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On violence, the everyday, and social reproduction: Agnes and Myanmar's transition

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ABSTRACT

This article brings into conversation feminist political economy with critical studies in peace and conflict to examine how Myanmar's transition is experienced through everyday gendered sites and with what consequences for women living in rural areas of the country, where lives are shaped as much by the actuality as the possibility of violence. The everyday is where these insecurities are felt, feared and negotiated. To illustrate this, I draw on the experiences of Agnes, a woman growing up within the context of prolonged conflict in rural Myanmar. I demonstrate how Agnes's home, and her bodily labour and vulnerability, is at the locus of a gendered political economy (re)produced both within the home and at the national level. I show how the transition has for women like Agnes resulted in a continuation of insecurity, challenging the legitimacy of Myanmar's neoliberal reform initiatives as a meaningful pathway towards sustainable peace and security.

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While I was drinking water, I heard a very loud sound, the explosion of a grenade. I was so scared . . . I saw two young children. The sister was about three years and her younger brother was about one and a half year. The sister tried to carry her brother on her back and ran, but her brother was dead. The sister did not realise that her brother was dead. [long pause] So, Uncle and I brought them inside the house and cleaned the blood that came out of the ears of the older sister. She did not hear well because of the loud sound that had destroyed one side of her eardrum.

In 2012, the same year Agnes¹ helps a young girl clean the blood from her ear, Aung San Suu Kyi enters parliament in Myanmar, her victory roundly hailed as the harbinger of a real democratic transition by commentators around the world. An ambitious peace process has begun, including talks with the largest non-state actor in Kayah (Karenni) state, the state where Agnes lives, and foreign investments to the country are increasing exponentially; by the end of fiscal year it exceeds US\$1.5 billion, a five-fold jump from the

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¹Agnes is a synonym; she is Christian, hence the use of a Christian name.

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previous year. Three years later that number has more than tripled.² The transition in Myanmar – a country previously considered an inveterate and paranoid military state – is, by all accounts, well underway. But how is it experienced by people living at the margins, people whose lives, while deeply affected by the transition, are not invited to inform or comment on it? How is it experienced by people like Agnes? Structural gender inequalities place Agnes, an ethnic minority woman from a rural area, as peripheral to the public sphere of both decision-making and knowledge-making. But what is revealed if we place her, and her story, in the centre?

I met Agnes in 2018, six years after the incident on the mountain; now living in a capital city she takes care of the three younger siblings her adoptive parents abandoned due to their involvement in the rampant – and growing – drug economy, and the baby she gave birth to after being raped by a progovernment militia soldier. She volunteers with a local armed group, ‘for her own protection’ she tells me, and barely ekes out a living through participation in a particularly precarious form of transitional economics: collecting per diems, given to her when attending training with one of the 55 organisations now implementing projects in Kayah state, capitalising on the recent and unprecedented opening of the state to outsiders.³ This ‘post-conflict’ development industry also includes an influx of foreign and national investors, eager and ready to develop the state’s largely untapped abundance of natural resources⁴: as the UN puts it, Kayah state, now enjoying a ‘fragile peace’ is ‘conducive for economic development’.⁵ The state’s forest and mountains, where the majority of the population practice shifting agriculture, hunt animals, and forage vegetables, roots and herbs are singled out as particularly ripe for investments.⁶ But conducive for whom? Agnes, for one, is largely prevented from tapping in to this ‘potential’. She does not have formal access to land, spends much of her time on reproductive duties, and lacks the capital, connection, and technical skills needed to benefit from the opportunities offered by Myanmar’s post-conflict development industry, marked by cronyism and military capture. In this way, she is not so different from other women in the state. Agnes, like the majority of women living in Kayah state, works in the informal economy and undertakes extensive unpaid care work in order to keep her family afloat. Along with a third of women in the state, she heads her household herself and lives near or on the poverty line.⁷ She cannot access formal credit, and did not

²McKinsey Global Institute. ‘Myanmar’s moment: Unique opportunities, major challenges’ (2013); Voice of America, ‘Myanmar Sees Foreign Investment Topping \$5 Billion in 2014–15’, September (2016), accessed Accessed September 2019: <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/myanmar-sees-foreign-investment-topping-5-billion-2014-15> also see Jared Bissinger, ‘Local Economic Governance in Myanmar. Yangon: The Asia Foundation.’ February (2016) and Bjarnegård, Elin. ‘Introduction: Development Challenges in Myanmar: Political Development and Politics of Development Intertwined’, *The European Journal of Development Research* (2020)

³Myanmar Information Management Unit, ‘Overview of the August 2019 3 W: SOUTHEASTERN Myanmar’. October 2019. Accessed May 2020: https://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Overview_SubSectorSummary_VT_Map_of_the_Aug_3W_southeasternMyanmar_23Oct2019.pdf

⁴European Union, ‘Kayah State Socio-Economic Analysis.’ Yangon, 2013. Accessed September 2019: <https://www.mercy-corps.org/research-resources/socio-economic-analysis-kayah-state-myanmar>.

⁵UNDP. ‘The State of Local Governance: Trends in Kayah (Local Governance Mapping)’. Yangon, 2014, p. 11. Accessed September 2019: http://www.mm.undp.org/content/dam/myanmar/docs/Publications/PovRedu/Local_Governance_Mapping/UNDP_MM_LG_Mapping_Kayah_web.pdf.

⁶European Union, 2013, p. 9.

