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The Maternal Frame & the Rise of the Counterpublic among Naga Women in India

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Ghosh, Payel, "The Maternal Frame & the Rise of the Counterpublic among Naga Women in India" (2018). *Violence Against Women conference*. 3.

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Nagaland, situated in the north-eastern corner of India, has witnessed a violent conflict situation for more than five decades now. It is a heavily militarised space with draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) still in place, which allows the army personnel to go scot-free even after committing violent war crimes. However, what makes this region stand out is the way few women here have used their tradition specific gendered role strategically to subvert prescribed gender norms; and exhibit agency, against not only the violence they face for the conflict situation, but also the systemic violence that bars them from entering the public-political sphere. In Nagaland the troika of State, Church and customary laws have created a gendered social space where women have been debarred from participating in the decision-making sphere. This is a society where modes of patriarchy are intertwined with militarization. In this paper I intend to study how women from the Naga tribal communities are attempting to use their tradition specific gender roles of motherhood to gain agency and resist the formation of a hostile gendered social space.

Keywords: Subaltern Counterpublic, militarization, violence, motherhood, conflict situation.