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ABSTRACT

"Post war" has been highlighted as an arena in which, under the banner of reconstruction, processes of accumulation by dispossession are often intensified. This conceptual article explores gaps in how "dispossession" is typically defined, to deepen understanding of the complex, gendered modalities that occur in post-war, when the population is already living in the wake of wartime land dispossession. Through an interdisciplinary feminist political economy and conflict studies lens, "dispossession" as a concept is interrogated beyond the original Marxist meaning of separation from the means of production via wholesale agrarian transition. The article argues that, in the long post-war "moment," gendered dispossession might occur in three interrelated ways, all connected to wartime dispossession. The first is bodily dispossession which occurs through shifting forms of patriarchy. The second is dispossession manifesting within reconfigured social reproductive relations. The third is piecemeal dispossession, through the embedding of other capitalist relations, including lifetime debt.

KEYWORDS

Conflict, violence against women, dispossession, war and post-war, social reproduction

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HIGHLIGHTS

- A feminist approach to dispossession reveals its less visible and its gendered dimensions.
- Conflict-related dispossession consists of more than mass land expulsion during war.
- In post-war, dispossession connects to both state and capitalist logics of accumulation.
- Dispossession can have different modes: it is an embodied process, occurs through social reproduction, and can happen covertly.

- A feminist re-conceptualization contributes to analyses of violence against women in war and post-war.

INTRODUCTION

Existing research shows how contemporary crises can prompt reorganizations – often constituting the advancement and embedding – of deeply gendered neoliberal political-economic relations. Most recently, such trajectories have been analyzed in relation to the COVID-19 global pandemic (Kabeer, Razavi, and van der Meulen Rodgers 2021; Mezzadri 2022). Conflict, and specifically the post-war "moment," can also be understood as such an arena: a heightened opportunity, under the umbrella of reconstruction and peacebuilding, to intensify processes of what David Harvey, building on Marx and Luxemburg, calls accumulation by dispossession. While the gendered dynamics of accumulation are relatively well-explored, there has been less analysis of the gendered modes of dispossession, particularly in post-war or conflict-affected contexts, where the population is already living in the wake of wartime land dispossession. That being so, feminist conflict scholarship has long emphasized continuities between gendered experiences of war and so-called transitions to peace. This article seeks to make a conceptual intervention in debates at this juncture. It considers how these reflections might be brought to bear on conflict-affected (post-war) environments; within a global neoliberal economic order but also involving reconstruction controlled by domestic elites.[1]

The purpose is to take account of gendered continuities between war and "post"-war, through an analytical re-evaluation of conflict-related dispossession, complicating – through a feminist political economy lens – what it is typically taken to encompass. The central questions addressed are as follows. How can a feminist approach address existing gaps in political economy theorizations of dispossession? How can this approach further our understanding of how dispossession might occur *after* war and *beyond* the distinct event of mass eviction from land? What does this add to our understanding of the violence embedded in post-war transitions, especially the violence against women that is such a well-documented continuity from war to post-war?

The theoretical choice to enhance understanding of gendered experiences of post-war via an intervention in political economy debates on dispossession is motivated by the feminist conflict research that exposes continuities of violence between war and peace and challenges assumptions that conflict trajectories are gender neutral. This article contributes to that research by provoking the question whether violent, conflict-related dispossession might entail more than the large-scale, visible expulsion from

the land that occurs during a war. As a corollary, the article deepens the analysis of how dispossession as a process is gendered.

The study is also informed by historical political economy scholarship that conceptualizes war, post-war transitions, and reconstruction as manifestations of wider processes of development, linking them with trajectories of state formation and capital accumulation (Tilly 1992; Cramer 2009). The post-war "moment," with a shocked and traumatized population and territory, can be understood as providing fertile grounds for the acceleration or deepening of a particularly predatory form of this type of development: accumulation by dispossession. Thus, the article also contributes to scholarship on post-war development. It speaks to the Special Issue theme by examining dispossession as a political economy mechanism connecting to, potentially driving, violence against women.

The article first intervenes in selected existing debates on dispossession. The departure point is Harvey's conceptualization of (accumulation by) dispossession (2004, 2005), which builds on the original Marxist meaning of dispossession as separation from the means of production via wholesale agrarian transition. It considers some critical engagements with Harvey's approach, and their relevance and applicability to gendered lived experiences in conflict settings. These debates and the lacunae they expose in respect of conflict contexts are ripe for feminist political economy intervention. Second, the article integrates insights from conflict studies and political economy and considers how this interdisciplinary framework might be usefully deployed to interpret the gendered realities of post-war transitions. In line with the Special Issue approach, the analysis understands (post-war) violence as multifaceted: occurring within and outside the home, and including physical, sexual, psychological, and structural forms. Three aspects of gendered dispossession are brought into the analytical frame, drawing from foundational work on accumulation (Mies 1986; Federici 2004; Hartsock 2006) and contemporary political economy and human geography debates on the gendered dynamics of accumulation by dispossession (Li 2009; Fernandez 2018; Ruwanpura 2018).

INTERVENING IN SELECTED DEBATES ON DISPOSSESSION

"Accumulation by dispossession" is geographer David Harvey's account of contemporary processes of global capitalism and perhaps the most widely known Marxist revision of the theory of primitive or original accumulation (Harvey 2003, 2004, 2005). Karl Marx examines the origins of capitalism – the transformation of a feudal society into a capitalist one. Harvey – advancing Rosa Luxemburg's critiques (Luxemburg [1913] 2003) – argues that the violent, predatory, and fraudulent practices that

Marx said happen at the start of the transition to capitalism have "remained powerfully present" throughout and within the long history of capital accumulation (Harvey 2004: 74). The dispossession that accompanies capital accumulation is not a historical artifact but ongoing; thus, he renames the process accumulation by dispossession (ABD). Capitalism's inherent contradictions lead to the continual production of surpluses of capital and labor; these recurrent crises of over-accumulation are resolved through ABD. ABD occurs through different forms of spatial and temporal reorganization and expansion as temporary solutions – "spatio-temporal fixes" – for example, the territorial reallocation of labor (Harvey 2001, 2004). Harvey argues that a number of new mechanisms of ABD have come into operation in the neoliberal era: cultural, historical, and intellectual dispossessions and the corporatization and privatization of previously public assets; while other features such as finance have come to occupy a far stronger role than before (2004: 74–75). Meanwhile, war and plunder continue as central mechanisms.