⁷Myanmar Department of Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: The Union Report, Vol. 2 (Nay Pyi Taw: Myanmar Department of Population, 2015); Myanmar Department of Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Gender Dimensions, Vol. 4-J (Nay Pyi Taw: Myanmar Department of Population, 2017); Myanmar Department of Population. ‘The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Kayah State.’ *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Census Report Volume 3 – B*. Vol. 3. (Nay Pyi

complete her secondary education. In other words, while her experience is her own, it is also representative of a larger story about the transition which suggests that the country's new political-economy order has not so much upset exclusionary norms as entrenched them, at least for women like Agnes. While richer, often urban, households have seen an increase in their standard of living in the years since Agnes left the mountain, the same is not true for the rural poor. As a recent World Bank report admits 'most measures of inequality have risen over the reform period . . . as individuals with better education and more capital to invest have benefitted more from the early liberalizations and reforms'.⁸

Over the course of the two days I speak with her, I begin to trace the relationship between Agnes' bodily and material insecurity and this overarching transitional political economy that her story suggests are complicit in shaping her everyday life. Agnes, then, helps me develop the thinking and theorising from which this paper emerges, in particular its focus on the everyday sites through which the transition is experienced. This approach entails understanding the transition not 'on the terms laid down' by the state in Myanmar, but through 'the terms laid down' by the subject, by Agnes herself.⁹ Trying to make sense of Agnes' experience of insecurity and labour leads me to make two interrelated claims: one, the transitional political economy perpetuates gendered insecurity, at least for poor women living in conflict-affected areas; and two, marginalised bodies are affected by the larger transitional efforts in ways which trouble notions about progress, peace, or security commonly accompanying accounts of transitions and reforms. In other words, the transition has – at least for poor rural women like Agnes – resulted in a continuation of their insecurity, challenging the legitimacy of the neo-liberal state-building project as the only meaningful pathway towards sustainable peace and human security currently guiding Myanmar's reform initiatives.¹⁰ Agnes' story, her experiences of violence, then illustrates how the political economy of the transition, far from working towards a diminution of insecurity, in some settings instead amplifies it. Structurally, as well as normatively, the state positions Agnes in a position of vulnerability, which ultimately enables the violence that she experiences.

In Myanmar, macro-level events such as the ceasefire negotiations and economic reforms have served to both alter and reproduce gendered relations. The androcentric character of the transitional political and economic processes in Myanmar is evident both in the paucity of women elected to positions of power in the legislature and in the near-total absence of women from the nationwide ceasefire process, as well as by a lack of concern with and investments in social provisioning, such as caretaking and welfare subsidies.¹¹ These broader changes are experienced as insecurities and drudgery negotiated and lived through in the everyday by Agnes. For example, Agnes' social reproductive duties as well as the violence she endures and survives have been shaped by the

Taw. Myanmar Department of Population, 2014); and IHLCA. 'Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey Myanmar.' *Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development*. (Nay Pyi Taw, 2010)

⁸World Bank, *Myanmar Economic Monitor: Capitalizing on Investment Opportunities* (Nay Pyi Taw: World Bank, 2017). p. 9

⁹Nick Cheesman, 'Taking the Rule of Law's Opposition Seriously', *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 9, no. 1 (2017): 41. Also see Roxani Krystalli, 'Narrating Violence: Feminist Dilemmas and Approaches', in *Laura Shepherd, Handbook on Gender and Violence* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, forthcoming).

¹⁰Republic of the Union of Myanmar, *Framework for Economic and Social Reforms* (Naypyidaw: Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2012)

¹¹Paul Minoletti, *Gender (In)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present and Potential Strategies For Change* (Yangon: Asia Foundation, 2016), and Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Ninh, K. N. B., Mi Ki Kyaw Myint, & Lee, S, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians* (Yangon: Asia Foundation, 2017)

broader ceasefire economies that led to a widespread production of narcotics, including opium and *yaba*.¹² Her gendered duties and vulnerabilities have been further intensified by the absence of social provisioning in past and recent market reforms and outbreaks of fighting associated with the 2012 push to engage non-state armed groups in peace talks. In other words, Agnes' vulnerability must be understood and theorised relationally: first in relation to a gendered political economy (re)produced within her home that situates her as uniquely responsibly for social reproductive duties, and second in relation to a gendered political economy (re)produced at the national level that structures her experiences of ceasefire economies and exposes her to intimate violence.

To develop this argument, I first draw on feminist political economy, and discussions on the everyday, alongside critical interventions in peace studies. I turn to the three sites that I suggest the transition is articulated through: social reproduction, the home, and women's bodies. This perspective exposes the workings of power by highlighting the connection between different gendered sites through which the transition fuel Agnes' experiences of violence. While Myanmar's transition is widely lauded by international observers, Agnes' story complicates its chimera of success. Through this discussion I aim to show how the transition is articulated through everyday sites in which gendered relations of power are negotiated and experienced. It is important to note that I am not trying to accurately describe or fix an explanation about the transition. Instead, I am trying to make sense of the relationship between everyday experiences and the transition, and to highlight the violence I suggest this entails, in at least some settings and for some bodies. I take the perspective that Agnes' story matters, or should matter to scholars and analysts working on Myanmar, because it provides critical insights into the ways in which rural women, living in ethnic minority areas, negotiate and experience everyday life during the country's transition. Her story attends to the specific workings of power by accounting for the everyday as a space of constraint and insecurity, as well as a space of duty and love.¹³ Recognising the knowledge that Agnes' life holds lends important insights into the ways in which gendered insecurity and violence do not necessarily diminish in post-conflict contexts, but may instead be perpetuated through the reproduction of structural gendered power relations that commonly accompany neoliberal state-building initiatives. Agnes' story then matters for scholars interested in the operation of power for its possibility to expose the workings of power. In closing, I therefore argue that scholars and analysis can – and should – develop more nuanced knowledge by centring everyday, bottom-up, lived experiences in our analyses of peace, reforms and politics in Myanmar.¹⁴

¹²See David Brenner, *The Development-Insecurity Nexus: Geo-economic Transformations and Violence in Myanmar* (LSE Global South Unit: London, 2017); and Patrick Meehan, 'Fortifying or Fragmenting the State? The Political Economy of the Opium/Heroin Trade in Shan State, Myanmar, 1988–2013', *Critical Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 253–282.

¹³Andrew M Jefferson, & Lotte Buch Segal, 'The Confines of Time—On the Ebbing Away of Futures in Sierra Leone and Palestine', *Ethnos* 84, no. 1 (2019): 96–112; and Juanita Elias & Shirin Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy: Space, time, and violence', *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018): 201–220.

