CHAPTER 9

Troubling the Transition

Gendered Insecurity in the Borderlands

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*I*n many of Myanmar's conflict-affected borderlands, armed violence was significantly reduced as a result of ceasefire agreements implemented largely in the 1990s. New peace negotiations began in 2011, which alongside larger processes of change set in motion by economic and political reforms, facilitated a drastic increase in foreign investment and state development initiatives in many border regions, primarily focusing on expansion of agribusiness, energy and infrastructure projects (Bjarnegård 2020; Burke et al. 2017; Décobert 2020; Tin Maung Maung Than 2014). In Mon and Kayah states, the geographical areas in focus in this chapter, these processes were accompanied by, and indeed legitimated, increased militarization and new forms of depletion and dispossession. Empirical realities in Mon and Kayah states therefore illustrate how post-war transitions often bring about intense societal changes, but may also reproduce wartime dynamics and introduce new forms of insecurity and injustice.

Based on a study undertaken in 2019, this chapter examines how these post-war changes were understood and experienced in the gendered everyday in Mon and Kayah states. Building on interviews, focus groups and observation with over a hundred farmers, politicians, civil society activists, religious leaders and higher-ranking members of armed groups, we seek to centre the experiences of women and men living in these areas and understand how their lives were affected by the end of armed violence, intensifying state-led development efforts, new versions of militarization, and other processes of change in the two decades leading up to the coup. In particular, we examine how these processes were conditioned by, and contributed to reshaping, gendered norms, divisions of labour, and relations of power. Through this analysis, we draw out and theorize the gendered connections and contra-

dictions between macro-processes of post-war transitions and embodied everyday realities in conflict-affected areas.

Our findings trouble conventional notions of a transition in several ways. First, while a reduction in armed violence during the decade of transitional change had a positive impact on people's everyday lives, increasing security and livelihood opportunities, this period did not represent an unambiguous, unidirectional movement from worse to better. Rather, as we see in both Kayah and Mon state, wartime forms of insecurity, such as forced labour for the military, torture, and women's unrelenting burden of keeping families alive in the absence of welfare provisioning, continued across ceasefire periods and into the transitional phase. These familiar forms of insecurity were also complemented by new forms of insecurity caused by the expansion of state-led development agendas, such as land grabbing. The dynamics and effects of these processes are shaped by existing gender relations and norms. This analysis supports a more critical conceptualization of post-war transition as a period of multifaceted, messy, and contradictory processes of change (Klem 2018; Gusic 2019), and shows how the micro-dynamics of such processes are fundamentally gendered.

Second, our findings suggest that present realities cannot be disentangled from past experiences of violence, and trouble narratives that seek to posit Myanmar's transition as a linear, forward-moving process (Rhoades and Wittekind 2019; Hedström 2021; Hedström and Olivius 2022). Indeed, as we found, present life is made sense of and experienced in close proximity to trauma and insecurity suffered at both the individual and the community level. Fear, deprivation of education, and physical depletion and harm based on sometimes life-long histories of war shape experiences of the present and expectation for the future. The past 'flashes up' (Benjamin 2007 [1968]: 255) in the present, serving to restrict people's opportunities to participate in or benefit from transitional changes. In addition, from the perspective of villagers' everyday lives, time was not experienced as a progressive, linear movement towards the future but as recurring cycles or episodes of violence, displacement and dispossession (also see Wittekind 2018). While the transition changed the character of some insecurities, everyday experiences over time nonetheless conveyed an image of recurrence and continuity rather than a distinct before and after in relation to the transition (Rhoads and Wittekind 2019). Our respondents' frequently expressed expectations of recurring upheaval and violence were confirmed in February 2021, when the

Tatmadaw took power in a coup and thereafter intensified violent repression against protesters in the cities as well as against rural communities.

In the next section, we develop our theoretical points of departure, building on feminist interventions in peace and conflict studies and political economy, as well as critical scholarship on time and space, to trouble androcentric and binary interpretations of peace, violence and war. We then describe the context of Mon and Kayah states, and introduce the methods and materials of our study. In the analysis, we explore the gendered dynamics and effects of Myanmar's transition through the everyday lives and experiences of our respondents.