In an uncompromising analysis, Naomi Klein applies this theory to the post-war moment. In the neoliberal era, she argues, the collective shock and trauma both during and after a disaster are deliberately used by the forces of capital as opportunities to undertake radical social and economic engineering via market liberalization and privatization. It is a process of ABD she describes as "disaster capitalism," which "finishes the job of the original disaster," with fear and disorder acting as catalysts (Klein 2007: 6–13). Feminist conflict studies scholars have drawn comparable conclusions in relation to specific post-war reconstruction contexts. Shahrzad Mojab, for example, argues that what was labeled reconstruction in Iraq (post-2003 invasion) was rather about "assembling the spoils of war" as part of US-driven capitalist imperialism (2009: 109). These and other such analyses are compelling, as they dovetail with the post-war transitions literature that rejects the idea that war and post-war are distinct spheres of activity and that the end of war represents a clean break from conflict (Richards 2005; Goodhand 2008). Feminist analyses also make visible the structural connections between accumulation and dispossession in contexts of conflict. There are political economy logics underpinning war-related accumulation – that occurs during both war and post-war reconstruction – which drive dispossession. The research implies strong causal relationships between accumulation and dispossession in conflict settings. The focus, though, tends to be on the techniques of accumulation rather than modalities of dispossession; dispossession is typically assumed to refer only to the land dispossession wrought by conflict. This framing leaves open questions about how and whether (violent) dispossession might continue and how such continuities are gendered in nature, especially given the attention feminist conflict scholars draw to the continuities or even worsening of gendered violence in post-war. Here, then, is one area

where feminist political economy could be brought together usefully with conflict research.

In the broader literature, others have critically engaged with and even attempted to conceptually reconstruct Harvey's theory. Three interrelated areas of debate are most relevant for this article's focus on post-war contexts. One is whether dispossession always occurs as a "fix" to global accumulation. A second is the charge of overgeneralization; and the third is whether dispossession is a political or economic process.

On the first, Harvey specifies that ABD represents an attempt by capital to overcome the structural problems of overaccumulation. While ABD has always been an aspect of the broader process of capitalist accumulation, it has become the dominant form in the neoliberal era because it represents one intensive means of offsetting the crises of global overaccumulation that have been building since the end of the Keynesian era (Harvey 2003: 156–158; Glassman 2006). Others, however, contest this as the defining feature of contemporary ABD, evidencing that processes of dispossession underway in the twenty-first century – especially in the Global South – do not always represent a strategy of global capital. Tom Perreault (2013), for example, details the contingencies between accumulation and the dispossession of Indigenous campesinos in Bolivia's Altiplano. Michael Levien (2012) discusses how the SEZs driving land dispossession in Rajasthan, India are primarily financed by domestic, not global, capital. Such empirical data indicate that dispossession does not only occur as a spatio-temporal fix to global overaccumulation. The debate highlights the need to account for processes driven by multiple domestic actors. In conflict-affected environments, it raises the question of the role and nature of domestic actors including states as agents of violent dispossession, especially within complex environments such as sub-national wars and post-war transitions. Recent examples, such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Angola, and Lebanon have comprised instances of strong – rather than collapsed or fragile – states. These states emerged robust after war and continued to pursue violent territorial ambitions (De Oliveira 2011). They may operate in conjunction with capital forces, but also exist in tension and at times contradiction with them.[2]

The second criticism is that Harvey's theory overgeneralizes (Brenner 2006; Hall 2012, 2013).[3] This charge could be leveled more widely at neo-Marxist theories of primitive accumulation, which arguably "hide capitalism's specificity" (Hall 2012: 1191), given that commodities and markets pre-date capitalism (Polanyi 2001). An argument within agrarian scholarship is that, to avoid depriving ABD of its substance, it should only be deployed to explain wholesale agrarian transition (Brenner 2006: 100–102). Looking at dispossession specifically, that would only refer to proletarianization: the violent separation of producers from the means of production and their shift into wage labor (Marx [1867] 1990).

However, in the contemporary (neoliberal) era of capitalism, we are not witnessing the serial repetition of the same scenario of wholesale agrarian transition but rather, a great variety of capitalist trajectories within complex socioeconomic and political milieu (Levien 2012, 2018; Dardot and Laval 2014).[4] According to Levien, despite its "ambiguities and lacunae," the *strength* of Harvey's theorization lies in its unmooring from the "historicism of modes of production" (2012: 936–939). Dispossession in the twenty-first century has a number of outcomes: for example, "passive proletarianization" whereby traditional forms of production, having been dissolved, do not translate into waged, formal work (Mitschein, Miranda, and Paraense 1989, in Davis 2006: 175); "capitalism without proletarianization," whereby separation from the means of production does not occur but subsistence producers are driven into "sub-subsistence" (Davis 2006: 180). Levien (2018) identifies the "semi-proletarianization" of peoples in Rajasthan, India, who combine agriculture with various forms of self-employment or causal employment in waged (for example, service, construction) sectors. Although a number of reasons are documented for semi-proletarianization, one is the generation of a relative surplus population, as the industrial sector is far less labor absorbing today than it was during Europe's industrial revolution. "Almost nowhere," notes Levien, "are dispossessed peasants being absorbed in great numbers into an industrial proletariat" (2018: 214).