¹⁴Rachel Julian, Beirt Bliesemann de Guevara, & Robin Redhead, 'From expert to experiential knowledge: exploring the inclusion of local experiences in understanding violence in conflict', *Peacebuilding* 7, no. 2 (2019): 210–225. Also see Laura McLeod and Maria O'Reilly, 'Critical peace and conflict studies: feminist interventions', *Peacebuilding* 7, no. 2 (2019): 127–145.

Everyday peace, transitional processes, and gendered labour

Conflicts and post-conflict reforms are experienced and reproduced in the everyday, but these experiences – and the knowledge these hold – tend to be obscured in dominant peacebuilding discourses that privilege armed actors and large-scale events.¹⁵ These are narratives that understand conflict as the exception, as a disruption of everyday life. But what if conflict and insecurity is not a disruption of the everyday, but rather, is the everyday? In Myanmar, conflict has been fought, on and off, since the late 1940s. In poor rural parts of the country, the lives of women like Agnes are shaped as much by the actuality as the possibility of violence and conflict. Here, war is not a disruption of the everyday. It is, rather, a way of living and surviving in the midst of trauma and violence.¹⁶ The everyday is where these insecurities are felt, remembered, feared, negotiated, and experienced, in the aftermath as well as in the midst of conflict. While not all bodies experience this violence in equal measure, the everyday is nevertheless a critical site through which gendered relations of power is enacted and deployed. We therefore need to study the multiple ways in which gendered power and insecurity takes shape through a focus on the everyday.

I am approaching the everyday from methodology that understands Agnes' narrative as a form of specific and relational knowledge.¹⁷ Her narrative, focusing on lived experience, is animated by the ways in which she understands and navigates past and present insecurities. Drawing on Agnes narrative helps me account for the ways in which gender power is constituted through and experienced within the everyday. To paraphrase Nick Cheesman, narratives are 'not just a by-product of state activity but integral to it'¹⁸ by which I mean to say that gendered harm and insecurity emerges from, and is shaped by, larger transitional processes that (re)produces unequal gender relations, at least for poor, rural women like Agnes. Her experiences of insecurity are, then, not just a by-product of the transition, but in some ways, integral to it.

I met Agnes while collecting interviews for a larger project on development, activism, and gender in Kayah state: in the middle of a group interview, Agnes began to tell her story of drug pushing, rape, and survival.¹⁹ The room fell quiet as she talked. She spoke for ten minutes. We had to end the interview, my colleague and I, as we were going to another office, another interview, but Agnes was not done. Looking at us she said, but I want to talk more. We invited her to visit us at our hotel the next day. There, for close to ninety minutes, she repeated the story we had heard the previous day, with more details.

¹⁵Elizabeth Dauphinee 'Narrative voice and the limits of peacebuilding: rethinking the politics of partiality', *Peacebuilding*, 3, no. 3 (2015): 261–278.

¹⁶Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007). Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, *The Everyday Economic Survival in Contemporary Myanmar* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019). On everyday militarisation and conflict, see Victoria Basham, 'Gender, race, militarism and remembrance: the everyday geopolitics of the poppy', *Gender, Place and Culture* 23, no. 6 (2017): 883–896; Cynthia Enloe, *Manoeuvres: the International Politics of Militarising Women's Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2000); Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); and Alexandra Hyde, 'The present tense of Afghanistan: accounting for space, time and gender in processes of militarisation', *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 6 (2015): 857–868.

¹⁷Dauphinee, 'Narrative voice and the limits of peacebuilding'.

¹⁸Cheesman, 'Taking the Rule of Law's Opposition Seriously'

¹⁹Jenny Hedström & Elisabeth Olivius, 'Insecurity, Dispossession, Depletion: Women's Experiences of Post-War Development in Myanmar', *European Journal of Development Research* 32 (2020), 379–403. Also see Jenny Hedström & Zin Mar Phyto, 'Friendship, Power, and Intimacy in Research on Conflict: Implications for Feminist Ethics,' *International Journal of Feminist Politics* (forthcoming)

While Agnes doesn't know much about the transition that has taken place on a national level, or the ceasefires that both preceded and followed from it in her area, the effects of these are embodied in her everyday experiences. Her story reflects how, for some women, the transition is experienced, not as an absence of violence, but as a continuum of insecurity experienced and negotiated in the everyday. Her story carries with it a form of 'situated knowledge'²⁰ (Haraway 1988) which provides critical insights into 'a set of truths that otherwise slip from view in empirical and general theories'.²¹ This is knowledge which suggests that everyday peace is gendered, and, importantly, ontologically different from perceptions of peace that take the state and its institutions as the point of departure.

I take the view here that feminist interventions in peace and conflict studies are helpful for identifying and conceptualising everyday gendered peace. In particular, feminist attention to everyday peace in the aftermath of violence as a fluctuating site framed by unequal power relations reveals how women's experiences of ordinary and everyday violence during and in the aftermath of conflict is constitutive of broader relations of (gendered) power. This perspective understands peace as ongoing struggles for survival despite, and amidst, violence and insecurity, locating agency not in resistance but in resilience, in the daily negotiation and sensemaking of violence.²² These scholars locate violence and conflict as a continuum, situating gender relations as central to understandings of peace, and women as key actors in transitional processes.²³ This understanding of the everyday offers a critical framework for locating Agnes' experiences in relation to the Myanmar transition. Yet, the feminist and local 'turns' in peace and conflict studies only offers a partial lens from which to understand the everyday in relation to political and economic reform processes.²⁴ To understand the everyday as embodied and ordinary, as everyday acts of survival, requires a recognition of the gendered relations of power that structures and constrains everyday life, shaping access to power, authority, and decision-making.²⁵ The everyday I suggest we study is a space of drudgery, negotiation, love, intimacy, and insecurity. What, then, brings such a messy focus on the everyday to an analysis of the transition? One useful aspect is that it offers a helpful analytical lens through which to understand how, and in what ways, the transition transforms or reproduces gendered relations of power. Feminist political economy of the everyday foregrounds social reproduction – loosely defined as the emotional, symbolic, and material labour reproduced in and from the household, to sustain life itself – as co-constitutive of and embodied within everyday life.²⁶ It argues that the everyday is shaped

²⁰ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599.