Situating Myanmar's Transition in the Gendered Everyday

Feminist peace research has played an important role in broadening discussions about *who* and *what* matters in research on conflict and post-war contexts, by looking beyond military and state-centric perspectives that have traditionally dominated the discipline (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020; Wibben et al. 2020). Instead, feminist peace research has drawn attention to the everyday as a key site for exploring war and peace, and to everyday experiences as important sources of knowledge (Sylvester 2012; Enloe 1990; Das 2007; Choi 2021). Crucially, the everyday is a space permeated by gendered relations of power, where people's actions and experiences are shaped by gendered norms and hierarchies. It is a site of violence and oppression as well as resistance, love and care (Berents 2015; Hedström 2021; Elias and Shirin Rai 2015, 2018; Marijan 2017; Väyrynen 2019; Agatha Ma and Kusakabe 2015; Rahman 2021). Peace can be practiced here, but it can also be a space where war, violence and trauma are felt and experienced, serving to restrict opportunities for resistance and change (Scheper-Hughes 1992; also see Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung 2011, 2019). This focus necessitates analysis of the gendered everyday as a temporal as well as a spatial site, wherein the past leaks into the future, upsetting any neat distinction between (past) war and (future) peace.

Examining the relationship between gender, violence and militarization (Cockburn 2010; Enloe 2000), feminist interventions have also destabilized fixed and binary understandings of peace and war. Instead, feminist scholars locate war and peace as a continuum, understanding violence as experienced within a context of unequal gendered relations of power shaping

post-war contexts (Yadav and Horn 2021). This body of research helps us foreground the ways in which present-day insecurities are embedded in, facilitated by and made sense of in relation to historical episodes of violence and oppression (Das 2007). Approaching war and peace as a continuum of gendered violence rather than a binary draws attention to changes as well as continuities over time, and allows us to better understand if, and how, overarching political shifts manifest in the everyday. Informed by these contributions, we foreground people's everyday experiences of life in Mon and Kayah states as a way to learn about the gendered dynamics and effects of Myanmar's transition.

Moving away from a binary understanding of war and peace also destabilizes conventional ideas about a transition *from* war *to* peace as a forward-moving, linear process that is inherently progressive (Keen 2007; Gusic 2020). This implicit assumption features strongly in literature on so-called war to peace transitions (Klem 2018), as well as in literature on democratic transitions (Linz and Stephan 1996). Indeed, prior to the 2021 military coup much of the literature analysing Myanmar's transition took linear time as a pre-given (Jones 2014; Callahan 2012), anticipating that the country is 'going *from* a highly authoritarian military regime *to* something else' (Diamond 2012: 138). Within these accounts, the notion of the transition itself is often left unexamined; instead the transition is assumed to exist in a causal relationship to progress. This obfuscates that which remains across time – such as insecurity, violence and dispossession – treating such things as exceptions rather than the rule.

Insights from literature that problematizes a linear understanding of time and history (Wittekind 2018; Hom 2010) can help us move away from expectations of improvement over time, and make sense of how our respondents experienced the meaning of the transition and the relationship between past, present and future. We also draw on Bart Klem's conceptualization of post-war transition as 'a process of fundamental and intense changes in society ("transition"), which take place after large-scale organized violence has ended ("post-war")' (Klem 2018: 237). Notably, this definition does not pre-suppose the direction of these changes or assume that they will always be beneficial – or for whom they might be so. Rather, it opens these questions up to empirical scrutiny. While it is important to situate post-war changes in light of the war that came before, it is equally important to avoid determinism (post-war changes are simply effects of war dynamics) and normative assumptions (post-war changes constitute a shift from war to

peace, from chaos to order, etc.) (Gusic 2020; Keen 2007). This approach to understanding political transitions is a fruitful starting point for recognizing the messy, multi-directional and contradictory nature of post-war processes of change.