Primitive accumulation has always, constantly, produced a population surplus to the needs of capital – Hannah Arendt described a "human debris" that, "eliminated permanently from producing society," became a menace to it (1951: 150). "Surplus populations" today must increasingly survive outside wage labor, entering, whether full or part time, the informal economy (Sanyal 2007; Li 2010; Sassen 2010; Samson 2015). Dispossession today therefore must consist of more than proletarianization as originally described.

Thus, discussions open up about the variegated trajectories of ABD that are shaped by the political and institutional arrangements during and after conflict. Research uncovers heterogeneous trajectories of accumulation – such as "ceasefire capitalism" in Myanmar (Woods 2011) and "militarized capitalism" in post-war Sri Lanka (Ruwanpura 2018), linked to legacies of war and conditions of the "peace" (Goodhand 2010; Widger 2017). However, there remains space to explore what these trajectories mean for modalities of dispossession. Taking into account continuities between war and "peace"/post-war demands consideration of the well-studied issue of violence against women (VAW) that continues or even worsens after the end of a war (Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen 2001; Enloe 2002; Cockburn 2004; Ramnarain 2020). It thus calls for reflection and empirical data on the gendered nature of conflict-related dispossession.

The third area of theoretical debate – which has arisen in response to the first two – is whether dispossession is a political or economic process. Levien reconstructs the concept by distinguishing "directly coercive, state-orchestrated dispossession" from "uncoordinated" market-induced dispossession (Levien 2018: 6) and only including the former within the definition of ABD. ABD, in his analysis, is the use of extra-economic coercion to expropriate the means of production, subsistence or social wealth for capital accumulation (Levien 2012, 2018). Dispossession, he claims, is a temporally distinct and highly visible process, only requiring "one-time compliance at the point of enclosure" and "inherently transparent" (2018: 18–19).

Focusing on dispossession by states, which are identified as the predominant owners of the means of coercion in the contemporary world, Levien advances the concept of "regimes of dispossession" to explain how dispossession is organized in different sociohistorical contexts (Levien 2015: 146). In India, the examples discussed are Nehruvian planning, which broke from the extractivism of colonial capitalism but still dispossessed large numbers of rural people, and the land dispossession specific to the latest phase of neoliberal capitalism, which manifests as the ongoing plunder of subaltern populations (2018: 14–33). Both, he reiterates, represent instances of (land) dispossession but the first – and other similar instances of statism and developmentalism, especially in postcolonial contexts – is/are shaped by ambitions (if not outcomes) of broader social transformation – some equitable growth and poverty alleviation – than private-sector growth at all costs.[5]

This re-conceptualization of ABD – starting from actually existing dispossession rather than from generalized and hypothesized features of global capitalism – is analytically specific. It provides an account of the significant, coercive role that political regimes/institutions play in dispossession, which, along with the context specificity that the "regimes of dispossession" framework allows for, is of value to understanding ABD in different post-war political environments, especially those where the state is strong, with a monopoly over (legalized) violence.

The more central re-positioning of the state speaks to the bigger question of who or what is meant by "the state." There is a large, dynamic field of Marxist and neo-Marxist literature on the state, which it is not possible to delve into here. This article takes as a starting point Harvey's later development of the theory of ABD, which understands the state as more than an enabler of capital. Rather, it is driven by geo-territorial logics of power and expansion that may operate in tension as well as congruence with capital (2005: 91–92). This "contradictory fusion" of logics drives processes of ABD (Harvey 2005, 2006). Such tensions can be evidenced in the case of post-war Sri Lanka. Here, following the decisive defeat, after twenty-six years, of Tamil separatists in the north and east, the victorious Sri

Lankan state set about an endogenously led process of "reconstruction." It involved the state's militarized expansion into and embedding in the former conflict territories, along with national and international capital penetration of these areas, previously subject to economic embargo (Ruwanpura 2016; Jegatheeswaran 2017). These intertwined trajectories of deepening political authoritarianism and economic liberalization operate together but are also at times in friction (Bastian 2013). State-building can be understood as both a (geo) political and an economic process. In another example, Myanmar in the twenty-first century, it has involved a post-war military state appropriating global finance and commodity markets, (trans-) national businesspeople, and ethnic business and political elites, to solidify *de jure* sovereignty into *de facto* territorial control of the Myanmar-China borderlands (Woods 2011). It is a (violent, abusive) process of accumulation that has benefited elites at the state's center and further marginalized subordinated social groups. The identification of economic interests shaping this case of "reconstruction" again raises the question of how political motivations converge and/or come into conflict with economic imperatives.

States can, further, be understood as coalitions of elite social forces, with every state based on a historically specific political settlement (Di John and Putzl 2009). The heterodox and Marxist analyses position states as historically and socially contingent far more than bureaucratic entities. Feminists then highlight how processes of state-making and state accumulation are deeply gendered (Peterson 1992). Re-positioning the state more centrally in analyses of ABD thus requires in-depth consideration of its gendered selectivities (Connell 1990; Jessop 2003), which function in tandem with its ethnicized/racialized logics (Goder and Ruwanpura 2014; Johnston and Lingham 2020).

This study, then, conceptualizes the state as more than a mediator of capitalist social relations, but sees state geo-territorial imperatives as fused, however unevenly, with imperatives for capital accumulation. This fusion makes Levien's dichotomous positioning of "economic" and "extra-economic" processes conceptually problematic. It is especially questionable when applied to instances where a strong state is operating with its own geo-territorial imperatives, as is increasingly the case under twenty-first conditions of conflict (such as in Sri Lanka and Myanmar). Evidently, the violent, state-driven land dispossession of war has a brutal immediacy that will be experienced as distinct from post-war processes of (capitalist) reconstruction. Under particular post-war political settlements, though, both processes may be at least mediated by the same state and so experiences of and responses to reconstruction are likely to connect to and be shaped by experiences of wartime land dispossession.

