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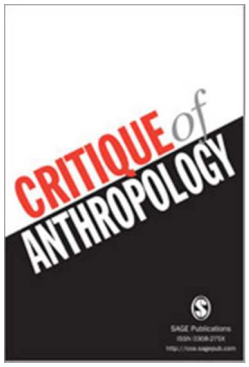

The Chronopolitics of Exile: Hope, Heterotemporality and NGO economics along the Thai-Burma Border

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Abstract:	In this article, we foreground chronopolitics—the politics of time—to examine the ways in which the heterotemporalities of Burmese exiles living in nine "temporary shelters" along the Thai-Burma (Myanmar) border mediate one of the most protracted displacement situations in the world. The imminent repatriation of these Burmese exiles, tens of thousands of whom have been waiting for decades to be resettled to an often elusive third country or to return to a peaceful Burma, has given way to a preeminent "crisis of hope". The perception that the camps are "out of time" has diverted critical funding streams away from border-related issues and into Burma itself, which has led to a widespread shift in focus for thousands of NGOs in the region. It is within this temporal and spatial context that we argue that the chronopolitics of protracted displacement among Burmese exiles has given way to a political economy of hope deeply entangled in the geoeconomics of Burma's "opening up" to systems of global capital. The forestalled realizations of exiles' hopes and potential futures are inextricably linked to not only geoeconomic change, but also to the shifting foci of NGOs and stakeholders in the region towards liberalization policies and projects in Burma and away from Burma's exile populations. In this way, along Thai-Burma border, the political economy of hope articulates with chronopolitics in ways that shed new light on the politics and temporalities of refugeedom.

The Chronopolitics of Exile: Hope, Heterotemporality and NGO Economics along the Thai-Burma Border

Introduction

> *I am sitting in a small cramped bedroom speaking with Dee[1], a refugee from the Shan State in Burma who was forced to flee in 2006 when war broke out in her village between Burmese soldiers and the Shan State Army. I ask whether she thinks she will ever go back to Burma. She becomes tearful before replying, "No. I will die in Thailand! It is difficult here too, but more difficult in Burma. So difficult, why is it so difficult? […] Life is like a black tunnel. We walk through it and we can't see in front of us. We don't know what is on the other side. Our life is like this—everything is difficult to understand* (excerpt from field notes).

More than 140,000 Burmese exiles currently live in the nine camps linking the Thai-Burma[2] (Myanmar) border (UNHCR, 2013, Rogers, 2012, Myint-U, 2011, Myint-U, 1997). Standing as one of the most protracted displacement situations in the world, the camps have been in operation since the late 1980s (Banki and Lang, 2008). Despite the longevity of the camps, they are officially referred to as "temporary shelters" (UNHCR, 2013). In 2005 UNHCR stopped registering Burmese[3] refugees in Thailand which has since led to a mobility stalemate for individuals and families who have lived in the camps for up to three generations (Horstmann, 2014, Arnold and Pickles, 2011).[4] Thus, despite their precarious situation, most Burmese exiles including economic migrants and political refugees lack refugee status (Arnold, 2013: 89).[5] In

[1] All names of research collaborators herein, are pseudonyms. We intentionally do not mention specific names, places or pieces of biographical information that could lead to the identification of specific individuals who have participated in this study out of respect for their privacy and concern for their personal safety.

[2] The country's official name was changed from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, yet not without controversy. While this name change has been accepted by most nations and international organizations, some countries continue to refer to the country as Burma. We retain the name Burma in this article because it is the name most commonly used by research collaborators and it is arguably more familiar to most readers. (cf. SAHABU, V., WEARING, S. & GRABOWSKI, S. 2011. Exploring'Religiosity'As an Influence in the Motivations of Volunteer Tourists.

[3] Importantly, exiles from Burma include a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Burmese government officially recognizes 135 ethnic "races," though this figure is contested by ethnic minority groups, like the Shan (Tai), who argue that the actual number is closer to 70 (Gamanii 2012). They point out that the military regime has attempted to unnecessarily divide groups or have even counted some groups twice, and this is "evidence of its lack of credibility and incompetence in counting the ethnic groups of the country it is governing" (Gamanii 2012). For the purposes of this article, we describe all exiles and residents in Thailand who were born in Burma as "Burmese" or "Burmese exiles" to indicate the research collaborators' country of origin rather than their ethnic or religious identity and the category most widely used in Thailand. The ethnonym Burman refers to the people belonging to the ethnic majority group of Burmans and not any other ethnic minority group.

[4] In addition to the politics of the "refugee" category and its associated function of inclusion and exclusion, the refugee category in Thailand is further politicized because of the closing of refugee registration 2005. Yet, Burmese in Thailand often refer to almost all Burmese in the country as "refugees" despite their official status.

[5] In Thailand, an official refugee is a person who is formally registered through UNHCR. While the term "refugee" is widely used among Burmese exiles to refer to all exiled peoples, Banki and Lane point out how displaced people

addition to lacking official protections as refugees, exiles' futures are compromised by the region's NGOs increasingly refocusing their efforts away from the border areas to issues inside Burma. In late 2014 the Thai junta announced plans to repatriate all camp residents to Burma by the end of 2015 (Naing, 2014a, Naing, 2014b). Meanwhile, media and academic reports from the border area indicate Burmese exiles' fear of oppression upon their return to villages, many of which are reported to be surrounded by unexploded ordnances (UOs) and land mines (Nallu, 2012). As a result, tens of thousands of exiles face a potential return to razed agricultural fields, torched homes and ongoing fighting in the area of proposed resettlement. Thus, UNHCR's commitment to non-refoulment—the principle of a refugee's right to reject forced return to a homeland in the event that real danger to life and livelihood persist there—is challenged by current expectations for repatriation by international governments, agencies and donors.