²¹ Erin Baines, 'Today, I Want to Speak Out the Truth': Victim Agency, Responsibility, and Transitional Justice', *International Political Sociology* (2015).

²² See Sophie Richter-Devroe, 'Palestinian Women's Everyday Resistance: Between Normality and Normalisation', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 32–46; Helen Berents and Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, 'Theorising youth and everyday peace(building)', *Peacebuilding* 3, no. 2 (2011): 115–125; and Swati Parashar, 'What wars and 'war bodies' know about international relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (2013): 615–630.

²³ Christine Sylvester, 'War Experiences/War Practices/War Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012): 483–503; Annika Björkdahl, 'A Gender-Just Peace? Exploring the Post-Dayton Peace Process in Bosnia', *Peace and Change* 37, no. 2 (2012): 286–317; and Tiina Vaittinen, Amanda Donahoe, Rachel Kunz, Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir, & Sanam Roohi, 'Care as everyday peacebuilding', *Peacebuilding* 7, no. 2 (2019): 194–209.

²⁴ On the local 'turn' in peace and conflict studies, see Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014.

²⁵ Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁶ Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy'.

by, and in turn is shaping, gendered political economic relations, visible in for example the commodification of reproductive labour; remittances sustaining both individual households and local economies; and the ways in which households, and in particular women's labour, are pushed to absorb welfare dismantling processes.²⁷ Importantly, this work notes how violence, while produced through broader political and economic relations, is experienced in the everyday: structural gendered inequalities, including a lack of access to opportunities, legislation, and material wealth, expose women to direct and intimate forms of violence endured in the everyday.²⁸ This work, I argue, is particularly useful for understanding Agnes' experiences' in relation to Myanmar's post-war reforms where multiple political and economic relations intersect to normatively and practically produce gendered hierarchies. It helps locate the everyday as a relational, messy space through which Agnes negotiate and experience insecurity, drudgery, violence as well as love. Bringing this literature into dialogue with work on peace and conflict helps me conceptualise social reproduction as embodied in and through everyday survival. This helps me see how gendered work and relations (re)produced within households constitute everyday sites where broader political and economic relations come into direct contact with women's bodies. These sites are important to locate, not least because as Ardeth Maung Thawngmung puts it 'the manner in which most people are currently going about surviving rarely aligns with the norms and practices considered integral to democratic culture'.²⁹ Yet, these everyday sites do not occupy spaces in opposition to the national or state level sites in which democratic transitional politics is typically understood to reside and take place: the legislature, the parliament, the many meetings held in Naypyidaw to discuss peace. Rather, these sites are both animated by and animate these other sites of (gendered) power.

Conflict, ceasefire economies, and the transition in Kayah state: Agnes' story

Kayah state, bordering Thailand to the east, Shan state to the north and Kayin state to the south and the west, is a small state with a very complex conflict history: currently, there are roughly seven armed groups 'claiming to represent nationality identities or goals', although a number of smaller militias also operate in and across the state's borders.³⁰ The largest of these armed groups, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) was formed in 1957. The army Agnes grows up in, the Karenni People's Force (KPF),³¹ was founded in the late 1970s. Several of the smaller groups active in the state agreed to ceasefires with the Myanmar regime in the 1990s, including the KPF. The ceasefire

²⁷See Juanita Elias and Jonathon Louth, 'Producing Migrant Domestic Work: Exploring the Everyday Political Economy of Malaysia's Maid Shortage', *Globalisations* 13, no. 6 (2016): 830–845; Diane Elson, 'Plan F: Feminist Plan for a Caring and Sustainable Economy', *Globalisations* 13, no. 6 (2016): 919–921; and Genevieve LeBaron, 'The political economy of the household: Neoliberal restructuring, enclosures, and daily life', *Review of International Political Economy* 17, no. 5 (2010): 889–912.

²⁸Juanita Elias and Shirin Rai, 'The Everyday Gendered Political Economy of Violence', *Politics & Gender* 11, no. 2 (2015): 424–429; and Jacqui True & Maria Tanyag, 'Global Violence and Security from a Gendered Perspective', In *Global Insecurity: Futures of Global Chaos and Governance*, eds. Anthony Burke & Rita Parker (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017): 43–63.

²⁹Thawngmung, *The Everyday Economic Survival*, p.176

³⁰Tom Kramer, Oliver Russell, & Martin Smith, *From war to peace in Kayah (Karenni) State: A land at the crossroads in Myanmar* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2018)

³¹This is a made-up name.

provided the KPF with critical business concessions, and capitalising on investments, they expand on infrastructure projects in areas of Kayah and Shan state now under their control, including a mosquito repellent factory where Agnes will later find work, and the boarding school she will attend. The army support their staff and soldiers with rice, stipends, and other basic items, and growing up, Agnes tells me she feels protected by the army who provide her parents, both active soldiers, with such necessities.

The ceasefire in KPF areas of control means that her childhood was mainly peaceful. However, as Agnes grows older she begins to experience discrimination by her adoptive parents, as if they are favouring their biological children, and she has to do a lot of chores around the home: ‘when I became around 10 years old, I started noticing some sort of discrimination, in words or in actions, especially when I asked for things I would need from my parents. Sometimes, they also did not acknowledge or appreciate the things that I have done for them’. In 2009, at age 14, Agnes is sent to a boarding school run by the KPF, but unable to pay for the tuition, she finds work in a mosquito repellent factory, also managed by the KPF, to help pay for school costs. The double-shift is too much for her, however, and she fails the exams. She returns home and makes a living by working as a day labourer in the informal economy, the general reforms sweeping the country with the new elections in 2010, ushering in a semi-civilian government, largely passing her by, or seemingly so. For the next two years, changes in the broader economic landscape will shape Agnes’ experience of living in rural Myanmar.

