

## **Making and Sharing the Space in Post-TRC South Africa: Perspectives from Local Female Theologians**

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Feminist peace researchers and theologians have stressed that a "positive", or "just", peace includes an end to violence against women *both* in the public *and* in the private sphere. Here one of the South African female theologians to write about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) stressed that the realisation of such a peace goes well beyond the work of the TRC. It includes, she argues, the establishment of a gender-inclusive justice, restoration and healing, and the equalisation of power imbalances between men and women, rich and poor, black and white.

Christian churches, to which about 80% of South Africans belong, play an important role, as they have mirrored society with regard to both race *and* gender relations. The churches might even contribute towards bridging divides caused by apartheid by providing women across *all* other (e.g. racial, socioeconomic, denominational) barriers with one source for common ground, namely the experience of religious ideas and institutions as being oppressive. Yet women have also found solace, strength and inspiration in their religious traditions. This paper, from a post-doctoral project, describes and analyses the ambivalent role of Christian beliefs and institutions, and the tension that local female theologians highlight between oppressive and liberating elements in their respective religious traditions. Crucial issues are the potential of their churches to be "safe spaces" for abused women, and to be spaces for women and men to encounter each other in non-stereotypical gender roles. Another important theme among these theologians is the sharing of personal life-stories, and those of their foremothers, in searching for a new identity, and constructive role, in the "New South Africa".

My material consists of writings by South African female theologians, and of interviews with women pursuing theological training and/or working in churches or NGO's primarily in the Western Cape. In interpreting the material Galtung's theory of cultural violence, as well as the theory of intersectionality, are used, although particular attention is given to suggestions by the female theologians about how to overcome various forms of (direct, structural and cultural) violence and to challenge the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination in post-TRC South Africa.

This Abstract might also fit into panel 40, 43 or 47.