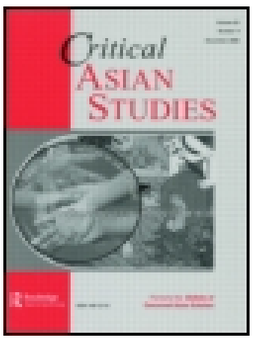

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Reworking Bandung internationalism: decolonization and postcolonial futurism in Burma/Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This commentary examines how futurity has been imagined across politics and political economy in Burma/Myanmar. Three areas are discussed: the revolutionary horizons of anti-colonialists, who combined Buddhist and Marxist ideas of historical progress; the developmental socialism of the early independence area, with its industrial telos and modernist commitments; and a contemporary development project in southern Myanmar, where processes of dispossession are troubling earlier temporal imaginaries. I suggest that a vision of postcolonial transformation coheres across anti-colonial and early independence claims to futurity. This temporal imaginary, which I call postcolonial futurism, promises transitions from farm to factory, peasant to the proletariat, and precapital to capital. This imaginary resonated widely. Today, however, scholars of South and Southeast Asia argue that modernist promises of transition now lack empirical and political purchase amid ongoing dispossession and trends towards low-wage, informal labour. Yet in the wake of postcolonial futurism, responses to dispossession are creating novel political possibilities. Responding to Kuan-Hsing Chen's call to rework Bandung internationalism in the present, I consider how struggles over dispossession today indicate both openings and limits for the making of new political futures. Integrating Glen Coulthard's work on colonialism and dispossession, I argue that decolonizing subjectivity is central to this process.

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In southern Myanmar in 2017, on the balcony of a monastery in a village outside Dawei, a group of us sat talking about the Dawei special economic zone (SEZ): myself; a handful of villagers from the area, mainly smallholder farmers; and two staff from a Thai civil society group, one of whom was my housemate, an activist from a village north of Dawei. We had recently returned from a trip organized by the Thai group, which had brought villagers from Dawei to visit heavy industrial projects in Thailand, for inspiration to fight the Dawei SEZ, at least in theory. The Dawei SEZ, among the world's largest industrial projects,[1] had been suspended in 2013, but the Myanmar government was discussing plans to resume the project. The Thai organization hoped this trip would help build opposition to

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[1]Overall plans for the US$ fifty-six billion industrial project include a deep-sea port, a vast petrochemical estate, an industrial estate for small and medium industries, a new township for workers, a dam and two reservoirs, dual oil and gas pipelines, and road and rail links to Thailand.

the government's plans. With the project suspended for years, though, villagers like Ko Tun, a farmer from one of the smaller villages in the project area, had trouble believing the project would resume. In fact, people like him often say they welcome the jobs, infrastructure, and financial compensation they associate with the project. As we discussed what strategies might be needed to contest the project's return, Ko Tun stepped away from us on the balcony, saying quietly, "Well, it's just a dream" (*aw eikmetthalobè*).

I interpreted Ko Tun's remark as a dual commentary on the SEZ and its suspension: the project has become a kind of fantasy, unreal. For many villagers, it remains an aspiration, unmet. Around us, that day, in the vast space of the project area, we could see how roads, bridges, water towers, pipes, signage, and housing built before 2013 had decayed. Flora was retaking the land and farmers grazed livestock in the ruins. In contrast to much recent scholarship on ruins and ruination, however,[2] these were ruins in reverse: debris of the future, not the past, of futures deferred and still desired.[3] During my fieldwork, I have tried to attend to the status of such futures – the curious nature of dreams like Ko Tun's – including the histories they carry and the politics they entail. What might a genealogy of futurity look like in Myanmar, and what kind of relation might it bear to developmental socialism, itself a key theme of the 1955 Bandung Conference?