Indicative of the changing relationship between Burma and the West are the recent visits to the country by numerous high-profile political leaders, including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and former UK Foreign Secretary William Hague (Kohler, 2012). These visits took place in the context of recent political reforms in Burma, which include the election of Aung San Suu Kyi to Parliament, the lifting of economic sanctions by many Western countries, and the release of thousands of political prisoners. Coupled with widespread geoeconomic hope[6] for the country, these reforms also compromise Burmese exiles' aspirations for a safe and secure future because of large-scale foreign investment that benefits only a small minority of the population. It has also been noted that "[b]usinesses are interested in Burma because the country is rich in natural resources and has a vast pool of young people eager to work and to consume" (Tripathi, 2012). Yet, these investments occur within the contexts of persistent land dispossession, ethnic cleaning in several border regions and human rights abuses, realities that are most severe in the "ethnic areas" outside the urban capital centers of Yangon and Mandalay. And yet Burmese victims of the world's longest civil war continue to cross the border into Thailand, an act that contributes to a blurred distinction between political and economic migration where migration in general is

along the Thai-Burma border include "refugees and internally displaced persons, inside-camp and outside camp populations, and recognized and undocumented migrants" (p. 59) (cf. SAHABU, V., WEARING, S. & GRABOWSKI, S. 2011. Exploring 'Religiosity' As an Influence in the Motivations of Volunteer Tourists.)

[6] We use the term 'geoeconomic hope' here to refer to the positive aspirations for the future that are based on changes made in the world to secure peace and freedom, often through free-market reforms. This is often expressed as a discourse about the "inevitably inclusive and expansive aspects of capitalist globalization" which are situated in "a world where global free-market integration is promoted as the solution to all distress and disgruntlement" (Sparke, 2007: 344).

perceived as "a form of resistance to or avoidance of the Burmese state" (Arnold, 2013: 92). Thus, an estimated two to three million Burmese political refugees and economic migrants living and working in Thailand (Naing, 2014a, Arnold, 2013, Lamb, 2014).[7] Ongoing tensions between what Arnold refers to as "'democratization from above' and migrancy 'from below'" in areas along the border such as Mae Sot in Tak province which have become a center of exiled democracy activities as well as a globally linked political center (Arnold, 2013: 90). In addition to becoming significant sites of protest, the Thai-Burma border areas have also become important geographies which "are mobilized as economic barriers and filters to the perceived contamination of migrant workers and the growing social instabilities, both real and misconceived, they create" (2011: 1619).

In this article we examine this crisis of protracted displacement through the lens of hope as a temporal analytic, using what Sparke (2012: 338) refers to as a "grounded approach" to studying hope. Hope, as Mattingly (2010: 6) has put it, "most centrally involves the *practice* of creating, or trying to create, lives worth living in the midst of suffering, even with no happy ending in sight." As a process and a practice, hope remains "an existential problem [that] takes cultural and structural root as it is shaped by poverty, racism, and bodily suffering" (ibid: 6). Marxist philosopher Ernest Bloch the concept of "not yet" or the "anticipatory drive of the 'not yet conscious,' that is, on the capacity of 'what has not yet become' to move a present moment forward (Bloch 1986: 115-116 cited Miyazaki 2005: 248). As a critical affective competency of exiled experience, hope is often deployed instrumentally in order to better social, economic and political futures. At the same time, hope is also a phenomenological temporality that both shapes perspectives on the future as well as frames and mediates (and, in fact, may often *produce*) the struggles between possibility, probability and eventuality (Appadurai, 2013, Richard and Rudnyckyj, 2009, Miyazaki, 2006). In northern Thailand, senses of hope and futurity among Burmese exiles are entangled in the political economic future of Burma as well as in the everyday affective encounters with NGO practitioners (Watanabe, 2014, Watanabe, 2013). This article also examines how affective experiences of hope are practiced, represented and (re)produced by both Burmese exiles and NGO practitioners. Through this lens of hope as a practice, we engage with emerging theories in the anthropology of the future and politics of hope (Appadurai, 2013) as they are inflected through heavily politicized temporalities.

[7] This number accounts for approximately eight per cent of Burma's workforce.

Rachel Pain cautions us against "classifying emotions as either locally or globally produced," suggesting instead that we consider how emotions are experienced by people both in ways that are at once global *and* local (Pain, 2009: 476). Discourses around the scalar and binary relationship between the local and the global tend to presume an inevitable effect of the global on the local and the expansion of neoliberal global capitalism. By disrupting these discourses through linking the everyday affective experiences of Burmese exiles with the changing political economy of NGOs and transnational geopolitical discourses about Burma, we may begin to construct a more nuanced picture of the complex relationship between this artificial binary (Pain, 2009: 476). In examining the ways in which affect structures the political rather than how politics structure affects, we are concerned with the role that affect plays in facilitating economic transformations. Specifically, we want to explore here how affect, as an intersubjective and reflexive experience, is co-constructed through relationships with NGO practitioners as well as through political discourse and action with the aim of cultivating hope (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009: 61, 57). Our reading of the politics of exilic time is grounded in a hermeneutics that sees affect as "critical to producing the subjects of contemporary political economic transformations" (ibid: 61). In order to link these political, economic and affective transformations, then, we build on the emerging body of work in critical geopolitics and illustrate how they such shifts play a key role in the development of the geoeconomics of hope.

This article proceeds as follows. We begin by theorizing the relationship between exilic time, chronopolitics and hope for the future. Burma, widely represented as a "timeless" state due to its limited incorporation into the global capitalist economy, is now "opening up" to foreign investment and trade. We therefore consider how NGOs working along the Thai-Burma border are constrained by the rapid refocus of international aid to Burma and away from the border. This donor transfer has contributed to the widespread migration of NGOs out of the border area and into Burma. This contributes to what we call "NGO economics", or the relationship between NGOs, broader geoeconomic discourse and temporal enclosures. Then, we discuss how conceptualisations of both temporality and hope—and their linkages—can augment geoeconomic understandings of crises of exile in the Thai-Burma border area. Finally, we consider how the political economy of hope articulates with the chronopolitics of exile among the Burmese, offering insights into how the temporally mediated geoeconomics of hope dictate not just present understandings of what the future holds, but also how the future itself might play

out. In this way, we illustrate how, along the Thai-Burma border, the political economy of hope articulates with chronopolitics in ways that shed new light on the politics of refugeedom.