Furthermore, while Levien does not attribute wholly positive characteris tics to "developmental" dispossession – and certainly, his reconstruction of

ABD conceptualizes "regimes," not "hierarchies," of dispossession – he does appear to be arguing that this is a more successful and less violent means of state-controlled capitalist accumulation than "dispossession without development" (2018: 18–19). This article does not adopt the same position, not least because the following section shows some of the hidden abodes of gendered violence that continue in post-war, which are enabled by wartime dispossession. Rather than "violence," notions of compliance, consent, and coercion are discussed by Levien (2018). However, there are conceptual and real-world overlaps between these four phenomena. Examining these overlaps might reveal ways in which a supposedly less coercive and more developmental regime of dispossession could incorporate new, as well as continuing, threats and manifestations of multiple forms of violence against women (VAW), that, moreover, materialize in less-than-transparent modes and do not necessarily play out as clear-cut, conspicuous events. Finally, any analysis of the coercive role institutions play in dispossession also needs to include consideration of *informal* institutions (gendered norms, such as the entrenching of patriarchal concepts of femininity and masculinity) which bear on gendered coercion and specifically VAW.

GENDERING (ACCUMULATION BY) DISPOSSESSION

Feminist analysis of contemporary ABD reveals how global (neoliberal) accumulation is significantly gendered. It involves differential treatment of women and men and therefore has different consequences and different possibilities for their respective economic and political participation (Hartsock 2006). Accumulation is marked by intersecting vulnerabilities; case study research across the Global South highlights the relations between different aspects of dispossession and vulnerabilities of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, and class (Federici 2012; Casolo and Doshi 2013; Doss, Summerfield, and Tsikata 2014; Whitehead 2015). This second part of the article integrates these insights with feminist conflict studies research with the objective of strengthening the theoretical groundwork on dispossession, especially in post-war contexts, and looks at how the gendered outcomes might be conceptualized.

Three aspects of dispossession are brought into the analytical frame: how dispossession is an embodied process; how dispossession operates within and through the sphere of social reproduction; and the temporal dimensions of dispossession, which manifest in "piecemeal" ways.

Dispossession and the body

Sylvia Federici (2004) brilliantly exposed and analyzed the set of gendered phenomena that were crucial for primitive/original accumulation in Europe and subsequent processes of capitalist accumulation. Her concern

was to address how this accumulation and dispossession relates to the intensification, under neoliberalism, of VAW. The original transition to capitalism required a new sexual division of labor: production was separated from reproduction and women's labor and reproductive function were subjugated to the reproduction of the workforce. A new patriarchal order was established, based on the exclusion of women from waged work and the specifically capitalist use of the wage to command the labor of the unwaged. The mechanization of the proletarian body included the transformation of the female body into a machine for the production of new workers. Sexual hierarchies of femininity and masculinity developed and were instilled in the population as means of capitalist social discipline. These were perpetuated via the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and the New World: the witch was "the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy" (Federici 2004: 8–12).

Of course, women's subordination to men existed in pre-capitalist society[6] but this subordination, it is argued, was at least partly mitigated by their access to commons/other communal assets. With primitive accumulation, however, "*women themselves became the commons*" (Federici 2004: 97). Federici explores how "original" dispossession involved not only violent separation from land/the means of production but also the loss, for women, of power and bodily autonomy. Women's loss of power also manifested through a new sexual differentiation of space: in Mediterranean countries, they were expelled from the streets as well as from many waged jobs. An unaccompanied woman was at risk of assault and ridicule, while those who dared work outside the home and for the market were portrayed as sexually aggressive or as witches (Federici 2004: 96–100). Compounding these changes was an ideological redefinition of gender relations: new cultural canons maximized the differences between women and men (Federici 2004: 100–103). Those who did not conform were demonized through the humiliating and brutal practices of the witch-hunts:

> Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies . . . For the threat of the stake erected more formidable barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected by the fencing off of the commons. (Federici 2004: 184)

This analysis brings to the forefront the issue of violence, exposing how women are controlled through gendered violence/coercion manifesting through ideology and patriarchal control over their bodies. In contemp orary capitalist development, these continue alongside women's incorpora tion into "productive" economic spheres (with the exploitation that also brings), further complicating the distinctions Levien draws, in

his theorization, between coercion and compliance. Including in the characterization of dispossession "the expropriation of women from their bodies" challenges the claim that dispossession occurs as an inherently transparent process, only requiring a single "moment" of compliance.

By taking up Federici's positioning of the body as a site of dispossession, theoretical connections can be made with feminist conflict research on the continuum of gendered violence from war to "peace." The reproduction of wartime dynamics in post-war is consistently documented in research on VAW (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Ramnarain 2020). The post-war moment often involves a "gendered backlash" – echoing the European Middle Age witch hunts – whereby patriarchal violence and social control over women's bodies intensify (Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen 2001; Enloe 2002; Pankhurst 2003). In the war-affected Northern Province in Sri Lanka, for example, in the years following the end of the war, women's security deteriorated sharply (United Nations 2012). VAW was driven by post-war militarization. However, simultaneously, the disorientation by the war's "losers," who were collectively dispossessed from land and means of production, was articulated in part through the patriarchal enforcement of control over women within these ethnic and religious groups. "Loser" communities sought to maintain coherent identities as the terms of a "victor's peace" were enforced around them. This manifested, for women, as an additional modality of war-related dispossession, via loss of power and bodily autonomy (Lingham 2019: 126–130).

