pluralistic in terms of membership and issues areas, it is likely to remain a crisis movement (Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

Colombia: Women played an active role in resistance to war, and in emphasizing the link between redistribution and a lasting peace (Lemaitre, 2020). Similarly, grassroots women's organisations have mobilised actively to demand material reparations that allow poor families to reconstruct their lives after the war (Lemaitre, 2020). LGBTQ+ civil society leaders and activists have also played a significant role in the progress achieved in Colombia in relation to LGBTQ+ rights. They are building networks for social change by partnering with other organisations to conduct capacity building activities in urban and rural settings and utilising the different assets

and connections of each organisation to effectively reach a greater variety of LGBTQ+ victims of the armed conflict (Maier, 2020).

6. Involvement in peace processes and quotas for political participation

An empirical study on the gendered implications of civil war finds that much of the post-war improvement in female empowerment is driven by negotiated settlements (rather than one-sided military victory). Peace agreements containing gender-specific provisions can have a particularly large effect on improvements in women's political participation, underscoring the importance of UNSCR 1325 and of involving women in negotiations and settlements (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). Women can use regional and international standards and norms to protect women's rights and peace (Lukianchenko, 2021).

Research on peacemaking processes in Nepal, Colombia and Rwanda finds that these processes set the stage for opportunities and challenges for women's groups in the post-war stage (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Some women 'insiders' – those with official roles in formal peace mechanisms or who advise peace process stakeholders in an official capacity – have championed women's participation and inclusion (Warren et al., 2018). In Ukraine, for example, women have been powerful advocates for legislation that protects women's rights (Warren et al., 2018). Where women's access to the negotiations is more restricted, they can inform the process through more informal channels (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020).

In the Western Balkans, women are still largely underrepresented in decision-making and governments due to the male dominated political mindset. Findings in the region show that women's participation in national governments does not go beyond 20%, with some exceptions in certain countries and during certain periods⁵ (Tahiri, 2021).

Quotas can be a particularly effective tool during post-conflict reconstruction processes as part of efforts to reduce political, economic, social, cultural and religious constraints that prevent women from fully participating in public and private spheres (Warren, 2021). Practice has shown that quotas are needed to ensure gender equality in decision-making levels, particularly in contexts with ongoing male dominated political mindsets (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). In Nepal and Rwanda, peacemaking led to high levels of women's formal participation in political institutions through constitutionally established gender quotas (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Quotas have been essential for ensuring gender inclusive parliaments in various contexts, contributing to good progress in women's representation in national parliaments (Myrittinen & Daigle, 2017). Quotas allow for people to become accustomed to the presence of women in decision-making positions and provide opportunities for women to gain leadership skills (Warren, 2021).

The effectiveness of quotas is not guaranteed, however: in particular, if quotas are introduced but not respected or enforced, they may be counterproductive (Warren, 2021). Quotas may also create an impression of women as tokens who did not legitimately earn their positions. Once

⁵ For example, a snapshot done by the RWLSEE regional review in 2019 shows the following data: there is a representation of around 20% of women in governments of four countries (Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia), over 10% in one country (Kosovo), less than 3% in one country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and, 50% for the first time in one country (Albania) (Tahiri, 2021).

elected, women may not be placed in leadership roles or assigned responsibilities that would heighten their profiles and provide opportunities for professional growth; or they may be sidelined into committees focusing on so-called 'women's issues' (Warren, 2021). As such, decision-making and leading positions are still often dominated by men (Myrtilinen & Daigle, 2017). Further, where women do comprise leaders of institutions, they tend to be from privileged, dominant class or caste groups (e.g. Rwanda's Tutsi elites and Nepal's Brahmin women), effectively leading to fragmentation of broader women's movements (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). In Colombia, Afro-Colombian women faced rising barriers to empowerment. Similarly, Nepali women from the Dalit caste did not share the same post-war opportunities as women from higher castes (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

The formalisation of institutions designed to empower women and protect women's rights is thus not a sufficient condition for cementing gains and maintaining mobilisation momentum (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Institutional tokenism, and social friction between gender-based groups and other identity-based affiliations, create risks for backsliding, and even the ongoing repression of particular women's groups (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

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Nepal: Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion discourse received political momentum after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (2006) due to: the influence of the Maoist movement between 1996–2006, which advocated for greater gender equality and social inclusion; the strong women's movement within Nepal; and the influence of international discourse (Yadav, 2021). The 2007 Interim Constitution reserved a mandatory 33% quota for women, and women's inclusion became one of the top election campaign agenda items (Yadav, 2021). In the absence of conflict, it is unlikely that this political opening would have happened to the extent that it did (Yadav, 2021). The presence of a critical mass of women (33%) in the first Constitution Assembly, due to the quota, enabled them to make several legislative changes, such as the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act 2066 (2009), which had been long debated (Yadav, 2021).