Two figures set the stage for this necessarily partial record of futures past: Thakin Kodaw Hmaing (1876–1964), a Burmese poet and nationalist, and Thakin Soe (1906–1989), an early member of the Communist Party of Burma.[4] Like others associated with the left wing of the liberation struggle against British colonialism, both put forth a radical temporal politics geared towards the revolutionary transformation of society. After independence in 1948, developmental socialism emerged as a moderate response to this politics, aiming for a peaceful transition to socialism *contra* the communist insurgency Thakin Soe would help spark. With challenging political implications today, this mid-century commitment to a politics of and for the future, which I call postcolonial futurism, continues to shape the political subjectivity and temporal imagination of farmers, fishers, and activists responding to present-day capitalist development in Dawei.

This genealogy of futurity begins with Thakin Kodaw Hmaing. Born in the 1870s, he became a leading anti-colonialist and one of the great literary figures of Burma's modern period. Associated with the introduction of Marxism to Burmese politics,[5] Thakin Kodaw Hmaing was publishing widely by the early twentieth century, often combining styles and narratives rooted in Burmese Buddhism and European Marxism. The historian Manuel Sarkisyanz credits him with producing a hybrid of Buddhism and Marxism that would prove influential over subsequent generations in the country's politics.[6] This syncretism is particularly attuned to revolutionary futural horizons.

In 1935, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing published *Thakin Tika,* which became a key contribution to the ideology and worldview of Burma's nationalists. The book mainly focuses on the *Dobama Asiayone*, an important nationalist organization Thakin Kodaw Hmaing was instrumental in founding in the early 1930s. But in describing the trajectory

[2]See Yarrow 2017, citing Dawdy 2010, Edensor 2005, Gordillo 2014, Schwenkel 2013, and Stoler 2008.
[3]See Smithson 1996.
[4]"Thakin" means "master." Once an honorific used to refer to colonial officials, the term was later appropriated by Burmese nationalists to refer to anti-colonial leaders.
[5]See for example Sarkisyanz 1965 and Walton 2017.
[6]Sarkisyanz 1961.

of nationalist politics, he also brings in what Sarkisyanz calls "the Buddhist historiography of Ceylon," or elsewhere, "the Pali Buddhist philosophy of history."[7] This historiography is found in colonial legal compendia drawing on pre-colonial sources, like the *Manugye Dhammathat*,[8] the opening of which stages a process Thakin Kodaw Hmaing would retell. Reproducing a narrative of decline that is traced to early Buddhist teachings, the *Manugye* text begins by describing a bounteous world held in common, symbolized by the *padetha* tree. But self-oriented traits like *lawba* and *yanmet,* or greed and desire, corrupt and end that age of plenitude, and the Illusion of the Self[9] necessitates the selection of the first ruler, a Buddha-in-becoming, who adjudicates and even equalizes.[10]

This philosophy of history, as it were, forms the basis of the narrative Thakin Kodaw Hmaing restages in *Thakin Tika.* He posits a primeval egalitarian past at a time when the original inhabitants of the world were of equal status and material abundance prevailed through the bounty of the *padetha* tree. But then greed and desire intrude, occasioning the crowning of a would-be Buddha figure, a *hpayalaung.* However, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing also uses the term *lawka neikban,* combining *neikban* (nirvana) with *lawka* (the worldly or secular).[11] For Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, this earthly paradise is what the *Dobama Asiayone* seeks to achieve. One of the first explicitly Marxist organizations in Burma, the *Dobama Asiayone*, in Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's account, suggests that an equalizing worldly nirvana names a common trajectory for both Marxist and Buddhist thought.[12]