In war-affected contexts, gendered violence is frequently structured through institutions and practices of war-making and "peace-making" (True 2012). For example, sex trafficking became part of the militarized "peacekeeping" economies in the Balkans (Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009). Material practices of patriarchal accumulation through (women's) bodily dispossession are enabled through gendered ideologies of militarism and nationalism (Reardon 1985; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989).

Feminist conflict scholars make connections between conflict in the so-called public domain and outcomes in the "private" sphere (Cockburn 2004; Swaine 2015; Ramnarain 2020). In multiple conflict contexts, studies show how war violence is "brought home" by (usually) male military fighters, who enact violent practices from everyday work on the "warfront" when they return home to (usually) women partners, kin and community (see, for example, Sharoni [1994]).

The lines of investigation have also been expanded to look at the gendered harms created by international "liberal peacebuilding" (True, Heathcote, and Otto 2014; Duncanson 2016; Goetz and Jenkins 2016). There is less on the role of (gendered) states as drivers of the material outcomes of this post-war backlash; rather, state-focused analysis tends to be on how nationalist discourses and ideologies enable physical and structural violence. Understanding post-war VAW as part of the enduring bodily

dispossession that accompanies processes of accumulation is one way to bridge this conceptual gap.

For Federici, women's bodily dispossession is one aspect of dispossession via the sphere of social reproduction. The sexual division of labor and women's loss of bodily autonomy, originally enforced through the witch hunts, was a power relation that provided immense fuel to capital accumulation (Federici 2004: 115). While much conflict research supports the view that gender-based violence in conflict connects to processes of global capitalism (Enloe 1990; True 2012; Meger 2015), data from others (referenced above) indicate that VAW is not only or always driven by capitalist logics.[7] Other patriarchal imperatives – not least those of the gendered state – may be responsible. If the patriarchal logics fueling gendered regimes of accumulation are about more than reconfiguring social reproductive roles and labor, then bodily dispossession (through VAW) needs to be conceptualized as, potentially, consisting of more than dispossession via social reproduction.[8] For this reason, the article's analysis separates the mode of bodily dispossession from the next mode, dispossession through the sphere of social reproduction.

Dispossession and the reconfiguration of social reproduction

The second way in which conflict-related dispossession needs to be reconceptualized is by identifying and analyzing the ways in which it impacts the sphere of social reproduction. Social reproduction can be defined as the labor, relationships, and social processes that maintain and reproduce individuals, households, and communities. It is thus core to the functioning of the capitalist system.

Federici (2004) theorized how the deliberate separation of productive and reproductive spheres, and the assumption of women's social reproductive labor as a natural and free resource, are central to processes of ABD. Dispossession – with both original and contemporary processes of accumulation – results in the seeming exclusion of social reproductive labor from now commodified circuits of exchange value. This shift enables capitalist production to be subsidized by (largely women's) unpaid and ongoing social reproduction work (Fernandez 2018: 147). In conflict-affected environments, the acceleration of neoliberal capitalist relations, or "disaster capitalism," that occurs in the post-war moment, facilitates the intensification of the gendered separation of social reproduction and production.

Federici's analysis of dispossession through the sphere of social reproduction synchronizes with feminist work undertaken vis-à-vis women's diverse experiences of incorporation into waged labor. There are possibilities as well as problems: there are, for example, benefits of escaping the confines of patriarchal families and households and wage

labor may increase power within the family and individual life options (Hartsock 2006). Gendered ideologies further secure acquiescence to material processes of dispossession. For example, the invocation of gendered practices and familial tropes, such as the "dutiful daughter" or the "paternal" employer, can create an enabling environment for hyper-exploitation under regimes of (accumulation by) dispossession (Wright 2006; Casolo and Doshi 2013). In conflict-affected environments, the narrative of "post-war [individual] empowerment" is invoked to entrench distinctive, dispossessing economic formations such as microfinance (Keating, Rasmussen, and Rishi 2010). This mode of credit can, in reality, deepen debt (Narayan 2005). It facilitates women's participation in precarious, informal sector work with low rates of return while simultaneously juggling unpaid social reproductive labor (Bateman 2008; Ramnarain 2015; Johnston 2020). Thus, relations of production and social reproduction become reconfigured so that certain war-affected populations are unable to socially reproduce.

Maintaining this gender-analytical lens and keeping the focus on social reproduction enables a better understanding of the temporal modalities of dispossession. Bina Fernandez (2018) identifies how the abandonment of fishing by the next generation of Miyana fisher households in Gujarat (due to the increasing precarity/insecurity of the work) affected not only the reproduction of labor as a social class but also caused the future loss of knowledge and practices of the fisher community. As discussed in the next subsection, dispossession is typically understood in terms of apocalyptic "moments" of violence but Fernandez's study shows how it can occur as everyday, incremental violence, that erodes the capacity for social reproduction and manifests with accrued impacts in the future (2018: 159). These findings resonate with other explorations of the temporal modalities of dispossession of "surplus populations:" the "stealthy violence" experienced by a population who are not massacred but discarded and relegated to leading short and limited lives (Li 2009: 66–67).

V. Spike Peterson (2008; 2009) explores these dynamics within post-war contexts. Although not connecting to the concept of dispossession, she analyzes the gendered dimensions of informal economies, especially in post-war Iraq. This research builds on the concept of "war economies": interrelated and overlapping spheres of "productive" activity (combat, shadow, and coping economies) that together fuel, perpetuate and respond to conditions of war/conflict (Pugh and Cooper with Goodhand 2004). Peterson extends that analysis to include social reproductive work within the definition of "economy." "Coping" economies, overlapping with shadow economies, are where gender relations are especially visible as they involve expectations that women keep households functioning, often through a variety of informal – in addition to unpaid, social reproductive – activities (Peterson 2009: 48).