Methods used for the research in this article include ethnographic fieldwork with Burmese exiles and expatriates residing in northern Thailand and in the United States, interviews with NGO practitioners, as well as discourse analyses of online media, including blogs, magazines and newspapers. Research, which took place between 2009 and 2015, comprised 90 semi-structured interviews, oral history narratives and casual conversations (including in-person, phone and Skype communications). Data was analyzed using a critical phenomenological framework (Willen, 2007, Cresswell, 2013). Critical phenomenology links the phenomenal with the political (Good, 1994) in attending to "the many, and often highly charged political, social, and discursive forces that contribute to life in particular settings" (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011: 93). Critical phenomenology is an appropriate interpretive framework for examining linkages between popular geopolitical discourses about Burma as a "timeless" state and its opening up to the global stage, and the temporal implications of this process, both for Burmese exiles and for NGOs. While in the field, the authors not only carried out participant observation with research collaborators, but also volunteered with NGOs and as members of activist organizations, and worked as teachers to exiles. Our methodological framework of critical phenomenology, paired with critical ethnography (Madison, 2011) "recognizes the macro structural dimensions of our social existence (the way discursive regimes are embodied and played out in everyday social practice)" while also "foreground[ing] the personal, intimate, singular, and eventful qualities of social life" (Mattingly, 2010: 7). Such a phenomenological ethnography, furthermore, can be an effective means of sensitizing officials, development agencies and the wider public (to say nothing of anthropologists themselves) to the complex, anxiety-filled and often seemingly "hopeless" everyday and existential realities of the condition of exile (Willen, 2007).

Exilic Time and Chronopolitics

Though temporality has long been a fundamental phenomenological consideration for anthropologists working in small-scale societies (see Mauss, 2004[1905], Evans-Pritchard, 1969), it has only recently experienced renewed interest among scholars of migration and exile (Bastian, 2011). While research on migration has long focused on the spatial elements of migration trajectories instead of their temporal connections (Griffiths et al., 2012), the temporal

enclosures of a range of migration-related phenomena, not least of all states of transience and limbo, can reveal much about both the processes of being, becoming and belonging among actors implicated in processes of migration as well as the discursive articulation of temporal incongruities (c.f. Miyazaki, 2003). As Miyazaki explains, temporal incongruities create tension between knowledge and its objects. In the case of refugeedom, being physically bounded creates a shared sense of temporal suspension out of capitalistic time through restricted access to what James Ferguson refers to as the "grid of modernity". Ferguson writes about how, while linked up with the grid of modernity, people of the Zambian copperbelt were hopeful to participate in modernity through their links with global capital. Yet, disconnected from the grid through neoliberal reform and environmental degradation, these hopes quickly led to widespread feelings of abjection and temporal stagnation (Ferguson, 1999, Ferguson, 2002).

Hutchings (2013) terms the multiple grand temporalities of progress, decline and cycle "heterotemporality", that is to say a temporal plurality within the contemporary geopolitical imagination and discourse. Heterotemporality refutes the idea that there is a single meta-narrative of time determining contemporary temporal experience, and instead espouses a "mutual contamination of 'nows' that participate in a variety of temporal trajectories" (Peck, 2013: 166). While movement of peoples has been common to human societies for millennia (Cohen, 1995), the supposition that stasis is the norm, and movement an aberration, dates at least as far back as the colonial era, when a sedentary bias (Malkki, 1995a, Bakewell, 2008) was co-opted by state institutions to argue that movement among poor and disadvantaged groups threatened the dominant public order. Such binaries constructred between the mobile and the immobile, and the artificiality of the borders often drawn between them, date back even earlier, to (at least) pre-Renaissance Europe (Anderson, 2013). Even today, prevailing discourse about refugees often describes time in exile as "standing still," "suspended" or "uchronic", which refers to a time of historical stagnation, or to the condition of "nothing happening" (Malkki, 1995b, Coutin, 1999). Such spatial associations are reproduced not just by images and imaginations of liminal actors, but by the very structures of the state bureaucracies in which they are embedded.

One problematic in discourse about refugeedom centers on the universalizing grammars of citizenship and statism in relation to those who exist on the threshold of belonging to a nation. Victor Turner's work on time and ritual went beyond Van Gennep's conceptualisations of *rites*

de passage by articulating in-between spaces that themselves became social structures in which individual components create their own space and time distinct from the spatial and temporal experiences of everyday life. These liminal moments expose the legal state of limbo and insecurity that arises when a person is stateless or living outside their legal country of origin (Turner 1969). No longer merely a point on a path of transition, then, exilic liminality is a state of being which offers "no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of ambiguity" (Turner, 1974: 233). The liminal character of the lives of migrants, refugees and persons in exile, then, arises from both their marginality *and* the temporariness of their experiences. Such "involuntary immobility" is particularly germane to the experiences of persons who wish to move out of their stasis but are unable to do so (Carling, 2002, Vigh, 2009). The condition of statelessness and displacement similarly conjures a repertoire of images of the refugee in a liminal, uchronic state. This view of time as standing still is embedded in discourses of refugeedom that centers on the notion of "bare life" (Sylvester, 2006), where political time ceases to pass after having entered the liminal space of the camp.