Thakin Soe eventually founded the Red Flag branch of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), contributing to an armed insurgency that shaped socialist politics for decades after independence.[13] In his 1938 book *Soshalitwada* (*Socialism*), Thakin Soe takes up this encounter between Buddhism and Marxism, moving towards pointedly communist revolutionary horizons. In one critical passage, he links communism as an age, or a *khit*, to both the idea of the *padethapin khit,* or the age of the *padetha* tree, and the notion of *lawka neikban.*[14] The age of the *padetha* tree signals, as in Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's invocation of the *Manugye Dhammathat,* a prior age of primeval egalitarianism, when people were without the self-oriented foes of anger (*dawtha*), ignorance (*mawha*), and greed (*lawba*). Communism, for Thakin Soe, was much like this primeval age of collective abundance, yet he specified a difference of character. In the primordial time of the *padetha* tree, there remained an elemental vulnerability to the forces of nature and wild beasts, but the age of communism, in his rendering, marked the end or overcoming of the *lawkadat* – the world, the cosmos, the universe – and a parallel liberation from, even a cleansing of, the economic full stop. He described this end as a kind of immersion in – a flowing into, a being steeped in – *lawka neikban,* the earthly paradise described in *Thakin Tika.*

[7]Sarkisyanz 1961, 56.
[8]The *Manugye Dhammathat* was one such colonial legal compendium. It was the pre-eminent juridical reference used to administer lowland Burma in the early colonial period. See Aye Kyaw 1994.
[9]Aye Kyaw 1994.
[10]Manugye Dhammathat 2010, 1–2.
[11]Thakin Kodaw Hmaing 1965, 163.
[12]Sarkisyanz notes that the term *lawka neikban* became popularized in the 1930s through Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's work and others, eventually representing in Marxist discourse the goal of revolutionary struggle. See Sarkisyanz 1965, 169. Ba Swe, for example, of the younger generation of leftists, would eventually write an article titled "Stalin, the Man Who is Building *Lawka Neikban.*" See Ba Swe 1967; cited in Walton 2017, 115.
[13]It should be noted that the main White Flag branch, led in its early years by Thakin Than Tun, would prove much more consequential.
[14]Thakin Soe 1938, 133–134.

Thakin Soe analogized this communist horizon with the *sinyèthaa asoyakhit*, the age of the rule of the poor or impoverished – best understood as his take on the dictatorship of the proletariat.[15] His other name for this age, notably, was the *padethapin khit thit,* or the new age of the *padetha* tree.

Over time, Thakin Soe became known as a hardline Marxist-Leninist, and dismissed as part of a generation of intellectuals whose contributions to Marxist thought were limited, in one historian's derisive phrase, to "mere nuances on a theme."[16] Like others, Thakin Soe may have operated "without actually understanding the details of Marxist doctrine."[17] Here, it is worth emphasizing that the revolutionary horizon of Thakin Soe's communism is revolutionary in more than one sense: in its integration of Buddhist historiography, thereby helping reshape Marxist categories in their transit between metropole and colony; more directly, in its turn to armed struggle to install the rule of the poor; and, in recognizing such a telos as both an overcoming and a return, in its emphasis on the abolition of the economic and a recovery of primeval abundance.

Writing in the 1930s, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing and Thakin Soe project a series of relatively abstract political horizons, even if, in Thakin Soe's case, these were actually pursued in the midst of one of the post-World War II period's most sustained communist insurgencies. In the 1950s, however, the developmental socialism of Burma's first independent governments, led by U Nu (1907–1995), would suggest a more liberal-rationalist vision of political futures, built around a measured approach to state-planned industrialization. This vision, moreover, is widely regarded as a response to the communist insurrection, and aimed at winning over the rural poor's hearts and minds.[18] This is the main sense in which communism tangibly gave form to Burmese socialism, including socialist futures, from the 1950s onwards. Socialist futures took shape as a refusal of revolutionary communism's radical political horizon, offering instead a moderate vision of a peaceful transition to a socialist society.

The Pyidawtha Plan, the centerpiece of U Nu's developmental regime, was released in 1954, six years after independence. 1954 was also the year of the Colombo Conference, at which, as with the Bandung Conference the following year, economic development was high on the agenda. "Development" during this period referred to industrialization under state management.[19] The Pyidawtha Plan, its name connoting national satisfaction or enjoyment – U Nu himself first translated it as "Happy Land"[20] – was no exception. Drafted by an American engineering firm, the dense 800-page report maps out a program of transitions: from farm to factory, peasant to proletariat, and "backwards" agricultural production to "modern" industry.