This contribution is valuable because it considers how the specificities of conflict-affected contexts (the socioeconomic conditions of post-war; the political actors and interests influencing that environment) set the stage for women's entrenchment in socioeconomic precarity. The (non-feminist) "war economies" framework recognizes that women are disproportionately driven into survival, coping, or "shadow economy" activities. The feminist theorization, though, has real analytical purchase: by revealing how the naturalization of social reproduction was crucial to enabling original, or primitive, accumulation, it enables understanding of why these dynamics would also be central to post-war processes of ABD. Contemporary feminist research provides just such evidence: Hedström shows how all aspects of informal war economies are not just enmeshed with but rather, predicated upon "militarized social reproduction" (2020). Moreover, the gender division of labor underpinning post-war reconstruction in Myanmar's Kayah state, whereby women disproportionately undertake underpaid informal work and unpaid social reproductive work, causes their dispossession, and deepens gendered insecurity (Hedström and Olivius 2020).

Furthermore, feminist researchers on work and the economy have developed the concept of "depletion" to refer to harmful impacts upon social reproduction. Shirin M. Rai, Catherine Hoskyns, and Dania Thomas (2014) identify three gendered sites where "depletion through social reproduction" occurs: the individual, engaged in social reproduction work, embedded in the household and community and enmeshed in social relations, who could experience physical and mental impacts; the household, whereby members may no longer be adequately supported; and the community, where impacts might include the breaking down of community bonds and shrinking space for community mobilization (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014: 93).

While "depletion" should not be conceptually conflated with "dispossession," this concept is drawn upon by Fernandez to extend the meaning of dispossession to also include, as its consequences, "the depletion of capacities due to gendered, differential exposure to the currents of structural violence, which are visible precisely in the realm of social production" (Fernandez 2018: 158). This conceptualization brings into the discussion the question of how land dispossession connects to and enables structural violence through the social reproductive sphere. In conflict-affected environments, based on the "peace" settlement, the social reproductive capacities of defeated groups are deliberately unsupported by the state/victorious social forces, and reproductive justice is denied. The failure to support social reproduction drives everyday and long-term human depletion, with the worst effects on the most conflict-affected women, already dispossessed from the land by war (Rai, True, and Tanyag 2019; Hedström and Olivius 2020; Lingham and Johnston 2024).

Reevaluating the temporal, "piecemeal," dimensions of dispossession

The third framing of dispossession speaks to the question of how we understand its temporal dimensions beyond the "grand moments" when people are forcibly hurled from their land (Marx [1867] 1990) – which, in conflict contexts, emerge most clearly at the height of war. This framing also addresses whether dispossession is always a highly visible process.

An alternative theorization of ABD understands dispossession as not just a one-time, transparent phenomenon but one that also occurs through under-the-radar processes (Li 2009, 2010). Tania Murray Li traces the "economic" and "extra-economic" processes of ABD in contemporary rural Asia via three "vectors" of dispossession (2009). These are categorized as state/state-supported land seizures, "piecemeal dispossession" caused by the capitalist onslaught of subsidized, large-scale agriculture, and the enclosure of common lands justified as conservation. In Southeast Asia, "all three vectors are operating in a kind of pincer movement, dispossessing rural people to a degree that is unprecedented" (2009: 71–72). Conceptualizing these vectors as part of the same process of dispossession enables consideration of how the acceleration of capitalist relations in the aftermath of war – Klein's disaster capitalism (2007) – connects to wartime land dispossession.

In contrast to the spectacular episodes of dispossession included in the first vector such as land grabs, piecemeal dispossession lacks spectacle. It occurs, often unrecognized or unobserved, through "everyday" capitalist processes that push smallholders into debt (Li 2009: 74; Guérin 2014) or lead them into land sale (Li 2010). The contrast appears starker in a conflict-affected context. For example, in wartime Sri Lanka, Tamil populations were brutally dispossessed from land by the state. In post-war, "self-help" and "livelihoods" schemes proliferated for war-affected women as part of the same state's development drive. Seemingly offered as "opportunities," the schemes' orientation to capitalist markets pushed women deeper into debt, curtailing chances for land security (Lingham 2019: 215–218). Li's theory does not simplify responses to capitalist relations: while debt and distress sales are central to the account of dispossession, there is recognition of "the element of desire… and the hope that risky behavior will pay off in improved livelihoods, access to education, and other elements of modern citizenship" (Li 2010: 408). Furthermore, hierarchical gender and caste relations inhere in these complex processes of indebtedness in Asia (Guérin, Kumar, and Agier 2013).

When governments do not intervene to deal with the outcomes of dispossession, surplus populations are left to perish; again, this is not a one-off, apocalyptic event but rather, "a stealthy violence" (Li 2009: 67). Moreover, nation-states, too, can be "viciously dispossessory" (Li 2010:

410). These processes can be traced from colonial times but piecemeal dispossession has been compounded, in the contemporary era, by the "new round of large-scale enclosures" associated with neoliberalism (Li 2010: 395) and financialization (Kadirgamar 2017). The post-war context adds further layers of gendered vulnerability. For example, Jenny Hedström and Elisabeth Olivius (2020) show how, in Myanmar, conflict entrenches the gender division of labor and positions women especially vulnerable to land dispossession in the service of post-war development.

The theorization that these three processes operate together to dispossess populations or entrench the consequences of dispossession is persuasive: it allows for a more nuanced exploration of the temporal dimensions of dispossession. It therefore provides a valuable analytical framework to explore the ways in which the continuing depletion of capacities and resources experienced by a war-affected population in a post-war transition connect to the "apocalyptic" land dispossession experienced during/at the end of the war. Further, this theory recognizes that dispossession can be an outcome even when it does not directly result from overt political coercion. The perspective does not dismiss the wishes or choices of those largely excluded from capitalist markets but it does allow for more extensive interrogation of the meaning/dynamics of coercion.[9] This analytical approach, in turn, enables connections to be made to the feminist conflict literature that exposes the multiple dimensions of violence.