But in-between times are more complicated than simple notions of the liminal will allow. In her work on Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Lisa Malkki shows how actors both inside and outside a Hutu camp construct multiple and differing notions of Hutu time. Inside the camp, Hutus fixate on images of the Hutu nation, traditions and "mythico-history" (Malkki, 1995b: 14). Those living outside the camps challenge and deconstruct such essentializing categories, choosing instead to adopt the language and customs of their new host culture (ibid). Inside, time is suspended such that the idea of a timeless nation for Hutus becomes reified; outside, 'unofficial' refugees adapt to the temporal rhythms of their host nation, assimilating new cultural and economic systems. Malkki suggests that is it the universal language of human suffering used by the NGOs who run the camps that creates the ubiquitous image of the uchronic, depoliticized camp-dwelling refugee (Malkki, 1996, Malkki, 1995a). Such homogenizing, humanitarian language looks beyond the immediate sociopolitical circumstances of migration, while "erasing the specific historical, local politics of particular refugees, and retreating instead to the depoliticizing, dehistoricizing register of a more abstract and universal suffering" (Malkki, 1995b: 13).The uchronia induced by the creation of "temporary shelter areas" in the Thai-Burma border-zone depoliticizes and pacifies large groups of persecuted peoples. Their lives have become paused indefinitely, and indeed without access to secondary education, work or the 'normal' rhythms of a person's life course

(or, in fact, everyday life), it is easy to see both the camp, and exile itself, as geographies of grand temporal disruption.

Opening up space for a heterogeneous chronopolitics, as Malkki's example elucidates, allows for new understandings of time as "repetitions of difference," or that which is repeated beyond hegemonic temporal structures (Deleuze, 1994). The charge of a critical geopolitics that views time and space as inseparable units of analysis encourages us to perceive the times of exile, such as the time spent in "temporary shelter areas," as existing on an equal plane with so-called "modern" time. Understanding exilic time as being equivalent in importance to national time (or other temporalities for that matter), encourages us to view exilic time not as a state of exception, but as a necessary counterpart to nationalistic and capitalist times.

Border temporalities and NGO economics

Long one of the most secluded countries in the world, Burma continues to be essentialized in the Western imagination via a pervasive Orientalism. Following scholars such as Edward Said and Johannes Fabian, the temporal tropes of Burma as the timeless other ascribes mysterious, unspoiled and atemporal characteristics to the land and its people (Fabian 2014; Rogers, 2012; Said 1979). After 60 years of isolationist policies and foreign sanctions, the country is now rapidly liberalizing and internationalizing its economy and, arguably, beginning the work of adhering to a Western human rights regime. Still, Western governments and NGO and human rights organizations remain cautiously optimistic of Burma's eventual democratization and "progress," as numerous recent articles attest (U.S. Campaign for Burma, 2013). Among other critical shifts in foreign policy, the termination of the U.S. resettlement program, rapid expansion of the Burmese tourism industry as well as international investment from countries such as China, Germany and the U.S. together have contributed to a heightened geopolitics of fear among Burmese exiles. The U.S. Campaign for Burma explains that, given its ranking of 181 (out of 183) countries in the Corruption Perception Index, "it's hard to believe that the government will do legitimate business with foreigners" (U.S. Campaign for Burma, 2013). Yet, the recent U.S. move into Burma represents what Naomi Klein has described as ''privatization in disguise'' (cited in Sparke, 2007: 345). In this way, the democratization of Burma speaks to a new chapter in the saga of displacement of Burmese exiles in Thailand.

The announcement in January of 2014 that the U.S. would end its group resettlement program for Burmese refugees in camps along the Thai-Burma border was made in the context of the rapid opening up of Burma's economy. The U.S., which operates one of the largest resettlement programs in the world, has been the most substantial recipient of documented Burmese refugees from camps along the Thai-Burma border, accepting more than 73,000 Burmese for resettlement in American towns and cities (UNHCR 2014). By comparison, all other receiving countries accepted a combined total of 19,000 refugees (UNHCR 2014) The U.S. has such a strong ideological presence along the border that when asked if he knew which organizations supported exiles, Htway, a Burmese research collaborator and long time resident of northern Thailand explained: "I don't know. I only know USA supporting us. There could be various organizations … I think or I am hoping that they are helping us to get out of refugee life." As a result of the closing of the American program, aid-workers and NGOs are preparing for an imminent repatriation of refugees—in this case, not a return, but rather a delivery into a new and even more uncertain future.

NGO practitioners as well as Burmese residents in Thailand were invariably devastated about the closing of the U.S. group resettlement program. Several days after the announcement several Burmese collaborators explained how they had lost their hope for the future. Dara, a middle aged man and father of three explained, "How can I feel, yeah, how can I feel? I'm hopeless." This sentiment was shared by Chit, who explained, "I really wish to settle in a place where both I and my husband can have a peaceful, stable and secure life where we can practice what we believe in terms of religion. We want to go to a place where we can have social security… we never have a security for life at all. We lived our whole life amid the gunfire and motor explosion. We are traumatized by it." After decades of dependency not just on Western aid, the very hope produced by the protracted nature of the camps and the lure of the resettlement program receded. Indeed, UNHCR spokeswoman Vivian Tan told *DVB* that, "The majority of the respondents said they preferred either resettlement to a third country or to stay in Thailand." However, Tan also reported that over half of those who had no desire to return to Burma had never actually been registered as refugees and would thus not even be eligible to apply for resettlement regardless (Solomon, 2014).

In this context, Bridgette, an American NGO practitioner noted that, since the announcement that resettlement programs were closing and refugees would soon be repatriated, a

generalized sense of fear and uncertainty has taken over the exile community, especially in the border area. The termination of the resettlement program is expected to break apart families, perhaps permanently, as only individuals with verified identities will be allowed to resettle in host nations. This situation was reiterated many times over during our interviews. One Burmese family, for example, described how they had been separated from their three children who still live in a camp along the border. They explained that they now live with their youngest son in Melbourne, Australia and were on a return visit to the camp where their three older children have lived with extended family members for more than four years. Their older children's lack of official birth documents meant that they were not eligible for refugee status and thus could not move with their parents and younger sibling.