In 2009, as the KPF subsumes their battalions to Myanmar military command under the Border Guard Forces (BFG) scheme, the government turns their attention to the one recalcitrant group left in the state, the larger KNPP, which is refusing military demands to give up their arms or join the State military. In order to encourage the KNPP to enter into an agreement with the state, they are offered business concessions, resulting in the KPF and other ceasefire groups receiving less, or no, continued support from the military: ‘after 2010, the *Tatmadaw* didn’t support us like before. We got no [more] opportunities’ a representative from a smaller ceasefire group in Kayah state told me in 2019.³² In other words, Agnes parents no longer receive the ‘rice, stipends, and other basic items’ and they retire from the KPF. Agnes returns home from boarding school, finding her parents deeply involved in the drug trade.

At this time, the overall changes in the investment climate in the country, including critical infrastructure development, have ‘expanded, rather than narrowed, opportunities for illicit profiteering’,³³ and informal cross-border trade, including the illicit trafficking of drugs, timber and gemstones, dwarfs the formal economy in the country.³⁴ In 2012, as the reforms in Myanmar are firmly underway, *yaba*³⁵ production in the country is surging exponentially³⁶ and Agnes is sold by her adoptive mother for US 2500 USD to a family residing high up in the Shan mountains, a remote rural location far from her own home. There, living amidst poppy farms and warring militia groups, Agnes is tasked

³²Tom Kramer, Oliver Russell, & Martin Smith, *From war to peace in Kayah (Karenni) State*, 57

³³International Crisis Group, *Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State* (Yangon, Jakarta and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2019).

³⁴Global Witness, *Jade: Myanmar's 'Big State Secret'* (London: Global Witness, 2015); World Bank, *Myanmar Economic Monitor: Anchoring Economic Expectations* (Yangon: World Bank, 2016); also see Winston Set Aung, *Informal Trade and Underground Economy in Myanmar* (Bangkok: IRASEC, 2011).

³⁵*Yaba* is a narcotic laced with methamphetamine

³⁶International Crisis Group. *Fire and Ice*

with selling *yaba*, in addition to undertaking more general social reproductive duties – cleaning, caretaking, cooking. Agnes doesn't know where she is, and without money of her own, feels unable to escape her situation.

It is important to note that Agnes' involvement in production (*yaba*) is dependent on her participation in social reproduction (household duties), which intersects with her gender. Put simply, if Agnes had been a man, she, a young woman not literate in Shan dialects, would probably not have been sold to the family living high up in the Shan hills. Her reproductive work underpins, even makes possible, her productive work. She sells *yaba* because she can also clean and cook. She is not paid for her work, and has no means to escape the situation, a position of vulnerability which is directly related to broader economic and political relations of power, and which shapes her exposure to violence.³⁷

In late 2013, Agnes' is raped over the course of several nights by a local pro-government militia-member; bringing a knife and a gun, the man tells her he will kill her if she tells anyone. Agnes tells no one; not even owning a phone, she cannot call anyone, and she is unable to speak the same language as her neighbours. Instead, she cleans, and cooks, and sells *yaba*. She is, in her own words, 'upset, furious and sad' but doesn't know how to escape the situation. Finally, in 2014, Agnes works up the courage to flee. Stealing US 600 USD to enable her escape, she arrives back home to find her house abandoned by her adoptive parents, her three younger siblings living alone. Immediately assuming caretaking responsibilities, Agnes' spends the last of her money to buy rice and school supplies for them.

In Myanmar, women's reproductive duties are as extensive as they are essential to the population's overall wellbeing. The 2014 census illustrates how close to 50 per cent of women surveyed nationally are 'economically inactive'; in Kayah state the number is almost 40 per cent. Over three quarters, 79 per cent, of economically inactive women report their inactivity as being due to household chores. This can be compared with less than 10 per cent of men reporting economic inactivity due to household work. According to data gathered through the census, the labour participation rate drops markedly for women once they enter their childbearing years, and becomes even lower if the woman has more than four children.³⁸ This suggests three things: one, a massive reproductive duty shouldered by women; second, an absence of state social welfare; and third, a non-recognition of social reproductive work, making the everyday a site of constraint and the diminution of opportunity for women like Agnes. We will now look at this in more detail.

Bodies, social reproduction and non-recognition

Without underpaid and underaged girls like Agnes working fulltime in factories, selling *yaba* to drug addicts, or assuming everyday heavy reproductive duties for a family deeply involved in the drug economy, it is unclear if Myanmar's transition would be economically viable. At the same time, the *trading* of Agnes for a lump sum of 2500 USD USD indicate the value this labour holds, even if someone like Agnes herself cannot access the

³⁷True, The Political Economy of Violence Against Women.

³⁸Myanmar Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: The Union Report*, Vol. 2 (Nay Pyi Taw: Myanmar Department of Population, 2015); and Myanmar Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Gender Dimensions*, Vol. 4-J (Nay Pyi Taw: Myanmar Department of Population, 2017).

money. Agnes doesn't matter, as much as her gender and her body does: through her undervalued labour and her vulnerability to sexual violence, she helps realise Myanmar's economic development goals.

Before she was trafficked, Agnes' (underpaid) work in a mosquito-repellent factory (around 22 USD USD/month) was facilitated through her family's involvement with a local militia group that was cashing in on business opportunities garnered through ceasefire deals with the Myanmar regime. This factory was built and managed by the KPF, which also controlled part of the area in which she lived. In this way, ceasefire economic reforms provided Agnes with low-waged employment opportunities while constraining the time she had available to study, and thus, expand the opportunities available to her to do other, more well-paid, work.

When I reached Grade 10, I needed more money for my tuition fees and I was already a teenager by that time. So, I asked my [adoptive] parents to help me out, but they refused and did not allow me to continue my education. At the time, there was a factory producing mosquito repellent; it was run by the [armed group]. I used the money that I earned for the school fee. I requested my parents to at least to pay the tuition fee of one subject, but they did not help me out. So, I worked full time and studied at the same time. Although I tried my best, I failed my matriculation exams.