It needs to be acknowledged, though, that this account brings the discussion of dispossession full circle, back to the charge of overgeneralization (as per the first section of the article) leveled at the concept of ABD. The processes and outcomes included in Li's definition could be understood as the normal aspects or by-products of capitalism (Brenner 2006); the "silent compulsion of economic relations" (Marx [1867] 1990: 899). In this case, we may ask: if this is capitalism, why re-theorize and rename it (Bernstein 2013)?

This is a challenging critique and appears to have been taken into consideration by Li herself, who, in "Land's End" (2014) describes these processes, notably the second vector of dispossession, as capitalist relations and not specifically dispossession:

> … capitalist relations emerged by stealth. No rapacious agribusiness corporation grabbed land from highlanders or obliged them to plant cacao. No government evicted them. The non-commodotized social relations through which they previously accessed land, labour and food … eroded piecemeal. (Li 2014: 9)

All the same, the book alludes strongly to what might, previously, have been described as the "dispossessing" nature of these aspects of capitalism:

> Once formed, these relations really were compulsory. They eroded choice. They couldn't be deselected, or wished away. (2014: 181)

In earlier work, addressing queries around this topic (Rata 2010), Li argues that global capitalism is not a "singular force with a unitary will and intention" but rather, "an assemblage that pulls together elements of diverse provenance" (Li 2007, in Li 2010: 410).[10] This framing moves away from a materialist understanding of the forces shaping the political economy and toward a more postmodern understanding; on one hand, it leaves the analytical framework vulnerable to further charges of vagueness; on the other, it enables it to account for socioeconomic and political complexities.

ABD offers a valuable theoretical advancement on conceptualizations of primitive accumulation because it allows us to move away from understanding dispossession as "more of the same" wholesale agrarian capitalist transition and toward theorizing the diverse modes of dispossession that occur in contemporary settings. These include contexts of enduring war and conflict. A theory of dispossession needs, though, to account for the dominant role played by coercive institutions, usually the state. The "regimes of dispossession" concept allows for variation across political contexts. However, the entangled boundaries that exist – and are experienced – between state and market, and between coercive and consensual processes in particular political economy contexts, make Levien's distinction between market-mediated and state-driven dispossession hard to maintain (Vijayabaskar and Menon 2018). Research on state-driven dispossession needs to acknowledge that this dispossession will shape/impact subsequent, or parallel, market-mediated processes: these are not unconnected or isolated social relations. Once this imbrication is accepted, the theoretical door is open to conceptualizing these as part of the phenomenon of dispossession (as Li does in her earlier work).

The post-war transition, marked by a "violent convergence of security, market integration and dispossession," provides important scope for empirical studies to explore these nexuses (Casolo and Doshi 2013: 825). Such studies would again bring into focus continuities between war and peace; how large-scale wartime dispossession can enable stealthier forms for marginalized social groups. The acceleration of these processes often relies on existing unequal gender relations, as long identified by feminist economists in relation to micro-debt in the Global South (Goetz and Gupta 1996; Kabeer 2001), and can create new, feminized burdens even as discourses of post-war empowerment are deployed. The nature of the post-war political settlement also demands we pay attention to the state's role in shaping these economic relations.

State-orchestrated, coercive dispossession such as that which occurs during (civil) wars cannot be neatly characterized as "extra-economic," although they may be driven primarily by the geo-territorial logic of the state. The political economy processes that occur in a post-war transition likely entrench and compound those outcomes of brutal war dispossession, as well as creating impacts of their own. To theorize those post-war political economy processes as "[silent] capitalist relations" alone would not encapsulate the ways in which state-driven wartime dispossession continues to shape the experiences of and responses to the "microprocesses" of everyday capitalism in post-war, such that these microprocesses deplete war-affected people's capacities through multiple vectors. Neither would it capture the continuities in state-driven wartime dispossession, such as those occurring through ongoing militarization of (formerly) contested territories. State-driven dispossession and post-war political economy processes – are, rather, intricately connected as social relations.

Relatedly, there are connections between the processes of accumulation and the gendered modalities of dispossession that are brought to bear upon the lives of women navigating post-war contexts. These are not straightforward and merit deeper investigation. Notwithstanding these complexities, and taking into consideration the critiques and feminist re-conceptualizations, the concept of ABD still has analytical purchase in research on conflict and dispossession, as it provokes inquiry into how and where power and resources are being concentrated when they are appropriated. Post-war, or "peace," is not a neutral time or space. Reconstruction and development are political projects, involving configurations of actors and motivations with imperatives to consolidate wartime gains, re-orient in the face of wartime losses, and take advantage of new openings as structures shift (Cramer 2006). Gendered modes of dispossession may not occur in linear ways that are temporally or spatially fixed in relation to these processes of accumulation, but neither are they disembedded from them: they occur in these particular constellations because those processes of accumulation, enabled by conflict and fueled by the dynamics of the post-war moment, are underway.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article began by proposing that the political economy shifts that occur under the auspices of reconstruction and peacebuilding in a post-war "moment" create fertile grounds for the acceleration and deepening of a particularly predatory form of development, ABD. While present-day trajectories of development reflect the political economy imperatives of the global capitalist (neoliberal) order, they are also shaped by domestic actors. Contemporary instances of reconstruction and peacebuilding are

increasingly driven by endogenous "illiberal," even authoritarian, states and agendas.