The plan was written in English and printed in London. But after a Pyidawtha conference was held in Rangoon prior to the plan's release, a smaller book summarizing the plan was published and circulated in-country, with a number of passages attributed to U Nu's conference speeches.[21] Futurity looms large. One passage reads, "These are the elements of our future prosperity: fertile land, power, transportation, raw materials, and good human resources. Efficiently developed and wisely administered, they can provide the material

[15]Thakin Soe 1938, 134.
[16]Taylor 2008, 6.
[17]Taylor 2008, 6.
[18]Tharaphi Than 2013, 639.
[19]See for example Chatterjee 2005, 489.
[20]Tharaphi Than 2014, 9.
[21]Tharaphi Than 2013.

basis for a new era in Burma."[22] In a kind of vernacular development discourse, the plan puts futurity center-stage, which meant, in part, overcoming the constraints of the colonial political economy: "In the past, our resources were exploited not for Burmans but for foreigners … But we shall waste no energies in lamentations or bitterness over the past. Our heritage is proud and strong, but our true history lies ahead."[23]

This sober commitment to developmental progress comes mixed with overtures to Buddhism. "But do not forget," the book's introductory section reads

> that the objective of all these steps – separately and together – is a Burma in which our people are better clothed, better housed, in better health, with greater security and more leisure – and thus better able to enjoy and pursue the spiritual values that are and will remain our dearest possession.[24]

Maung Maung (1925–1994), a prominent intellectual at the time and later the seventh President of the Union of Myanmar, would later describe being in awe of the building and rebuilding of roads, reservoirs, bridges, and schools he witnessed under the Pyidawtha Plan. But Pyidawtha was about more than physical infrastructure. He would write

> Pyidawtha aspires not merely to develop Burma in material ways, but also to create the "new man," that is, a responsible citizen who will participate actively and constructively in government, an intelligent, public-spirited individual possessing a reasonable share of modern education.[25]

Scholars of decolonization remind us that anticolonial struggles produced different versions of, and imagined different relations to, postcolonial modernity. In David Scott's summation, liberal rationalists broadly embraced modernity; cultural nationalists renounced it; and Marxists put forth a socialist modernity in place of a bourgeois modernity.[26] In India, Nehruvian socialism, like U Nu's socialism in Burma, set the terms for postcolonial transformation. But in these different accounts, "modernity was never *itself* the object of a nonteleological investigation, a nonteleological criticism. This is what the postcolonial present demands."[27] More recently, a fundamental sense of time stalled, of futures unfulfilled, has come to characterize political thought and action in much of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.[28] In South and Southeast Asia, meanwhile, scholars like Kalyan Sanyal, Partha Chatterjee, and Tania Li argue that the promise of postcolonial transition no longer retains the political or empirical purchase it once did, creating an impasse demanding new knowledge and new politics.[29]

In this scholarship, the very idea of modernist transformation, which provided the basic horizons of postcolonial politics, has come undone. Postcolonial futurism could be one way of naming that former commitment to a politics of and for the future. This is not a messianic notion of a coming political community, but a fundamental dedication to a progressive temporality, shared across many of the new states that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century in Asia and Africa. Whether in the revolutionary horizons

[22]Economic and Social Board, Government of the Union of Burma 1954, 9.
[23]Ibid., 9–10.
[24]Ibid., 10–11.
[25]Maung Maung 2013, 119.
[26]Scott 1999, 16–17.
[27]Scott 1999, 17.
[28]Scott 2013.
[29]Chatterjee 2011; Li 2014; Sanyal 2007.

of Thakin Kodaw Hmaing and Thakin Soe, or in the more measured, rationalist transition set forth in U Nu's Bandung-era developmental socialism, the possibility of a certain telos held. Recent scholarship on postcolonial transition has established convincingly the passing of that telos, that "march of progress" once guaranteed in earlier grand narratives.[30] Yet in contemporary southern Myanmar, something of the spectral afterlife of postcolonial futurism appears to remain. Even as regional land and labor trends obviate the former temporalities of progressive transition – making clear, for example, that the notion of any farm-to-factory transition is in many places an illusion today[31] – there remains at the level of subjectivity and imagination a continuing investment in the possibility of developmental transformation. People like Ko Tun, for whom the SEZ is now a dream – at once fantasy and aspiration – reveal this subjective remainder, which raises difficult political questions in the present.