Colombia: Increased women's political participation and representation emerged from the peace process (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). One third of the participants involved in negotiating the peace process, which began in 2012, were women (Warren, 2021). Additionally, while women waited for an invitation to the formal table, they participated in informal channels, such as public forums, summits, and rallies to express their demands (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Many women's groups are continuing to flourish in Colombian society, with increasing acceptance of women leaving the domestic sphere (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Not all Colombian women experience the same level of agency in their respective communities, however: Afro Colombian women, in particular, continue to report feeling very marginalised by the peace process (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Colombia introduced political quotas in 2011: legislation requires that women must be appointed to 30% of the cabinet-level positions. Further, three female candidates competed in the 2014 presidential elections (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). National quotas have not affected local governing bodies, however: between 1998 and 2019, the average percentage of female representation in departmental assemblies and municipal councils was 14% (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021).

Rwanda: Prior to the war, women were largely absent from the political sphere in Rwanda. The flourishing of women's organisations during the war, and the increasing role of women as

community leaders (a traditionally masculine role), resulted in a cultural shift in the perception of gender roles; legitimised women as political actors; and paved a pathway into the formal political sphere (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Women's participation in politics has become normalised in the country. In the first post-war election in 2003, women won 48% of the parliamentary seats—18% higher than the quota system passed in the country's constitution which stipulates that 30% of parliament's decision-making positions should be reserved for women (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). The already high percentage of participation has increased over time: in 2017, women comprised 64% of parliament, and Rwanda became the country with the highest percentage of female political participation in the world (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021; Warren, 2021).

7. Transitional justice

Transitional justice is a means of dealing with past human rights violations in societies transitioning from war to peace or from autocratic to democratic regimes (Lambourne & Carreon, 2016). The UN has defined transitional justice as 'the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation'⁶. The political opportunity embedded in transitional justice processes and mechanisms occurs temporarily due to the crisis of legitimacy and upheaval caused by war (Bueno-Hansen, 2018). Transition might only be a short and fleeting moment – therefore, it is essential to incorporate a gender dimension in transitional justice processes and mechanisms (Nelaeva & Sidorova, 2019). Following the UN guiding principles on transitional justice, processes and mechanisms shall necessarily account for the ensuring of the rights of women and girls⁷ (Nelaeva & Sidorova, 2019). There is a need for improved access for women and SGM groups to existing transitional justice mechanisms and for different approaches that directly address their marginalisation and exclusion in legal, political, economic and social spaces in conflict-affected contexts (Lambourne & Carreon, 2016).

The experience of prior armed conflicts reveals unequal participation of women and men in post-conflict recovery processes: transitional justice often does not fully address the needs of different groups of women and men affected by conflict (Lukianchenko, 2021). The patriarchal system, which often continues to operate outside of times of conflict, can result in the continued dominance of hegemonic masculinity, further marginalising vulnerable groups and undermining their full and effective participation in transitional justice (Mbwana, 2020; Haider, 2016). Women are often silenced in truth-seeking and truth-telling processes, for example, including in peacetime (Mbwana, 2020). Transitional justice processes also often exclude sexual and gender minority groups (Mbwana, 2020). In some societies, instability generated by mass violence intensifies attacks against LGBTQ+ persons. The rising rates of anti-LGBTQ+ violence in post-Agreement Northern Ireland and post-conflict Uganda, for example, demonstrate how pervasive violence and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments can be in societies undergoing peace processes (Fobear & Baines, 2020). The failure to acknowledge the abuses done to SGM groups, along with the lack of promotion of accountability, deepens their exclusion (Mbwana, 2020). Very few

⁶ United Nations Security Council (2004). 'The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-conflict Societies', Report of the Secretary-General, New York: United Nations, p. 4.
<https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/blog/document/the-rule-of-law-and-transitional-justice-in-conflict-and-post-conflict-societies-report-of-the-secretary-general/>

⁷ Guidance note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice (2010):
https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/TJ_Guidance_Note_March_2010FINAL.pdf

documents produced post-conflict even mention SGM groups, let alone describe efforts made to include them in a resolution process (Maier, 2020).