Thus, in summary, our analysis is informed by insights from feminist and critical peace research, enabling us to approach Myanmar's transition through the lens of the gendered everyday. This means that people's experiences constitute the site where the nature and effects of the transition are assessed. Further, as the everyday is shaped by gendered norms and hierarchies, so are experiences of war and peace. Tracing gendered experiences of violence and insecurity destabilizes binary conceptions of war and peace, as well as conventional temporal frameworks that posit the post-war transition as a progressive, linear movement towards a better future. Questioning the temporal order of things in this way opens up 'alternative conceptualizations of the relationship between past and present' (Wittekind 2018: 276) by making visible the ways in which predatory relationships experienced by members of ethnic minority communities vis-à-vis the Burman state remain, in some shape or form, across time (Wittekind 2018; Ferguson 2014; Kyed 2020; Naw Wai Hnin Kyaw and Soe Soe Nwe 2019), including across postwar and transitional reforms. These analytical points of departure allow us to trouble pre-conceived notions of what the transition was or meant, and instead examine how it was experienced in the gendered everyday realities of our respondents in Mon and Kayah states.

Context, Methods and Material

Most of independent Myanmar's history has been marked by military dictatorship, civil war and violence (Callahan 2003; South 2008; Simpson and Farrelly [eds] 2020). The country's border regions, home to ethnic minority communities, have been the focus of much of the conflicts being fought between the state military and multiple armed groups (Women's League of Burma 2011). Many of these armed groups have split off into fractions and uneasy alliances, producing highly militarized, volatile and insecure spaces (Meehan and Sadan 2017). The effects of these conflicts on local communities have been disastrous, resulting in widespread poverty, precariousness, dispossession and death. Although national-level politics in the form of ceasefires and reforms undertaken between 2011 and 2020 reduced

active conflict in some areas of the country, new or continued insecurities were experienced around extractive and predatory forms of development and state building (Meehan and Sadan 2017; Hedström and Olivius 2020; L. Gum Ja Htung 2018). Thus, in conflict-affected, ethnic minority populated areas of the country, political and economic reforms during the transitional period coexisted with persistent continuities and legacies of war.

This was clear in the two areas adressed in this chapter, Mon state and Kayah state. These are both located along Myanmar's southeastern border with Thailand, and have been scenes of armed conflict, including brutal counter-insurgency campaigns waged by the state, for decades. In Kayah state, the smallest of Myanmar's ethnic minority states, the main ethnic insurgent group is the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), formed in 1957. Further south, in Mon state, the main insurgent group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), was established a year after the KNPP, although the armed struggle in Mon areas had already begun in 1948 (New Mon State Party 1985). Over time, breakaway factions and failed alliances have led to the establishment of numerous smaller armed groups, sometimes fighting each other as well as the central state, creating highly militarized and complex conflict landscapes. The 2021 military coup has exacerbated this fragmentation, with hundreds of new local and people's defence forces emerging throughout the country, upsetting old alliances and creating new ones (Hmung 2021).

In both areas, the regime's infamous 'four-cuts' counter insurgency campaign resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including forced relocation, sexual violence, arbitrary executions, forced labour, land confiscation and the destruction of villages. In June 1995, the NMSP agreed to a ceasefire with the military regime. In 2012 they signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the new, semi-democratic regime, and in 2018 they signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The KNPP, however, did not successfully conclude a ceasefire deal until 2012, and, although they were a participant, never signed the NCA. After the start of the transitional period, armed violence decreased overall, but the situation on the ground continued to be fragile and tense, with occasional flare-ups in fighting. The 2021 coup exacerbated tensions and insecurity across the country, leading to arrests of political activists and deadly crackdowns against protesters in Mon and Kayah state. Beginning in late May 2021, the Tatmadaw retaliated against resistance to the coup with air strikes in Kayah state (Myanmar Now 2021).

Further, tensions around state-led initiatives for economic development and reconstruction have been prominent in both regions (Hedström and Olivius 2022), while decades of armed conflict and underdevelopment of welfare services and infrastructure have resulted in extensive poverty. This has exaggerated women's care and reproductive labour, and led to a widespread perception of state and other actors as violent and predatory. Previous research has shown how this has resulted in constraining women's access to land, justice, authority and opportunity (Agatha Ma and Kusakabe 2015; Mi Thang Sorn Poine 2018).