In the Dawei area, the return of the SEZ project would mean the displacement and relocation of at least six villages, including Ko Tun's. On one of my visits to his village, one of his neighbors told me that approximately half of the villagers have moved to Thailand to work. Indeed, many people from the Dawei area, including the SEZ project area, have migrated to Thailand as informal, undocumented, low-wage workers, especially in seafood processing factories on the outskirts of Bangkok. This is part of the reason why the Myanmar government's job creation narrative about the SEZ project carries such weight around Dawei. Government officials argue that the SEZ will bring home migrant workers, in the process reuniting families and reintegrating the region's social fabric.[32] In my experience, this argument resonates strongly with farmers and fishermen living in the SEZ area. Activist groups, on the other hand, argue that the project needs villagers' land, but not their labor.[33] The SEZ will focus on hosting capital-intensive petrochemical processing plants rather than labor-intensive light manufacturing.

Evidence from comparable industrial estates and SEZs in Myanmar and Thailand, as well as historical evidence from colonial plantations, lend credence to activists' claims.[34] From the colonial period to the present, attempts to form concentrated labor forces have relied on migrant labor rather than the labor of people from a given area.[35] In this sense, rather than bringing migrant workers home, the Dawei SEZ may actually reinforce existing labor flows. Displaced and dispossessed, villagers from Dawei stand to swell the ranks of Thailand's informal, precarious labor force, amid wider trends towards informalization and "jobless growth" across South and Southeast Asian labor markets.[36] These trends contribute to a process of exclusion whereby more and more dispossessed laborers become surplus to formal economic production.[37] In this context, the industrial

[30]Li 2014, 2.
[31]Tania Murray Li's work on capitalist relations in highland Indonesia is currently the clearest demonstration of this claim. See Li 2014.
[32]See for example Khine Kyaw 2018.
[33]Myanmar Times 2018.
[34]In interviews I conducted in January 2018 with farmers displaced by the Thilawa SEZ near Yangon, they emphasized that only seventeen of the almost 300 people displaced in the project's first phase had obtained employment in the SEZ. Civil society groups in Thailand, meanwhile, often note that the Map Ta Phut industrial estate, Thailand's largest, has an unofficial policy of not hiring people from the surrounding areas, the better to ensure information does not circulate locally about what is actually happening inside the plants.
[35]Li 2014, 170 and Li 2011, 286; citing Alatas 1977 and Breman 1990.
[36]See for example Arnold and Aung 2011; Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011; Campbell 2013; Deshpande 2012; Li 2011.
[37]Li 2009 and 2011; and Sanyal and Bhattacharya 2009.

transitions held up by modernizing visions like the Pyidawtha Plan – premised on inclusive, state-led, nationally articulated projects under a developmental state – have lost their previous grounding. The "new man" imagined by Maung Maung, far from bearing the ethical significance of citizenship and building the postcolonial nation, is today more likely to be undocumented, excluded, and hyper-exploited, a precarious worker in a neighboring country.

Yet even as these older visions of futurity might no longer hold, the normative premises of national developmental progress retain some traction. At a workshop in the village next to Ko Tun's, a farmer described the project to me in terms I would hear others use repeatedly in the following months: as a matter of "national needs" (*nainggnandaw loatchet*), and something to pursue "in order to develop the nation" (*nainggnandaw pwunpyoaung*). Villagers often spoke of their willingness to suffer or sacrifice for this larger purpose, even to relocate as and when necessary, so long as there would be an appropriate balance in what they would receive. In interviews, group discussions, and informal interactions, villagers like Ko Tun commonly framed the project as bearing tangible benefits like employment, infrastructure, and financial compensation. Their comments pointed beyond the futures in ruin – the ruins in reverse signaling the project's suspension – that surround them at present.