Truth commissions were originally established in a gender-blind fashion. Following the lead of the South African TRC, subsequent truth commissions (Liberia, Peru, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste) have created gender units and implemented measures to increase women's participation, such as providing childcare and safe transport. Women have also been appointed as commissioners and experts (see Haider, 2016). The narrative truth commissions develop should also explore the links between masculinity and violence and unequal power relations and gender inequality as potential root causes of conflict: the Sierra Leone TRC, for example, was the first to make a connection between 'extraordinary' violence against women during the civil war and 'ordinary' violence they experienced before and continue to experience since the war (Lambourne & Carreon, 2016).

There have been significant struggles for and remarkable achievements in recognition of war-time sexual violence. However, excessive focus on women in transitional justice (e.g. in trials and truth-telling mechanisms) as victims of war may obscure other forms of women's experiences such as direct participation in combat; and collective agency and mobilisation (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021; Nelaeva & Sidorova, 2019). It obscures how women attain new forms of power during war, and how their actions can influence armed groups, create new CSOs, and transform local, national, and international politics (Evilsizor & Cox, 2021). Women should thus not be seen solely as victims of conflict, but also as agents of change (Yadav, 2021). In Colombia, for example, attention to women's agency reveals that feminist peace activism during and after the war is an important part of women's experiences, beyond women's sexual victimisation—which has traditionally received more focus (Lemaitre, 2020).

The inclusion of the LGBTQ+ agenda in transitional justice can also be part of a transformative and diverse process that seriously considers the rights and dignities of all people (Mbwana, 2020). As the case of Colombia shows (see below), including diverse LGBTQ+ voices in all stages of transitional justice processes is important and beneficial: it can provide a safe space to hear marginalised voices and to discuss varying experiences; help societies unlearn the stereotyping and stigmatisation of the LGBTQ+ community; and ensure that all individuals within society are afforded their rights (Mbwana, 2020).

Case studies

Ukraine: In 2020, Ukraine adopted its second National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 until 2025, which provides for several measures aimed at ensuring post-conflict recovery, development and implementation of transitional justice systems based on the principles of equal rights and opportunities for women and men (Lukianchenko, 2021). In 2021, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine registered the bill No 5844 'On the principles of the State Policy of Transition Period', which specifies that the state ensures equal and meaningful participation of women in all measures of transitional justice (Lukianchenko, 2021).

Tunisia: Since Tunisia's 2011 revolution, transformative gender justice has been pursued via various mechanisms, including the Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC)'s Women's Committee, established in 2014 and tasked with dealing with gender-specific issues and mainstreaming gender in the work of the other committees (Ketelaars, 2018). In order to address the imbalance in submissions to the TDC (men accounted for 95% of them as of 2015), a group of 11 women's

CSOs worked together to highlight the challenges that women face in the country (including discrimination in access to economic and political opportunities) and to facilitate the inclusion of their experiences. Their efforts contributed to the significant rise in the number of cases filed by female victims with the TDC (from 5% to 23%) (El Gantri, 2016).

The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) travelled to the most marginalised regions of Tunisia to take the testimonies of female activists and victims who had been engaged in the popular uprisings against the regime that preceded the 2011 revolution. This culminated in the publication of a report highlighting the role of female activists in these uprisings, and the harms they suffered as a result of their participation (Ketelaars, 2018). Their testimonies demonstrated the gendered impact of socioeconomic rights violations and corruption, which have been identified as the core reason for Tunisia's revolution. Research on Tunisia's transition and gender justice finds, however, that the Women's Committee of the TDC was not as willing to give visibility to issues of economic marginalisation—and to the impact of corruption on economically marginalised women (Ketelaars, 2018). While existing analyses of the gender dimension of Tunisia's transitional justice process have paid much attention to the inclusive concept of victimhood underlying the activities of the TDC's Women's Committee, there has been less attention to broader gender transformation (Ketelaars, 2018).