Her experience of working in the mosquito-repellent factory suggests that the informal economy develops, indeed underpins, Myanmar's transition to a formal economic power. In particular, this depends on, and creates a structure of gendered (im)mobility which serves to constrain women's socio-economic opportunities while expanding the national economy. Agnes' experiences illustrate this very concretely: caretaking responsibilities within her adoptive home restrained her educational opportunities, as did her first paid job in the factory owned by a local armed group; her experience of being sold and raped was contingent upon her gender and limited socio-economic mobility. Recent economic developments in Myanmar have been characterised by an increase in the informal market, with participation rates peaking in conflict-affected border-areas, such as Kayah state and Shan state,³⁹ where the black-market economy in drugs, minerals, and timber continue to dominate.⁴⁰ Women are overrepresented in the informal sector, yet earn a third of what men earn⁴¹ and spend up to five times more time on unpaid reproductive labour, as compared to men.⁴² In other words, the transition depends on women's embodied labour, and the insecurity this entails.⁴³

It is important to understand that unpaid and underpaid feminised work is a form of structural (material) violence that (can) also lead to direct experiences of violence in the everyday.⁴⁴ Domestic labour is not recognised, and is therefore not remunerated. This exposes women to poverty, and because of this, to harm.⁴⁵ Agnes was raped, not once,

³⁹World Bank, *Myanmar Economic Monitor*.

⁴⁰Cormac Mangan, *Private enterprises in fragile situations: Myanmar* (Oxford: International Growth Centre, 2018).

⁴¹See note 39 above.

⁴²Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Myanmar: A Situational Analysis* (Manila: ADB, UNDP, UNPF & UNWomen, 2016).

⁴³Maria Martin De Almagro & Caitlyn Ryan, 'Subverting economic empowerment: Towards securities in post-war settings', *European Journal of International Relations* (2019)

⁴⁴Elias and Rai, *Feminist everyday political economy*; True, *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

not twice, but three times, because she had no means to leave the area, to report the crimes, or to call someone for help. When women do not have money to leave abusive homes, or pay transportation costs to report sexual assaults, or take time off work to go to court, or get a babysitter, the lack of financial means is directly linked to women's experiences of violence.⁴⁶ It also exposes women to harm in ways other than direct violence: reproductive work is heavy, tiring, work.⁴⁷ It is experienced and depleted in and through bodies.⁴⁸ And Agnes is, undoubtedly, tired. The work she undertakes is felt in her body: she is skinny, she is tired, she is cold. She is exhausted. In Agnes' own words:

When I stayed there [in the mountain], I was not only a sale person, because they also treated me like a housemaid or a slave. I had to wash their clothes, including their underwear. The stream where we washed clothes was so far away that we had to go there by motorbike. I knew how to drive a motorbike, but was not good at it, so I fell [accident] several times. On the days I had to wash clothes, I was very tired. After washing clothes at the stream, I brought the wet clothes back to the top of the mountain and hanged them to dry out. After that, I had to cook and had to do all things that they asked me to do. At the mountain, it was very cold and I did not have enough warm clothes, but I dared not to ask for it. The warm clothes that they have were very heavy and it was very tiring to wash them. At that time, I was also very tiny and skinny.

The tiredness Agnes talks about is limiting: it restricts the possibilities to do other, materially or emotionally rewarding, tasks. The mundanity of everyday survival, the repetition of reproductive work, exhausts, physically and mentally.⁴⁹ Non-recognition moreover limits the time available for women to engage in other, more productive duties; it limits the time they can go to school, and learn; it limits their opportunities to read and to write. Agnes' experiences illustrate these relations in concrete ways. As the adopted, and oldest, daughter in a family of five, Agnes was positioned as uniquely responsible for caretaking, in addition to being tasked with providing for the family in more direct ways, through low-waged salaried work. This may expose them to violence that reverberates and shapes their future: Agnes' returns home from the mountain, finding not only her three younger siblings living alone, but she herself pregnant.

I did not work. I just stayed home with my brother and sisters. When I was in the mountain, I missed my period for two months. So, I thought that I was normal. But after three or four months, I did not feel normal and I did not feel comfortable with my body. So, I suspected that I was pregnant. There was one aunty [neighbour] who had given birth recently, so I heard about these things from that aunty. I did not go out anymore and locked myself up at home. I isolated myself.

In Agnes narratives, her past experience blurs into her present life, collapsing boundaries between conflict and post-conflict life. While her home on the mountain was a site of overt violence, her present home is a site of continuous structural insecurity and drudgery. Her current reproductive responsibilities as the sole caretaker of now four children doesn't leave her with many options: out of a sense of duty, love, and courage

⁴⁶True and Tanyag, *Global Violence and Security from a Gendered Perspective*. Also see CEDAW Action Myanmar, *Myanmar CSO Shadow Report on Thematic Issues: Violence against Women* (Yangon: CEDAW Action Myanmar, 2016).

⁴⁷Elias and Rai, 'The Everyday Gendered Political Economy of Violence'.

⁴⁸Shirin Rai, Catherine Hoskyns, and Daina Thomas, 'Depletion: The Costs of Social Reproduction', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 1 (2014): 86–105. Also see Samanthi Gunawardana, "'To Finish, We Must Finish': Everyday Practices of Depletion in Sri Lankan Export-Processing Zones', *Globalisations* 13, no. 6 (2016): 861–875.

⁴⁹On exhaustion, see Jefferson and Buch Segal, "The Confines of Time."

she fulfils her gendered obligations. Buy what else can she do? As Elias and Rai⁵⁰ note in a critique of Scott's⁵¹ work, women's do not drag their feet, because if they did, who would feed the children? Agnes does what she does because she doesn't feel like she has the option to choose differently, because someone has to take care of the children.