The deputy secretary of Mae La camp, the largest such camp in Thailand, with more than 40,000 residents, explained in an interview with *The Irrawaddy*, that the imminent forced repatriation would be a violation of Burmese exiles' human rights. An outspoken critic of the repatriation process, she explained how repatriation can be forced, but not without significant human rights abuses. Citing ongoing conflicts throughout several regions in Burma, she explained that the process would put tens of thousands of lives in danger. Burmese exile's acceptance of insecurity and precariousness in the present is based in large part on the belief that one day they would be resettled. Talk among the exiled community in Thailand of reduced rations in the camps have contributed to intensified fear among its residents. Arun, a part-time camp resident explained how each month he receives only 18kg of rice, a common staple in the camps, which marks a significant reduction from previous rations. Arun was not optimistic regarding the prospect of NGOs continuing to leave the border area. "We are not able to survive on our own at this moment," he explained. "We are not in good shape to make a living on our own yet. I don't think we can live without them." Arun further highlighted how he would like others to know that the reduction in food rations, as well as the presence of NGOs in the border area, has already contributed to increased social and economic problems for many exiles. Without enough food, he explained, people have turned to selling drugs and engaging in prostitution and gambling within the camps themselves.

Critically, imminent repatriation has resulted in a mass exodus of funding opportunities from along the border as aid agencies and funders shift their focus to working inside Burma itself. It has been widely suggested by members of the NGO community that it is "only a matter

of time" before the border exile population is forced back to Burma. For example, when asked about the funding situation along the border, Erica, an Australian NGO practitioner explained the situation like this: "I think anyone and everyone is trying to get in; that is where the money is, ourselves included. Like I've said we had to look at potentially moving inside. But the big ones definitely, it's hard for CBOs [community based organizations]… there are many difficulties faced by CBOs on the border as the money is going inside. And also, once the money goes inside, again the military has great power to control where that money is designated. Once you are inside, once your foot is in that door, in many ways, you are beholden to their agenda." Similarly, when asked if recent events have affected funding, Meagan, an American NGO practitioner explained how her NGO was attempting to send the message that it was not yet safe for Burmese exiles to return. This was especially true for Burmese exiles thought to be involved in political movements inside Burma. Fiona, a German NGO practitioner, described how funding from an Australian donor was threatened by the perception that Burma was "okay now." She explained: "we are trying to fight the perception particularly in the West that everything is okay in Burma, there is change now, and it is kind of opening up. So we are trying to get the message out what the impacts of change on our organization has been that, even though the country is opening up extensively, what it has done is made it easier for people to travel in…"

James Igoe (this issue) draws on Spinozan philosophy in distinguishing between *potentia,* the inherent power to act and create, and *potestas,* the ability to separate something from its capacity to act in its own interest. He argues that the ongoing struggle between *potentia* and *potestas* is a key aspect in the struggle for NGOs to realize their social and economic development goals. Igoe writes that the temporalities of funding cycles can demand a series of conditions on NGOs, who must then "negotiate temporal inconsistencies of globally circulating resources and local self-determination" (this issue). This tension is clearly illustrated along the Thai-Burma border where thousands of NGOs work to advance the social, political and economic rights of ethnic minority groups from Burma, resulting in a highly competitive funding environment (Hyndman, 2002, Vogler, 2007). Nadia, the director of a CBO in Northern Thailand, insists that she refuses to accept funding from sources other than individual donors, since they invariably come with "strings attached." As she explains, "If I were reliant upon, say the Norwegian government for funding, they could easily put things in extreme upheaval if they suddenly decide to stop funding for rice or something similar." But many NGOs are not

community-based and to rely on large donations from foreign nations, companies and individual donors in order to remain in operation. In response to widespread reports of the increasingly supposed democratic and free-market face of Burma, many NGOs along the border struggle for economic viability as international funds progressively move into the country. As a result, big international NGOs (BINGOs), that align themselves with international and governmental donors in order to attract critical financial support, are moving their operations inside Burma, leaving smaller, grassroots NGOs along the Thai-Burma border to deal with the (no longer profitable or 'sexy') current repatriation crisis. So, as BINGOs "follow the money" and smaller NGOs tend to lack funding as well comparable influence and capacity, many exiles who have bet their hopes on the promissory note of resettlement find they are left to fend for themselves.

The Political Economy of Hope on the Border

The political economy of hope comprises what Bloch referred to as 'the warm stream' of human history—a series of affective notions including liberation, fulfilment and utopia—that became enveloped under the 'cold stream' of consumer-capitalist "economic reductionism form" (Thompson, 2013: 1). Bloch's analysis of the attainment of hope in a material(ist) world addresses the ever-present disjuncture between the objective possibility of hope ("that which can appear in history as determined by historical-materialist conditions") on one hand and the always-present hope/aspirations of human becoming (that which may become possible) on the other (Thompson, 2013: 4). This focus on hope has arisen in part as a result of the shift to post-war neoliberal capitalist ways of living, in which "happiness and optimism [are] now counted in cold hard cash and commodities," and which compels us to ask whether hope still exists in "anything other than an atomized, desocialized, and privatized form" (Thompson, 2013: 1,5).

Promises broken by geopolitical or geoeconomic flights of fancy have critical ramifications for those who have become dependent on such promises as beacons for the future. Perceptions of the temporal incongruity of markets being "behind" meditate widespread projections of Burma's markets "catching up" to other capitalist markets in the region (Rudnyckyj, 2009). Along the Thai-Burma border, the politics of refugeedom are embedded in a broader political economy of hope (Miyazaki, 2013, Miyazaki, 2010). The political economy of hope highlights the relationship between one's expectations and understanding of the capacity for political and economic structures to govern one's perception of what is possible while placing

markedly less emphasis on what is probable. Appadurai (2013: 126) describes the strategies employed by residents of Mumbai's Dharavi slums in their struggle against states of politically-grounded emergency and exception as a "politics of waiting". He explains that in such contexts, hope can be seen as "the force that converts the passive condition of 'waiting for' to the active condition of 'waiting to'. This process will assure that "the end of the rainbow is not a broken promise" (Appadurai, 2013: 127).