In order to explore how people living in these conflict-affected border-lands experienced and understood violence, peace and war, we interviewed just over a hundred women and men living in Kayah state, southern Shan state and Mon state in 2019, using a combination of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. To elicit interactive discussions, we employed life history diagrams (Söderström 2020; Skidmore 2009). These allowed us to identify specific events or circumstances shaping changes in how peace and war was experienced in everyday life. This methodological tool meant that the participants were themselves able to pinpoint and draw out specific events that they felt affected their day-to-day lives. This proved helpful for highlighting continuities of violence and insecurity across macro-political changes, which troubled any assumptions of change being inherently progressive or unidirectional. Through this, we were able to trace participants' experiences and perceptions of war and peace across time, and better understand the temporal frameworks through which they made sense of changes and continuities in their lives.

Gendered Insecurity: Continuity and Change

In Mon and Kayah states, ceasefire agreements generally led to reductions of armed violence and improvements in basic security and livelihoods.[1] From the mid-1990s, as described above, ceasefires were agreed between the government and various armed groups at different times, and after 2011 there has been little outright fighting in both Mon and Kayah areas. Alongside

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1   An important exception was a 1995 ceasefire between the government and the KNPP agreement, which lasted less than three months, and was followed by an intensification of the war in areas contested by the KNPP. See Hedström and Olivius 2020.

this relative stability, the post-2011 period brought about an increase in development projects and foreign investment, accompanied by a strengthened central state presence in general, and military expansion in particular, which generated new forms of insecurities and threats. This suggests that the transition reshaped the political landscape and brought significant changes that were felt in the gendered everyday. Importantly, these changes defy simplified assumptions of progress, instead encompassing a complex mix of improvements, continuities of war and new forms of insecurities.

In the life stories shared by our respondents, experiences of fleeing from armed attacks and of being subjected to torture and forced labour at the hands of the Tatmadaw were particularly widespread during periods of war. However, torture and forced labour continued after ceasefires brought an end to armed clashes. For example, a method of positional torture colloquially known as 'drying in the sun' (နေလှန်း) and 'drying in the snow' (နှင်းလှန်း), in which villagers – children, the elderly, women and men alike – would be forced to sit outside with their arms stretched out, sometime for periods as long as 24 hours, seemed to be a widespread practice up until the mid-2000s in the communities we visited in southern Mon state. In Kayah state, everyday life was equally violent during the same time period, with even the most basic necessities out of reach for most people living in rural areas targeted by fighting. Villagers would be forced to provide materials and food for soldiers, which meant that families could not regularly feed themselves; instead their labour and livelihoods would be diverted towards military needs. This placed an enormous strain on women in particular, as they had to both give the military what they required and feed their families, while many men hid, as illustrated in this quote from Mon state: 'My dad usually had to run or hide [from the Tatmadaw], he hardly stayed at home. Usually, taking care of the children, cooking, all household jobs, were the responsibility of my mum. We did not have an income.'[2] A woman we interviewed in Kayah state echoed these experiences:

> I would bring food to the jungle for my husband, when he was hiding from the Tatmadaw […] I would pretend I am going to take water or I am going to the jungle to cut the tree or something like that […] I went

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there even though I was really afraid, I had to go there in fear. When my husband was away I would do everything, shifting cultivation, taking care of the children, household chores. Sometimes my husband had to hide for a month, as the Tatmadaw could come and stay in the village, sleep in my house. They would steal our chickens and pigs […] Some women, they also experienced rape by the Tatmadaw and also violence.[3]

Moreover, as ethnic minority areas were targeted by counterinsurgency campaigns, thousands of houses were burned down, and people were forcibly relocated to military-controlled villages where food and security was scarce. One woman told us that after the Tatmadaw burned down their village in Kayah state in the 1990s, her grandparents were so desperate for food that they tried to eat the rice that had been destroyed in the fire: 'They brought that black burned rice and they cooked it. The smell was so bad. They were sick a lot.' Everyday life in war thus exacerbated a gendered division of labour that saw women shouldering most of the responsibility for ensuring, or attempting to ensure, survival for families and communities.