When I gave birth to the baby, I did not want him and wanted to give away. But, my aunt told me that my biological mother abandoned me. And if I abandoned my baby, I would carry this kind of legacy. So, she encouraged me to confront the situation no matter what. I gathered all my courage and decided to raise the best way I could. At that time, my aunt asked me whether I really wanted to give away my baby, if so she would have found someone who could have adopted my baby. But, when I looked at my baby, I felt so pity on him and did not dare to give him away. So, I decided to raise him [along with my siblings].

In this quote, we can sense some of the tensions arising in wanting something better for her son, maybe even for herself, framed in the knowledge of a social and political reality which has failed, and is continuing to fail her. Contrary to what Scheper-Hughes⁵² found with poor mothers living in shantytowns in Brazil, Agnes does not succumb to expectations: empathy towards her baby and her siblings is suggestive of the complex entanglements of love and labour fuelling everyday gendered lives. This also points to the importance of contextualising everyday political economies shaping women's lives within broader macroeconomic relations: Agnes' most intimate relationships, including her experiences of bodily violations, are informed by state regulations, and in Myanmar, the impact of ceasefire economies.

In Myanmar, public spending on health remains low. Numbers from 2014 estimate that only 1 per cent of the gross domestic product was allocated to health care, the lowest of any countries in ASEAN.⁵³ The absence of adequate social protections mean that households have to rely on themselves [read: mothers and daughters] to cope with poverty, illness, and environmental hazards: only 1 per cent of the population has social service protection.⁵⁴ At least 70 per cent of old people live with their children, with adult daughters in particular providing care for their own or their husbands' parents.⁵⁵ Clearly, limited investments in social provisioning amplifies women's reproductive duties in Myanmar, leading to 'a privatisation of survival'.⁵⁶ A caretaker of four children, without a high-school diploma and experiences of rape and violence, Agnes' reproductive duties alleviate the State of any caretaking responsibilities, while she barely survives on another transitional economy: collecting per diems, or simply transportation fees paid by local and international organisations engaged in development work.

When I attend a training, they [organizers] give me some money [cash] for gas. So, I save up some money. [But] it is not regular. Sometimes, I have a lot of trainings, but sometimes

⁵⁰See note 26 above

⁵¹James C Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed – An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010).

⁵²Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵³Su Myat Han, Rahman, et al. 'Progress towards universal health coverage in Myanmar: a national and subnational assessment', *The Lancet Global Health* 6, no. 9 (2018): 989–997. Also see UNICEF, *Social Protection in Myanmar: The Impact of Innovative Policies on Poverty* (Yangon: UNICEF, 2015).

⁵⁴Than Tun Sein et al, 'The Republic of the Union of Myanmar Health System Review', *Health Systems in Transition*, 4, no. 3 (2014).

⁵⁵John Knodel and Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan, 'Aging in Myanmar', *Gerontologist* 57, no. 4 (2017): 599–605.

⁵⁶Lourdes Benería, 'The crisis of care, international migration, and public policy', *Feminist Economics* 14, no. 3 (2008): 1–21.

none. As you know, NGO work is not on a regular basis. With the money I earn, I support my family and pay for the school fees and supplies for my brother and sisters, as well as my baby I still want to learn and do a lot of things, but I do not have anyone who support and back me up. So, I feel discouraged as I cannot find the way to improve myself [make progress by myself]. I requested them [the armed organization] to allow me to attend a training on computer and English language skills. But, sometimes, I feel that I am ignored because they did not take my request seriously.

Agnes' narrative highlights the gendered relations of power which pits her as responsible for her family's wellbeing while relegating her to a subordinate position in society. This doesn't mean that Agnes doesn't have agency, but rather that her choices are structured by broader political and economic relations. She feels ignored, Agnes says. That is because she *is* ignored: her labour is not paid, or not paid enough to ensure a decent living or enable an *opening* of possibilities rather than a closing. Following decades of underdevelopment and conflict, the gap in social provisioning is evident in the heavy burden assumed by women in the everyday, which limits their opportunities to participate in activities that could elevate their socio-economic status. It is a privatisation of survival, in which the state pushes individual women like Agnes to pick up the slack for what the state should provide.⁵⁷

Yet Agnes, growing up in conflict-affected areas, seeks to reassert her place within transitional Myanmar by laying claims, not on the State, but on the militia group who she feels represents the only form of authority and security she knows: the KPF. She tells me she 'loves the KPF': they fed her growing up through monthly rice deliveries, and through their activities she feels she gains support and belonging.⁵⁸ Assuming agency over the violations done to her body, Agnes also re-joins the armed groups in order to 'raise awareness about sexual violence'. Equally important is the fact that they provide some support for her son; support that the Myanmar State does not provide. Her 'return' to this group is then a result of her past experiences of structural and direct violence and lack of opportunities. However, her participation reaffirms a gender order that devalues her and her work: the KPF group not only runs brothels but also operates an extensive drug operation, thus implicating Agnes in the reproduction of the (gendered) violence and insecurity that she herself faces.

The everyday is shaped by gendered relations of power, in which possibilities for transformation – and for an everyday peaceful future – are negotiated and understood through past experiences of structural and intimate violence. Mundane, repetitive, struggles to make ends meet are (re)produced in and through Agnes' everyday gendered duties, in and outside the household. Tiredness and discouragement, evident in Agnes' narrative, suggest a foreclosing of possibilities, born out of an anticipation of the inevitability of relentless reproductive work.⁵⁹ Asking Agnes what she wants for the future she tells me she wants peace in her heart, in her body, before adding, 'I will never have it'. Yet

⁵⁷Benería, 'The crisis of care, international migration, and public policy'; and LeBaron, 'The political economy of the household'.

⁵⁸For a discussion on women's motivations for joining, and their experience of, armed movements, see for example, Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Sandar McEvoy, 'Loyalist Women Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: Beginning a Feminist Conversation about Conflict Resolution', *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 262–286; Laura Sjoberg & Caron Gentry (eds), *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

⁵⁹Jefferson and Buch Segal, 'The Confines of Time.'

her actions – bringing up her child and younger siblings, joining the KPF – also suggest a tenacity for survival, a hope for the future. Agnes is clearly no quitter: through endless repetitive work, she soldiers on.