Colombia: Much like other armed conflicts, Colombia's LGBTQ+ community has largely been excluded from conversations of victimisation, which has resulted in incomplete truth-seeking (Maier, 2020). However, despite the prominence of conservative religious and political sectors that frame the advances of women's and LGBTQ+ rights within the peace process as a threat to God's given design of the family and social order, Colombia has made significant advances in the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights (Bueno-Hansen, 2018). The 1991 constitution included inclusive language that LGBTQ+ activists and advocates could utilize to frame their claims to citizenship rights, which bolstered the strength and visibility of LGBTQ+ social actors and movements (Bueno-Hansen, 2018). The field of transitional justice further opened up a political opportunity for marginalised populations to insert and enact their demands on the national stage, thereby disrupting restricted narratives of inclusion and reconciliation (Bueno-Hansen, 2018). This is all part of a larger political project of ending impunity for violence against women and people that do not adhere to gender and sexual norms; and gaining full citizenship (Bueno-Hansen, 2018).

Colombia has ensured that LGBTQ+ individuals are considered in terms of holistic reparations, healing and assistance through its 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law. Particularly focusing on conflict, Colombia has included LGBTQ+ identities in its victim registry in the Victims' Unit⁸ (Maier, 2020; Mbwana, 2020). In 2015, Colombia was the first country to include LGBTQ+ activists in the peace talk process, which included the aim of implementing a truth commission that explicitly includes LGBTQ+ rights in all of its processes (Mbwana, 2020). Colombia's truth commission began in 2018, with a mandate to focus on 'women, children, old people, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups, and LGBT people'. Similar to Colombia, other truth commissions in

⁸ Utilising the data from the registry, within the context of the armed conflict, those who identify as LGBTI were five times more likely to experience threats than those who identify as women or men. Additionally, those who identify as LGBTI were 15 times more likely than women to experience 'crimes against sexual freedom and integrity'¹² and 162 times more likely than men.¹³ LGBTI victims also experienced displacement at a slightly higher rate than women and men, 92%, 91%, and 86%, respectively (Maier, 2020).

Latin America have recently expanded their mandate to include cases of violence against gender and sexual minorities as human rights violations worthy of investigation (Bueno-Hansen, 2018).

At an informal level, LGBTQ+ civil society leaders, activists, and organisations in Colombia have, over the past 50 years, documented all aspects of violence against SGM persons (Mbwana, 2020). Civil society has also created spaces for LGBTQ+ victims to reveal the truth of their experiences, through forums, workshops and conferences (Maier, 2020). Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory released its report on the experience of LGBTQ+ persons within the context of the armed conflict titled 'Aniquilar la Diferencia' ('Annihilate the Difference') in 2016. The report was the first publication to document the violence committed against LGBTQ+ people during the armed conflict and the impact on their families; and established a starting point for authorities to take action to protect LGBTQ+ people in their departments (Maier, 2020).

Sierra Leone: The SLTRC has sought to magnify women's voices and experiences, including recognising the link between pre-conflict gendered structural inequalities and conflict-enabled gender-based violations of women (Unobe, 2022). From the outset, local women's groups participated in SLTRC's trainings and gave written submissions and oral testimonies at the SLTRC. In addition, three women commissioners were appointed out of seven commissioners (Unobe, 2022). The SLTRC offered complex accounts of how social, legal, political, and cultural forces conspired to render women more vulnerable to a range of degradations and violations in the war (Unobe, 2022). Testimonies from women and girls centred on the gender-specific nature of violations that they suffered (Unobe, 2022). The Commission recommended in its final report that new legislation require all political parties to ensure at least 30% of their candidates for all national and local elections are women, and that Sierra Leone ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women (Unobe, 2022). A bill for a 30% elective quota for women was adopted by the Sierra Leone Cabinet on July 21, 2021.

While the SLTRC engaged civil society and women's groups from the onset, limited funding inhibited the SLTRC's engagement with these groups beyond information sharing, undermining a genuine partnership between the Commission and civil society (Unobe, 2022). In addition the Commission's recommendations have either not been implemented, or where implemented, many have not been effective—such as in the case of 30% quota. Presently, women account for only 18 of 146 parliamentarians (12.33%); and women in general remain marginalised in post-conflict Sierra Leone (Unobe, 2022). Recent research argues that the lack of success of the Commission and transitional justice in advancing the status of women in Sierra Leone is due in part to a 'one-fits-all' model of transitional justice, based on a Western approach, which does not cater to local dynamics and local women's experiences for meaningful transitional justice (Unobe, 2022).

8. References

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