Within politically-governed resettlement programs, the privileging of Burmese exiles from particular ethnic groups or with family already living overseas has institutionalized discriminatory practices that limit hopes of resettlement for certain members of the population. The Tai (also called Shan) peoples, who despite being both the largest minority group in Burma and largest group of Burmese migrant workers to Thailand, have never been afforded official refugee status either by the UNHCR or the Thai government. Many Tai research collaborators we spoke to maintain that Western NGOs and IOs are only interested in working with minority groups who are willing to convert to Christianity. These groups, they suggest, include the Karen peoples, who, unlike the Buddhist Tai, have mostly converted to Christianity and subsequently benefitted from missionary organizations lobbying on their behalves. Lung Pho, an unrecognized Tai refugee who had to flee violence and internal displacement in the Shan State of Burma says, "Yes we want to go back. My mother father and siblings live there [Burma]. If we go and can live and have enough to eat we will go. All Tai people want to go back. But as long as the Burmese military does bad things we will not go back." In this way, the imminent resettlement of certain ethnicities of Burmese exiles is contrasted with the experience of others who lack a similar optimism about their hope for a future in Burma, or what is likely far less attainable, another country other than Thailand. Additionally, access to social networks of resettled people through familial ties is another point of optimism for some.

Describing what they hoped for, research collaborators almost invariably stated that they hoped for a future in a Third Country but that keeping this hope alive was, for many, an ongoing challenge, especially following the announcement of the closing of the resettlement program. Reporting on his conversations with Burmese in the border area, Myo, a Burmese NGO practitioner and journalist as well as a former political prisoner and camp resident explained: "They told me that they are so hopeless. 'We have no tomorrow. What the fuck life?' Something like that…" Explaining this situation, Matilde, a German NGO coordinator commented, "I think

they feel they've been neglected in the past… and that things will get worse in the future. Unfortunately, some of them also feel it's their 'karma' and nothing can be done about this. There's a lot of disenchantment and hopelessness, which will be very difficult to overcome."

The "temporality of no hope" (Miyazaki 2005) along the Thai-Burma border is widespread. This lack of hope is in part mediated by the affective relations between NGO practitioners and Burmese whose relations are increasingly unpredictable. Hope seems a particular improbability along the Thai-Burma border in the midst of volatile changes to the material conditions of exile's lives, whereby refugees in the camps depend on aid from NGOs with shifting agendas for necessities such as rice and water, while those living outside the camps are exploited in Thailand's burgeoning manufacturing economy and service and sex industries. Where fear, insecurity and destitution are tantamount, hope is the affect of the dispossessed. Auyero and Swinston, writing about the corporate- and government-created precariousness in an Argentine shantytown, calls the confusion produced by ever-changing policies surrounding people's future and environment, "the social production of toxic uncertainty", whereby hope and the routines of everyday survival become essential strategies for "overcoming the uncertainty inherent in living in a place that has always been about to be vacated…" (2009: 140).

Both NGO and government practitioners are intimately entangled in the management of hope among their benefactors. The very capacity of people to aspire is distributed in unequal forms (Miyazaki, 2010) and as a result, there must be a productive and "disciplined dialogue between the pressures of catastrophe and the disciplines of patience" in order for hope to exist (Appadurai, 2013: 127). Moreover, hope in late capitalism is often tied to the capacity for collective envisioning of the future. For example, Ghassan Hage refers to capitalist society as a shrinking society which is "characterised by deep inequality in their distribution of hope, and when such inequality reaches an extreme, certain groups are not offered any hope at all" (Hage, 2003: 17, cited in Miyazaki 2009: 238). Similarly, Watanabe illustrates how "collective intimacy" among Japanese and Burmese aid workers contributed to the unmaking of individual subjects through the creation of a collective hope for community and national development (Watanabe, 2013: 650) Yet, long-term displacement contributes to fragmented forms of collective intimacy whereby uncertain and unstable relations become the norm. When asked how much time he believed it would take for him to realize his hopes of living a peaceful existence without the threat of war and violence, Aung explained, "I got here [northern Thailand] in 2006.

It has been over 10 years now. I don't know how long it's going to take. It all depends on those organizations which are dealing with our situation". Htut, like many Burmese exiles, explained that he didn't want to return to Burma: "I don't want to go back to Burma because I am a former political prisoner and I also I have no house, no land, no money, and, especially because I have a problem with my eyes… Finally, I would like to state that this U.S. policy will force us back to Burma." Similarly, Htay, who has been waiting to be resettled in America since 1994, explained, "It's taking too long already. I am very unhappy. I feel like there is nothing to hope for apart from getting old."

Hope that is politically organized, Appadurai argues, "mediates between emergency and patience and produces in bare citizens the internal resources to see themselves as active participants in the very process of waiting" (Appadurai, 2013: 127). If the precarious and insecure trajectory from bare citizenship to active, political citizenship "produces a toxic and permanent state of uncertainty about the journey," this toxicity can be mollified via a demonstrated trust from above (ibid: 128). Hope is produced by the suspension of time for refugees living a life in waiting—waiting to be resettled abroad, waiting to receive national (e.g. Thai) identity cards, for a wage increase, for an opportunity to go to school, to receive medical care or to return to a peaceful Burma. As in the Argentine shantytown described by Auyero and Swiston, "waiting is one of the ways in which residents experience submission" (2009: 6). One key weapon to be employed in the politics of hope is the setting of precedents, which can present the hopeful possibilities of cooperation, collaboration (and indeed camaraderie) between the state and its disenfranchised citizens or non-citizens. The ability to aspire and to hope "inevitably thrives on communicative practices that extend one's own cultural horizons," allowing people to "gain plausible access to the stories and experiences of others" (Appadurai, 2013: 213). This imagination of possible futures and the collective expression of aspirations by disenfranchised peoples from a plane created by vastly unequal power relationships necessitates improving people's "collective capacity to aspire" (ibid). Thus, those who hold the power in managing hopes and those who trade in the propagation of such hopes, hold responsibility for the aspirations into which people have bought. NGO practitioners, often from the Global North, are critical geopolitical actors in managing dreamt futurities among Burmese exiles in northern Thailand. In a related vein, Watanabe illustrates how Japanese development actors working for one of Japan's oldest NGOs in Burma are in part motivated by what he calls a "redemptive

dream" whereby hope for post-war national renewal through development aid is enacted. This process of starting "over the process of modernity" in a developing country is experienced among Japanese aid workers as an opportunity to overcome what is perceived as a widespread loss of culture and alienation through a politics of temporality in which the Burmese Other is seen as a vehicle for the future of Japan (Watanabe, 2013: 78). As Fabian has observed in anthropology as well as popular culture, Others are often represented as temporally distant and there continues to be a widespread belief that development is linked and on a predetermined linear path (Fabian, 2002). Marilyn Ivy similarly suggests how notions of nation, culture, phantasm and modernity are re-enacted through the cultural industries where the vanishing seems to "emerge as an event across a relay of temporal deferral" (Ivy, 1995: 22).This sense of a lost national authenticity then, is recaptured through discourses of the vanishing in the cultural industries where national-cultural imaginary and marginalized voices enact sometimes disparate national community.