Moreover, the Dawei activist group that has been most consistently critical of the SEZ project, the Dawei Development Association (DDA), works decisively within the discourse of development.[38] Friends and colleagues from DDA regularly stressed to me the importance of not being seen as opposed to development, but rather to the SEZ because it is a damaging version of development. They pursue what they see as alternative development strategies, such as sustainable agriculture, small-scale fisheries, and community-based tourism.[39] In Dawei and places like it, steeped in a sense of deferred modernization – whether through colonial histories, histories of authoritarian rule, generations of economic mismanagement, or some combination of them all – development continues to carry a remarkable normative legitimacy.[40] DDA and other Dawei groups critical of the SEZ, for example, have generally not framed the question as, "the project, yes or no," but rather demanded "*if* the project, then as much as possible on our terms." Calls for transparency, accountability, and public participation dominate advocacy and campaigning – much more so than demands to shut down the project itself.

As in scholarship on dispossession in liberal or liberalizing settings, dispossession, in this case, persists not only through overt violence or coercion, but through the reproduction of subjectivity – as in fishermen, farmers, and activists largely accepting, today, the developmental premises of dispossession in Dawei. Writing about indigenous dispossession in Canada, Glen Coulthard draws on the work of Franz Fanon (1925–1961) to argue that only the decolonization of subjectivity, through a resurgent cultural politics, can break the cycle of colonial dispossession.[41] In his account of cultural studies in Asia, meanwhile, Chen Kuan-Hsing foregrounds the need to reimagine decolonization after the upheavals and divides of the Cold War in Asia, arguing this requires no less

[38]Incidentally, their Wifi passwords include: "@only4developmenT$" and "$Develop4regioN$."
[39]See Myanmar Times 2018.
[40]On the normative legitimacy of development in postcolonial settings, see Chatterjee 2011 and Sanyal 2007.
[41]Coulthard 2014.

than the remaking of political subjectivity.[42] It also suggests, for him, a possible reworking of Bandung internationalism.[43] Yet internationalism, in his formulation, must be more than, deeper than, a matter of formal association between nation-states, however anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist they may be, as in the Bandung era. While maintaining the radicalism of that mid-century moment, internationalism must also accommodate forms of local knowledge, cultural politics, and "resources of tradition" in a way that "actively transgresses nation-states' boundaries," as in his earlier call for an "internationalist localism."[44]

In Dawei, activists have established connections and built relations with allies and civil society groups in Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, and beyond. My housemate in Dawei, an anti-mining activist from a village north of Dawei, now works for the Thai civil society group that has linked Dawei villagers to activists and community leaders in Thailand struggling against industrial projects. The director of DDA, meanwhile, constantly attends meetings, workshops, forums, and conferences in Yangon, Bangkok, Tokyo, Brussels, and farther afield. But it is not clear whether networked solidarities such as these might be legible as part of "today's Bandung."[45] In Dawei, a broadly liberal developmental imagination remains hegemonic, suggesting that amid the passing of an earlier modernizing telos, something of a spectral promise still lives on, for better or for worse. Indeed, postcolonial futurism can be restated as a subjective formation, one that helps secure the conditions for ongoing dispossession. Alongside this formation are certain further liberalizing vectors: the rigid anti-communism of Myanmar's long military dictatorship, which shut down spaces for leftist thought that could have provided resources for rethinking dispossession today;[46] and, after 2001 in particular, the convergence between American democratization doctrine and the growth of Myanmar's "movement for democracy and human rights."[47] In today's Myanmar, American-style liberalism has been internalized in the political thought of leading activists and civil society groups, including prominent mentors and donors to activists from Dawei. The liberal-rational contours of Pyidawtha modernism now intersect with these other histories and streams of liberal thought.