As has been noted in other post-war contexts, economic recovery initiatives that do not take into account division of war-time labour tends to privilege men, or women who already possess critical skills, contacts and resources. In Myanmar, this view is reinforced through the absence of affirmative policies supporting welfare and women's wellbeing in the country. Indeed, the transitional economic interventions enabled by the Myanmar state through their Framework for Economic and Social Reforms – such as extractive industries, large-scale infrastructure and energy projects – presume that social reproductive work is to be done by women, primarily within the home. The recent increase in the informal and illicit sector reinforces the precarious situation of women living in rural, conflict-affected areas, and highlights the interrelation of women's bodies, social reproductive labour and the home. In other words, the insecurity Agnes' has experienced, and continues to experience, is at the locus of the Myanmar transitional economy which is underpinned by women's embodied labour and vulnerabilities. Formal employment is a privilege: it requires time, connection and education. Going to work necessitates having a body that *can* work, a body that has the energy and the ability to partake in formal opportunities. In a place like Myanmar, without a functioning welfare system, someone going to work often means someone else staying behind to look after those needing care. While coping and care economies⁶⁰ 'provide vital yet taken for granted resources' for conflict-affected communities,⁶¹ the invisibility of women's extensive labour results in bodily depletion and insecurity.⁶² Agnes' work and her bodily wellbeing is, however, not endlessly 'elastic'.⁶³ Moreover, for rural women like Agnes, the paucity of adequate state legislation and economic policies that alleviate women of their extensive caregiving responsibilities also undermine their capacity to participate in public life by restraining their time and mobility, and pushes them into poverty and vulnerability by limiting access to socio-economic opportunities. This also means that women are obstructed from informing and fully participating in public and political life, and thus prevented from informing and changing the underlying gendered power relations fuelling conflict.⁶⁴ Yet, this knowledge, along with the experiences of women like Agnes, are hidden within a larger discussion of the need to achieve peace, democracy, and prosperity within the country. This is not an innocent omission, but a violent one.⁶⁵ The absence of attention to gender issues in the Framework for Economic and Social Reforms- indeed the absence of any substantial recognition of the lives of the many barely eking out a living in conflict-

⁶⁰Spike V. Peterson, 'Gendering Informal Economies in Iraq', In *Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives*, eds Nicola Pratt and Nadjie Al-Ali (London: Zed Books, 2009): 35–64; and Neil Cooper and Michal Pugh, with Jonathan Goodhand, *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2004).

⁶¹Maria Tanyag and Jacqui True, 'From Depletion to Regeneration: Addressing Structural and Physical Violence in Post-Conflict Economies', *Social Politics* (forthcoming); and Jenny Hedström, 'Reproducing Revolution – A Feminist Political Economy Analysis of the Conflict in Kachinland,' Phd Thesis (Melbourne: Monash University, 2018).

⁶²Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas, 'Depletion.'

⁶³Diane Elson, *Male Bias in the Development Process* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁶⁴Hedström, 'Reproducing Revolution'.

⁶⁵See Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence: The Ethical in the Political* (London: Verso Books, 2020); and Judith Butler, *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* (London New York: Verso, 2009).

affected communities throughout Myanmar – curtails rather than opens opportunities for increased wellbeing, depletes rather than nourishes rights and recognition.

Conclusion

Interpreting the violence Agnes' survives through the lens of the transition would most likely reduce it to isolated events of no relevance to the larger affairs at play in Naypyidaw, the administrative capital of Myanmar. But if we look at Agnes' experiences of violence in relation to the transition, as I have done in this article, then another story emerges, one which suggests that the transitional political economy, rather than generating greater security and stability, both perpetuates gender-based violence *and* abstracts it from discussions about the reforms, at least in some contexts and for some bodies. This renders visible how Agnes's home, and her bodily labour and vulnerability, is at the locus of a gendered political economy (re)produced both within the home and at the national level.

Agnes' experience is her own, but it is also emblematic of more general trends in which broader political and economic reforms in Myanmar heighten (some) women's exposure to violence and insecurity. The reproductive work women like Agnes engage in enables the expansions of state-led investments across the country, as these depend on women 'filling the gap' left by a welfare state by taking on critical caretaking duties. Her involvement in the informal economy, including the illicit economy in *yaba* peddling and a mosquito repellent factory controlled by non-state armed groups, underpins the cease-fire economies that (still) play a huge part in Myanmar's economic development. This suggests that the country's recent reforms have, at least for poor rural women like Agnes, (re)produced relations of dependency and vulnerability in and through the household, in and through women's bodies and their everyday repetitive work. Suffering and exhaustion, as well as duty and love, are embodied in these everyday acts of survival and reproduction, slowly but steadily foreclosing possibilities for transformation, at least for poor rural women like Agnes.⁶⁶

Many observers assume the transition will *arrive* somewhere, and is therefore stalled. This is a core assumption that this article is challenging, as it assumes a sequence of events which I argue are of no relevance or at least are not helpful for understanding current political events in Myanmar. Instead, through highlighting Agnes' experiences, I am arguing for the importance of local experiences – the specific – in nuancing and complicating our knowledge about reforms in Myanmar. To me, Agnes' story matters for its ability to highlight the ways in which rural women, living in ethnic minority areas, negotiate and experience everyday life during the country's transition. This lends important insights into the ways in which gendered insecurity and violence do not necessarily diminish in post-conflict contexts, but may instead be perpetuated through the reproduction of structural gendered power relations that commonly accompany neoliberal state-building initiatives. It also provides a gendered perspective on the ways in which the 'post-conflict development industry' may adversely impact poor, rural women like Agnes, who are unable to reap the benefits of interventions primarily targeting those with time, connections, capital and education. For these women, the transition is

⁶⁶See Jefferson & Buch Segal, 'The Confines of Time'.

experienced, not as an absence of violence, but as a continuum of insecurity experienced and negotiated in the everyday, restricting possibilities to upend, or at least transform, the overarching gendered political economies of power fuelling both intimate and structural insecurity and conflict.

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