These experiences of gendered labour and insecurity carried over into the post-ceasefire and transitional periods. Increased troop presence after ceasefire agreements meant that villagers were still required to provide materials, food and labour for troops now permanently stationed in their areas, making it hard for households, often headed by women, to survive and feed themselves. The 2014 census reveals that a majority of women in both Kayah and Mon state were still primarily engaged in informal, unpaid or underpaid reproductive work, including childrearing, subsistence farming, cooking and care work.

While there was a slow reduction in direct armed violence over time, other forms of structural violence continued. These forms of violence tend to disproportionally affect women, because they carry the largest reproductive responsibility for making everyday life sustainable as well as meaningful (Faxon 2020). This suggests that generations of conflict and under-development in rural communities have resulted in a stark gendered division of labour that continues to restrict women's socioeconomic and educational opportunities in the present (Hedström and Olivius 2020; Blomqvist, Olivius and Hedström 2021).

These embodied, gendered everyday experiences over time challenge the idea of an unambiguous transition from worse to better. This is not to

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3   Woman in Kayah state, cited in Hedström and Olivius forthcoming.

disregard the significant transformations that took place, but it is important to remember that gendered insecurities, alongside the broader issues of ethnic minority inequality and violence, were reproduced, sometimes in new forms, in post-ceasefire life. For example, in Mon state, although outright fighting abated after 1995, the increase in troops meant that younger women still faced significant threats. In the past, young women would hide when the troops moved through their areas because 'The Tatmadaw came and brought them to their place.'[4] But once the ceasefire was in place women could no longer hide, as this quote illustrates:

> We can see that between 1995 and 2004 things got worse [for women]. Because before, [the Tatmadaw] only called for safeguards and human shields. But when they were building the Tatmadaw camps, they asked for the beautiful and young women and teenagers and made them sing for them. There was less fighting but more militarization.[5]

New forms of gender-based insecurities were not only emanating from the military, however. Ceasefire agreements and overall economic and political liberalization resulted in an influx of investors, crony companies (using military protection) and largescale infrastructural development. The fact that villagers primarily have customary access to land, and moreover might not be fluent in the legal, Bamar language needed to claim land rights, led to widespread loss of land and livelihoods: 'Because there is less fighting, the government is inviting so many investments, so people are really worried that if there is more investment, they will grab our lands.'[6] Women are especially vulnerable to dispossession because they are even less likely than men to have formal ownership of the land on which they work (Faxon 2017; Cornish 2017; Transnational Institute 2015; The Global Justice Center 2017).

Moreover, a spiraling drug epidemic has in recent years compounded women's heavy reproductive burden and continued to restrict their access to the public sphere. As described by this woman in Mon state: 'The drug issue is really bad, we are really afraid of it. As a woman, we don't dare to go out alone.'[7] Across Myanmar, and especially in ethnic rural areas, the use of heroin, methamphetamine and *yaba* is pervasive. This has been linked to ceasefire

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4 Interview with six women and one man, Mon state, 28 November 2019.
5 Interview with eight women, Mon state, 27 November 2019.
6 Interview with two women and one man, Kayah state, 28 March 2019.
7 Interview with two women, Mon state, 28 November 2019.

arrangements in parts of eastern Myanmar, where militia groups and criminal enterprises enjoy a relative degree of freedom, producing 'conditions [that] are ideal for large-scale drug production' (International Crisis Group 2019: i). As the majority of drug users are men, women are straining to ensure everyone's survival, which simply does not leave enough time for them to participate in public, political life. In the words of one woman: '[Men] cannot work for the house income, and then women get many burdens […] That is why they can't be [involved] in the community.'[8] These experiences, on the part of both women and men, raise the question of who exactly benefits from ceasefire deals and business investments.

To sum up, while the transition significantly reshaped the political landscape and brought positive improvements in some ways and for some people, the ways in which these changes were felt and experienced in the everyday by people living in conflict-affected communities are informed by broader gendered relations of power. These reproduce or produce new insecurities experienced by women living far away from the centres of power, in the rural borderlands.