Chronopolitics and Futurity

Chronopolitics calls into relief the relationship between temporality and geopolitical discourse. The preeminence placed on space and place over time in popular discourse is due in large part to the preeminence of territory and its conquering within the Euro-colonial imagination. But as Griffiths (2013: 14) has pointed out, time is "neither independent of nor external to space" (see also Hägerstrand, 1975). Moreover, it is important not to overlook the fact that time is necessarily experienced in different ways by different peoples living in different contexts (Frederiksen 2008). The various temporalities of given spaces are almost always "doubted, contested, and mediated" among different actors (Abram, 2014: 129) since, as Herzfeld points out, "regardless of how people experience time, it does seem clear that people organize the passage of time in significantly divergent conceptual modalities; and that these modalities are both culturally and idiosyncratically determined (Herzfeld, 2009: 109)".

Indeed, notions of space and time are strongly bound up in individual and communal identities, as much recent work by scholars of mobilities have reiterated (Biao et al., 2013, Nyiri, 2010, Salazar, 2011). James Ferguson writes about how, while linked up with the "grid of modernity," people of the Zambian copperbelt were hopeful to participate in modernity. Yet, once disconnected from the grid through neoliberal reform and environmental degradation, these

hopes quickly led to widespread feelings of abjection and temporal stagnation (Ferguson, 1999, Ferguson, 2002). Thus, rather than compartmentalize space and time, we see these as interdependent concepts contextualized in part by affective geopolitical discourse. In this way, heterogeneous temporal narratives (Klinke, 2013: 9), such as those shaped by voices expressing the affects of hope and longing along the Thai-Burma border, pluralize conceptions of time that have been straight-jacketed by the temporalities of both the nation-state and capital itself (Harvey, 2000). By attending to the movements, voices and performative politics of peoples whose experiences of time differs from those dictated by late capitalism—namely, as profit and as space—it is possible to focus on exilic temporal experiences as processes of becoming and unfolding, rather than periods of stagnancy, stasis and being "caught in time".

Our Burmese research collaborators often cited disillusionment, fear and a lack of trust in the possibility of an alternate future. The dearth of options for the future is frequently described as intense anxiety over their uncertain predicament. Myat, for example exclaimed: "For us, we have no ability to take any steps toward our future at this point. I would like to request to all organizations to help us get out of our situation and to help us build a better future." Myat's request for NGOs to stay in Thailand to continue to assist Burmese exiles is repeated by many throughout the region. Myo, a Burmese NGO practitioner and reporter explained how Burmese exiles in the camps have, "lost their morale. They lost their future…I feel so sorry, so sad for them. That's why I worry about them." This is echoed by Lung Pho, an exile from the Shan State in Burma who lives as a migrant worker outside the camp, "We can't think about the future. Here in Thailand we live peacefully, but don't have rights or a voice. We all want a country, but can't speak of the future."The lost capacity to imagine the future is a shared ambivalence about the possibility of moving forward both literally and metaphorically.

The geoeconomic discourse surrounding the opening up of Burma to global capital has been reinterpreted by aid donors as reduced need for exiled Burmese. Instead, there is a widespread shift towards Burmese migrants "who are now a critical component to the Thai economy, working light manufacturing, agriculture, fisheries and seafood processing, domestic work and construction" (Arnold, 2013: 91). A Burmese activist and NGO practitioner explained how "The local people are very poor… no job. Most of the people want to come to Thailand, most of the people, want to come to Thailand and Malaysia and other places. So they have no

choice. They want money." Similarly, Khin, an aspiring doctor who has lived in northern Thailand for four years, explained that his hope was to go to medical school and return to his village in Burma. He explained, "I don't have lots of hopes. My first hope is to be a medic and to live with my parents and siblings. If I am a satisfied medic, I can help my community back in my village". Khin prays every day for God to help him realize this future. In a similarly optimistic tone, Aye explained how, despite the renunciation of the group resettlement program, she looks forward to joining her family in the U.S.: "I will have lots of things to do once I get there. I just want a house and a happy life with family: that is what I look for".

In myriad ways, the future is perceived by Burmese exiles to be a space of security where one has arrived, often in a third country and/or with safe house to in with their family (Naing, 2014a). Additionally, the future may also seen as a space of role reversal where dependence on aid agencies and NGOs will be inverted and one may become the giver instead of the benefactor of aid. Hlaing exemplified this when he said: "I don't want to live my whole life with their support. I will definitely try to get out of here and even be a donor one day." Cho called for help from all NGOs and foreign donors: "I just want to humbly request international organization to help us to build a better future. We don't want to expect help from others forever. But we don't have much choice."