The study deployed an interdisciplinary feminist political economy and conflict studies lens to propose that the gendered impacts of a post-war environment can be interpreted and explained through a concept of "gendered dispossessions." While the gendered dynamics of accumulation are relatively well-explored in both conflict and non-conflict scholarship, there has been less analysis of the gendered modalities of dispossession, especially in post-war/post-conflict transitions, where the population is living in the wake of wartime land dispossession.

Informed by feminist conflict scholarship that reveals continuities between overtly violent events of war and everyday processes of post-war development, the article contributes to these debates by arguing that post-war dispossession occurs through multiple modes. The enduring outcomes and impacts of brutal, often state-orchestrated, war-time dispossession connect to less visible forms of dispossession in processes of post-war reconstruction that are underpinned by both state and capitalist logics. The impacts of and responses to the latter are likely to converge with impacts of and responses to the former. This analytical approach means that dispossession cannot be neatly categorized as either "extra-economic" or "economic" and, in the same vein, cannot necessarily be understood as synonymous with capitalist development. The thread of gendered violence connects wartime dispossession to that of post-war. As forms of violence shift and the end-of-war political settlement becomes entrenched, the post-war transition represents a fraught moment for women.

Conceptualized through a feminist lens, dispossession is understood as embedding or increasing social control over women's bodies. Bodily dispossession occurs through shifting forms of patriarchy, linked to the political settlement and subsequent socioeconomic dynamics of the post-war transition. Dispossession also occurs within and through the sphere of social reproduction. The gendered separation of social reproductive and productive labor intensifies as neoliberal capitalism penetrates, deepening women's socioeconomic precarity. There are temporal impacts: social reproductive capacities of subordinated social groups are undermined by dominant social forces, often through the institution of the state. Finally, rather than only occurring through a one-time, visible event, dispossession also occurs "piecemeal," through stealthy processes. The creeping dispossession that occurs through capitalist relations of debt manifests in the inability of the most war-affected populations to socially reproduce, threatening future collective survival.

In exploring the notion of dispossession after war, the article also engaged with existing tensions within non-feminist conceptualizations of (accumulation by) dispossession. The variegated trajectories of modern-day ABD require recognition of its contingencies, including spatially and

temporally complex connections between accumulation and dispossession. There is a need to reconsider the temporal dimensions of dispossession beyond the "grand moments" when people are forced from their land; to question whether dispossession is always a highly visible process; and to reflect on whether economic and extra-economic drivers of dispossession should be analytically distinguished. Cutting across these debates is the enduring feminist commitment to address multiple forms of VAW.

In evaluating the gendered impacts of a post-war transition through a framework of (accumulation by) dispossession, this article contributes to understanding gendered violence in conflict-affected environments, by more consistently foregrounding its socioeconomic and structural dimensions, while still keeping focus on the direct physical and sexual VAW that persist in post-war. Recognizing that the complex political economy logics driving gendered modes of dispossession are fundamental to enabling processes of accumulation in the post-war moment should prompt further investigation of the gendered outcomes of enabling certain forms of development in post-war. In conceptualizing gendered dispossession as occurring within and across the social reproductive sphere, the article contributes to analysis of the *whole* post-war economy (social reproduction and production). The need for this more expansive economic understanding is not confined to conflict-affected environments and the insight is not new for feminist political economists but re-emphasizing it might enable some additional reverberations beyond these circles.

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NOTES

[1] This consideration is especially relevant in analyses of contemporary conflict. To take one example: over the twenty years of 1992–2012, there were twenty-six sub-national conflicts in South and Southeast Asia (Parks, Colletta, and Oppenheim 2013). While much contemporary feminist conflict scholarship focuses on gendered harms wrought by intrusive exogenous (international) processes of "liberal peacebuilding," the aforementioned data demonstrate the need to better account for impacts of domestic actors.

[2] See later in this section for discussion of the state. There is a growing body of conflict scholarship on illiberal peacebuilding that highlights the roles played by often authoritarian domestic states (Piccolino 2015; Smith et al. 2020; Subedi 2022).

[3] Additionally, although these critiques cannot be discussed within this article's scope, ABD is said to conflate cause and effect and to not actually encompass the central aspects of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation with which it is meant to be synonymous (Fine 2006; Glassman 2006; Whitehead 2015). It is also accused of encompassing a politics at odds with the lived realities of people in the Global South (Hall 2012; Cross 2014).

[4] There are also nuances which the term, in itself, does not imply: "dispossession" implies a transfer whereby those who once possessed rights are dispossessed of them but the realities are less straightforward; for example, those who use land – and are then unable to, due to dispossession – may not have actually had legal tenure originally (Gardner and Gerharz 2016). There is a need to be analytically sensitive to these complexities when defining "what counts" as dispossession.

[5] The "regimes of dispossession" framework is meant to actively counter assumptions that dispossession is either uniformly developmental or predatory (Levien 2018: 18).

[6] As it did and does in other socioeconomic formations, such as the caste system in South Asia.

[7] These data again raise the question (unfortunately, beyond this article's remit to answer) of the porous bonds between dispossession and accumulation. Thanks to Reviewer 3 for this point.

[8] Thanks to Melissa Johnston for sharing emerging insights on patriarchy and gendered accumulation in conflict contexts.

[9] Postero (2010: 405), commenting on Li (2010) and discussing her own research in the 1990s with Guarani peoples in Bolivia. She notes that when neoliberalism penetrates, small-scale farmers with limited market power make rational calculations about land values and subsistence farming and sell most of their farmlands; this

phenomenon might be described as choice or compulsion but regardless, the outcome is dispossession. The outcome is what Levien labels semi-proletarianization, as discussed earlier.

[10] This more Foucauldian argument has some similarities with Levien's earlier stated critique, that the dynamics of dispossession in any one context cannot be deduced from the imperatives of global capital.

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