The Past is in the Present: Temporal Complexity

People's experiences also challenge the temporality of conventional notions of transition. While life became better due to the absence of outright conflict in the particular areas we visited, past insecurities were reproduced or replaced by new uncertainties or threats. For many of the people we spoke to, it was difficult to clearly delineate between war and peace, or to identify a distinct 'before' and 'after' key macro-level events such as a ceasefire or the 2011 end of direct military rule. Instead, their narratives and ways of making sense of their lives were marked by temporal complexity (McLeod 2013), where time was not experienced as 'moving forward', but rather as recurring cycles of insecurity, fluctuating in intensity (see Wittekind 2018; Hyde 2015). In very tangible ways, past experiences of dispossession, displacement and violence framed decisions made in the present. In this way, the temporality of anticipation, in which what happened in the past might occur again, structured everyday life (Das 2007; Jefferson and Buch Segal 2019). This points to how the relationship between past, present and future

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8   Interview with four women, 1 December 2019.

is experienced not as linear, but as complex and intertwined. In southern Kayah state, women from a Karen community explained that in their area:

> Women had a long experience with that really bad situation in the war. Women are still in fear until now. Only some women who are activists like us, only just a few women dare to speak out, or something like that, the rest they are still in fear because of past experiences.[9]

This exemplifies how the ways in which the past spills over into the present structures people's experiences of and opportunities to participate in post-war society. Many women we spoke to explained that fear and trauma kept them from involving themselves in politics, or making their voices heard in their communities. For women, restrictive legacies of fear were also compounded by the effects of a wartime division of labour that prevented them from acquiring education and language skills. In addition, as discussed above, the continuing care work demands placed on women due to the prevailing absence of state welfare provisioning eats up the time and energy that women could otherwise use for paid work or civic engagement. Thus, the ways in which the war casts long shadows over post-war everyday lives is also fundamentally gendered.

Moreover, past experiences of war, and the anticipation of recurring episodes of violence and threat, structure expectations for the future. Strikingly, in the light of the 2021 military coup, a group of civil society activists we interviewed in Kayah state were already arguing in 2019 that the military could, and probably would, take back power at any time:

> So, we have the same situation as in the past […] [The military] already has the legitimacy to take power any time, whenever they want to take it back […] that is why I just feel like […] the past experience will happen again in the future also.[10]

This anticipation of recurrence, rather than progress and change, has material, direct effects in and on people's everyday lives. For example, farmers in Kayah state explained that there was no point for them to invest in housing, as they in any case expected to eventually lose their property to the military (Hedström and Olivius 2022). This experience of looming threat was eloquently described by an older man we met in Mon state: 'I

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9   Interview with two women, 2 April 2019.
10   Interview with four women in Kayah state, cited in Hedström and Olivius 2022.

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feel that all people, all groups, are holding a bomb. A time-bomb. Any time it can explode.'[11]

Thus, while the post-2011 transition period was not experienced as just a continuation of wartime dynamics, villager's everyday lives were still marked by both the anticipation and the actuality of recurring violence, displacement and dispossession. New political dynamics, issues and insecurities generated by post-war processes of change were not perceived as examples of progress and change, but as new manifestations of long-standing patterns of conflict and oppression. As a woman in Mon state notes, the end of war did not mean the end of fear and insecurity:

> Even though there is no fighting, it doesn't mean that we have peace in Mon areas. Because without fighting, people still have concerns and they have fear of different things, you know. From different situations. For example, business and development projects.[12]

While the causes changed – from counterinsurgency to development projects, for example – violations like forced dispossession and displacement have recurred across time. This is clear in the following narrative, where events and issues in Myanmar over 70 years were situated as illustrations of the same fundamental pattern:

> There is no peace since about 70 years already, and since we were born we have not seen any case of peace. And within 70 years there are so many conflicts in the area, and even though the government and the armed groups are doing the peace process […] there is no improvement, no process going forward. So in short we can say that there is no peace in the region. Regarding the conflict, another [problem] is always coming, one by one, for example such as land confiscation, land grabbing, and also exploitation of natural resources. And the current issue with General Aung San Statue.[13] So all of these things are big issues, so that's why it is still far from peace in our region.[14]