Hope is often framed as "remote, disembodied and curiously unemotional" and frequently has solid grounding to "connect[s] political processes and everyday emotional topographies in a less hierarchical, more enabling relationship" (Pain, 2009: 466). Pain has further suggested that we look at emotions "not just as blank canvasses, waiting to be affected by wider events and relations, but as situated, historicized and relational—already formed and always changing—and affecting politics, as much as they are affected by politics, at a range of scales" (Pain, 2009: 478). Doing so may allow us to link quotidian phenomena and subjectivities, such as the everyday hope among Burmese exiles, to larger networks of privilege and power, embedding hope within these networks as an affective response that is "continuously challenged, resisted and reshaped" (Pain, 2009: 475). Thus, the chronopolitics of the future can be understood as "embedded in cultural, economic, social and spatial micro-geographies" (Pain, 2009: 474). Hope and the future are inextricably entangled, since both compulsions have critical considerations for society and its members. As Sparke states, "justified fears when combined with sensible hopes can open new possibilities and thereby help mobilize change for the better,

including both better lives and a better world in which to live," while "false hopes and groundless fears can be of dreadful, deadly consequence" (Sparke, 2007 pp. 338). Suffering, subordination and marginalization is often endured by the subaltern as it "appears logical in the context" of suffering that is shaped by the interacting "invisible elbows of external power forces and everyday routine survival struggles" (Auyero and Swistun, 2009: 6).

Over the past several years, there have been a multitude of traditional, hope-filled (or hopeful) movements directed at toppling despotic regimes—movements that seem to present the opportunity for fundamental social or political change (Thompson, 2013). The problem, as Bloch sees it, is that we live in 'the darkness of the lived moment' (Bloch cited in Thompson 13) such that we are constantly surrounded by narratives and representations of freedom and oppression, failure and success, utopia and dystopia. Jammed within the 'facticity of life' (Bloch, 1986: 65-77) … 'in a world based on the principles of commodity exchange, it seems as though improving one's existing life is only possible in the private sphere" (Vidal and Schröter, 2013: 289). Although geopolitics and geoeconomics operate as "alternately fearful and hopeful discourses shaping [the] worldviews" (Sparke, 2007: 340) of states, positive futures are linked to economic aspirations, while success and entitlement in the present is stymied by negative political oppression and intimidation. How do discourses of hope fit into geoeconomic ways of understanding the world? We might suggest that such discourses are often idealistic and forthright in defense of geoeconomic interests, not least of all in the rhetoric of economic freedom and opportunity, with global integration being the endgame.

Conclusion

In late 2014, Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi called on the U.S. government to reconsider its optimism around Burma's political reforms (Naing, 2014d). Ongoing violence in the conflict zones, the former home of most Burmese exiles in Thailand, continues despite the institution of more than 16 ceasefire agreements in the region (ibid). The upsurge in violence in recent months is attributed to land seizures for commercial development, including large-scale dams, factory operations and environmentally damaging mining operations (Lewis and Snaing, 2014), and are aggravated by Burma's move to open its economy to new markets and foreign investment. Thus, "whether the 'new' Myanmar is a 'thinly disguised authoritarian state' (Lintner 2012) or a nation on the cusp of structural change remains to be

seen" (Arnold, 2013: 100). In the shadows of ongoing controversial reforms, more than 140,000 Burmese exiles languish in "temporary shelters" where they have waited for resettlement for more than three decades and now face imminent repatriation to Burma. For many exiles facing repatriation, what awaits them are razed villages, rice paddies riddled with landmines deplorable health and education infrastructures, large-scale environmental disruptions due to damning and mining operations, and an ongoing civil war between the Burmese military and ethnic rebel armies.

This article has responded to recent calls by scholars to reignite debates on temporality and precariousness, and the relationship of the experience of time to the geopolitics of migration, refugeedom and exile. In particular, it has sought to articulate new ways of thinking through the relationship between chronopolitics, hope and the political economy of the future. By foregrounding the political-emotional competencies of hope along the Thai-Burma we have sought to open up space for a heterogeneous chronopolitics that is both critically political as well as personal. The chronopolitics of exile are complicated by the geoeconomics of hope around intensified incorporation of Burma into global capitalism. As the U.S. National Security Strategy of 2002 stated, "[T]he United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world'' (National Security Strategy 2002, preface cited in Sparke, 2007: 345). Yet geoeconomic worldviews also thrive on their dark foundations, playing on people's hopes and co-opting "fetishistic fears about dangerous spaces and others' places to create a forceful, albeit forcefully misleading and contradictory, double-vision" (ibid: 340). In this context, NGOs who work in the border area are hamstrung by the chronopolitics around the hope for Burma's economic future. Many onlookers argue that aid donors are overly optimistic of the reforms taking place while reports of one step forward and two steps back continue to canvass news reports on the region.

The persistence and importance of chronopolitics along the Thai-Burma border are illustrative of how NGO economics are entangled in geopolitical discourse. It also highlights how everyday affective geopolitics are linked to geoeconomics, extended through the stretching of transnational financial exchange. NGO practitioners working for the betterment of Burmese exiles along the Thai-Burma border are cognizant that there is still widespread need for their

labour, and critical work still to be done in the region. Yet donors have made a beeline into Burma, where they jostle for space with investors from around the world in the now-crowded businesses districts in Yangon.

Hope is a two-way process forged between those who imagine a better future and those who disseminate and produce imaginaries through geoeconomic promise. Geoeconomic promise is often facilitated through geographies of dispossession, which enables the control or coercion of subjects whose territory is "imagined and administered as somehow beyond the reach of justice… these spaces of exception are spaces where the abstract and projected fears of government lead to the production of terribly tangible fear among the governed on the ground" (Sparke, 2007: 339). These become forced impositions of both neoliberal idealism and geoeconomic hopes founded on geopolitical fears (ibid). In this sense, hope becomes linked to territory and its (re)possession.

But in what ways does territory relate to these temporalities? Demarcated by their separation from the state, village and family-life, exiles are thrust into a condition of legal *limen* in which their status is wholly ambiguous and constantly changing depending on their movement and external politics. Most Burmese exiles become fixed within this stage as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (1967: 95). Only a select few reach the stage of reaggregation into society—the passage of exile rarely returns actors to where they want/hope to be, but instead delivers them into new, unknown and defamiliarized spaces. Exiles may be at least in part characterized as experiencing time standing still, as though the very passage of time were halted once they entered the moment of exile. This speaks to the tyranny of capitalist time, which dictates in no uncertain terms that if actors are not effectively producing in a capitalist fashion then they remain, for all intents and purposes, stagnant (Castree, 2009).

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