

Vernacularizing Trauma for Resilience in Post-Coup Myanmar

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Abstract

Trauma has become a default concept to describe individual and collective experiences with violence, and when it comes to dealing with mass atrocities, some kind of traumatization of effected populations is almost immediately assumed by the humanitarian establishment. Gender is a crucial dimension of the trauma discourse, as the latter is more frequently tied to women's experiences in conflict settings. Expectations for how women's trauma needs to be performed, e.g. in various processes of transitional justice, create a "narrative determinism" of how these experiences can be told leading to silences and distortions. To emphasize agency, feminist scholars tend to challenge this by shifting attention towards post-traumatic growth, resilience and the transformation from victimhood to survivorhood.

Empowerment however may not only arise from the overcoming of trauma, but also from its translation and instrumentalization for specific purposes (e.g. access to resources). Trauma is now also being articulated, still primarily by women, to capture a variety of experiences in different social contexts. This research intends to re-examine gendered binaries in the framing of trauma and explore the possibilities of the localization of trauma language as empowerment through practices of women political prisoners and activists working with them in the context of post-coup Myanmar. It also attempts to explore investigate the potentials of trauma vernacularization as empowerment to challenge passive victimhood narratives of women in conflict.