It seems clear, then, that forging a politics in response to dispossession requires more than a better legal strategy, say, or a stronger analysis of environmental impact assessments, as in much of my fieldwork with activist networks in Dawei. A politics adequate to ongoing dispossession, to breaking its conditions of possibility – and thus reimagining the dreams of Ko Tun and people like him – requires some of that basic harder work that Coulthard and Chen point to, a need for working on and decolonizing subjectivity itself. In that vein, in addition to the expansive solidarities that have been constructed from Dawei, signs of an emerging cultural politics may also be significant: a festival called "We Love Dawei," organized by Dawei activists last December; a series of village studies documenting what farmers describe as their traditions and beliefs; a group of scholars working to

[42]Chen 2010, x.
[43]Chen 2010. Specifically, his injunction is to "rework the historically grounded ideals formulated in the third wordlist moment of internationalism, or perhaps even earlier, in the moment of Sun Yat-sen's Great Asianism" (13).
[44]Chen 2010, 223; citing Chen 1994.
[45]As Michael Hardt once described the World Social Forum. See Hardt 2002.
[46]One thinks, analogously, of Tania Li's reflection that in Indonesia, the 1965 massacre of alleged communists haunts political thought in the present through a "dearth of robust critical debate." See Li 2014, 183.
[47]Maung Zarni's critique of the concept of civil society in Burma resonates here. See Maung Zarni 2012.

protect an ancient city being excavated just beyond the SEZ area. Activities like these indicate the importance of cultural politics for decolonizing subjectivity; as Coulthard has argued, Indigenous liberation requires "a resurgent approach to Indigenous decolonization that builds on the values and insights of our past in our efforts to secure a noncolonial present and future."[48] Citing the Anishinaabe feminist Leanne Simpson, Coulthard holds that resurgence does not mean an actual return to the past, but rather – in Simpson's words – "re-creating the cultural and political flourishment of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens … " It means reclaiming "the fluidity of our traditions … not the rigidity of colonialism."[49]

A certain type of internationalism characterizes the work of activist groups based in Dawei, even while that work tends to be located within subjective formations that combine Pyidawtha modernism with other vectors of liberal thought. On the other hand, Dawei organizations are nurturing a cultural politics that informs wider activities, especially through recovering and maintaining public awareness of and pride in certain aspects of Dawei history, knowledge, and cultural life. If Chen highlights the relative absence of the anti-imperial, anti-capitalist radicalism of an earlier Bandung politics, Coulthard signals the importance of an ongoing process of reclaiming history and cultural life in order to decolonize knowledge and politics in the present. Temporal politics looms over all of this. Postcolonial futurism, that politics of futurity that characterized mid-century developmentalism in post-colonial states, haunts the political imagination in Dawei. It yields an anachronistic faith in the progressive temporality of developmental change, making criticism of the SEZ – itself premised on the transformative potential of capitalist development – that much more difficult. Still, this partial genealogy of futurity is not about arriving at an *ought* for Dawei activists, but rather situating their activities historically and politically – the better to grasp and interpret those activities themselves, as well as both the challenges and limitations, and openings and possibilities, those activities entail.

The full trajectory of the transnational and cultural politics being constructed in Dawei remains to be seen, but this range of political activities is worth considering more closely. At stake is the long arc of decolonization, from formal state politics to subjectivity itself. If reworking Bandung internationalism requires remaking political subjectivity, then insights drawn from struggles around dispossession have much to offer, especially as they tend to center the problem of subjectivity – how it is made, and potentially remade. Moreover, if Bandung internationalism is imagined as a fluid tradition ripe for reclamation – part of a Third World past to be recreated for its possibilities in the present – then it too can be part of a novel politics of and for the future today. Flashes of the kind of internationalism Chen has called for suggest this opening is already immanent to activism in Dawei, pointing towards political possibilities that, one day, might not be constrained by futures past. In the wake of earlier postcolonial horizons, reworking the relations between internationalism, subjectivity, and cultural politics is part of a process of reconstructing political futures in Myanmar today.

[48]Coulthard 2014, 149.
[49]Coulthard 2014, 156; citing Simpson 2011, 22.

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