While the character of conflict and the issues in focus changed over time, overarching political and legal reforms did little to change people's experience of and relationship to the state, which continued to be largely perceived as

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11   Interview with man in Mon state, cited in Hedström and Olivius 2022.
12   Interview with one woman, Mon state, 4 December 2019.
13   For an analysis of the Aung San Statue case, see Olivius and Hedström 2021.
14   Interview with three men, Kayah state, 28 March 2019.

predatory, extractive, and violent (Naw Wai Hnin Kyaw and Soe Soe Nwe 2019; Kyed 2020; Wittekind 2018). As one man in Kayah state explained, this means that people still did not feel secure, and were not able to trust that the relative stability of 2019 would last:

> There is no security when, if we go out at midnight or other times we still have a concern, we are still in fear. So as long as the government system is not reformed, we fear for the stability in the country.[15]

Here, continued military power and Bamar dominance were singled out as a reason why the transition was not trusted to lead to something genuinely new. In this way, wartime relationships and experiences spill into and shape postwar lives, challenging conventional ideas about linear transitional time. Exploring transitional processes through the lens of the gendered everyday allows us to make visible these continuities of violence across space and time, and to foreground an alternative temporal framework through which people make sense of their lives.

Conclusion

In the past decade, people's everyday lives in Mon and Kayah states have been affected by political and economic shifts caused by ceasefire agreements from the 1990s and onwards; and by political reforms, economic liberalization and renewed peace negotiations following the 2011 transition from military to semi-civilian rule. These transitional processes combined have brought a complex mix of improvements, new insecurities and threats, as well as a reproduction of wartime dynamics. These multifaceted, multidirectional post-war dynamics and their effects are intertwined with and conditioned by gendered relations and norms.

Notably, while armed violence and forms of forced labour that primarily targeted men were reduced over time, structural forms of violence that disproportionally affect women have persisted. Women's social reproductive burden continues to be overwhelming in the absence of state welfare provisioning. These legacies of war are compounded by new dynamics, such as male drug abuse and labour migration, thus continuing to leave women responsible for sustaining families and communities while unable to access education or paid labour opportunities. Due to gender norms as well as legal

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15   Interview with one man, Kayah state, 1 April 2019.

frameworks, women are also particularly vulnerable to dispossession as a result of development-related land grabbing.

In the aftermath of the military coup, these patterns are being exacerbated, with women reporting both increased caring responsibilities and increased violence, resulting in negative coping mechanisms, including cutting down on food, savings and medicines, and staying inside (UN Women and UNDP 2022). These are gendered experiences and coping strategies that Agatha Ma and Kusakabe (2015) already found women to be adopting in 2011–2012 in their study on women living in Kayah state, suggesting that past experiences are being repeated in the present moment.

Our findings demonstrate, then, that, rather than constituting a straight-forward 'move from madness to sanity, or from evil to good' (Keen 2007: 9), post-war transitions are messy, multifaceted and multidirectional. Moreover, the knowledge gained from speaking to women and men living in conflict-affected areas trouble not only ideas about the progressive nature of transitional change; the lived experiences of our respondents also destabilizes conventional, linear temporal frameworks. In their lives, time has not been experienced as 'moving forward' towards the future, but rather as recurring cycles of insecurity, dispossession and displacement, where the past, present and future have been intertwined. This was visible in the way wartime gendered divisions of labour restricted women's political and economic opportunities in the post-war, and in how the anticipation that the past will 'return' in the future shaped investment decisions as well as political activism in the present. From this perspective, the 2021 military coup appears not as an anomalous interruption of a trajectory of progress, but as yet another cycle of insecurity that needs to be navigated in everyday life. This temporal complexity points to the relevance of the feminist assertion that war and peace are not dichotomous opposites, but exist on a continuum of gendered violence (Cockburn 2004). Moreover, it highlights the importance of approaching the post-war period as a con-tinued struggle against the enduring legacies of war, and of paying careful attention to how those legacies are manifested, navigated and transformed in the gendered everyday.

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