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Note: The phrase that runs through the journal rearranges the lyrics of the song *Time After Time* by Cyndi Lauper.

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Solitude Journal 4

Time After Time

Contents

Greetings

Elke aus dem Moore

Time does not exist; it is a human construct; an idea or projection for a sensation of a string of moments that we call duration or time. This sensation is »neither neutral nor objective« as Fatin Abbas states in her essay »Black Time.« »Time is experienced, valued, and used differently depending on culture, history, and political context.« The perception of time is based on different value systems and creates – if these systems' diversity is not acknowledged – immeasurable misunderstandings, which may then even lead to conflicts.

Acknowledging different perceptions of time is central in a process of decolonization. While the industrial-capitalist monochromatic perception of time is associated and defined with aspects of economic activity and places the individual at the center, the polychromatic perception of time foregrounds creative work and the connection of people and the environment.

Being aware of these different approaches and questioning a universal reckoning and definition of time is central in a process in which power relations are critically questioned. In times of transformation and constant change, new perspectives on the relationship to time can be revealed or even new models for dealing with time can emerge.

I would like to thank Fatin Abbas and Dzekashu MacViban for the inspiring conversation that gave rise to the idea for this journal. Many thanks to MacViban for his profound work as editor of this edition of the *Solitude Journal*, and to Denise Helene Sumi and Jazmina Figueroa from the Digital Solitude program as well as the entire team at Akademie Schloss Solitude. Many thanks to all authors of this issue for their contributions.

Editorial Introduction

Jazmina Figueroa, Dzekashu MacViban, and Denise Helene Sumi

Like other paradoxes, time is self-referential. One way to approach time is to consider it within the framework of linearity/nonlinearity, in which case, Faulkner's words from *The Sound and the Fury* come to mind: »I give you a watch, not so you could remember time, but so you could forget it … And not spend all of your breath trying to conquer it.« Within this specific framework of temporalities, there is no distinction between past and future, yet the reverse is also true: the »profitable« use of time that has underpinned capitalism among other »isms« for centuries attests to this.

Another way to approach time is to deconstruct it by looking beyond the dichotomy of temporalities, embracing non-Western positions and understanding that time is a construct of geography, as much as it is a construct of neoliberal capitalism. In this regard, *Solitude Journal 4 – Time After Time* attempts to push the boundaries of our understanding of time, by questioning time as we think we know it, as well as exploring it through complex prisms such as multiple and contested histories, anticapitalist discourse, Afrofuturism, queer positions, feminist scholarship, Indigenous futurity, and land sovereignty amid a global environmental crisis – a moment associated with running out of time.

In a time when the idea of progress has been wiped away by an ongoing state of crisis fueled by the industrialist-capitalist complex and colonial legacies, we'd like to recall presumptions of a lost present.

The journal's title, *Time After Time*, suggests a breach in continuity from any known constructs of time. It is an obvious nod to the expression performed by Cyndi Lauper in her eponymous 1980s pop-rock ballad. The phrase »time after time« is moreover in pursuit of the abundant encounters folded into the past, present, and imagined. The authors and artists in this edition home in on their allegiances to time through retellings, observations, and deconstructions.

In Anglophone literary canons, phrases such as »time will tell« describe the specific duration needed for what's to come, »telling time« or »of/at all times« is a way of marking the present moment as whole and complete, and if something is to occur in »only a matter of time« that denotes the inevitable. Idioms such as these impose the annexation of certainty with time and its passing. However, »time after time« expresses another relationship having to do with repetition – time in the making, undetermined, and infinite. How often can a single situation occur, be retold, noticed, amplified, and reduced? Time and time again.

Drawing from the aforementioned positions and beyond, the contributions to this issue speak to each other, complement each other, and distance themselves from each other, offering multiple entry points into the notion of time: Sheila Chiamaka explores the Igbo ontology of time, in which time is place, time can be shifted, and time exists in more than one sphere. The Fantasia Malware collective creates games that evoke a sense of spiraling through chaotic and nonlinear worlds of myth-making and storytelling. Fatin Abbas reflects on how time is often used to create social bonds in Khartoum, whereas in New York time is used to produce things. Time can also be a tool to liberate or oppress. »The more oppressive an economic or political system is, the more compulsively it controls time,« she writes in her essay. Wanjeri Gakuru says that »time stands still,« following the brutal British repression during revolutionary uprisings in Kenya; while BaRiya meshes past epochs with emerging queer Hindi poetics in their metrical translations and quantum-like mediations.

Often it is language itself and narratives that form the way we relate to time. We tell ourselves stories, get lost in (sci-)fiction, predict the future, and juggle our memories. »Well, to make it simple as possible,« as stated in the opening contribution by Camila de Caux and Eric Macedo, »we usually say that we remember the past, live in the present, and make plans or guesses for the future,« only to then explain that the different arrows of time are tricky concepts. »Time is a silent language,« writes Sada Malumfashi in his contribution. A silent language emerges with multiple dialects, twists, and ambiguities.

Time as a language and the ambiguous forms it takes are touched upon in a conversation with Tanya Villanueva about exchanges and artistic collaborations between her and her child. Villanueva's time perception shifts in her role as artist and mother, she says it is, »how

love exists between each of us, making time to uplift each other against the darkness of our days.«

This journal also includes artistic takes on varying realms of absence in the Eurocentric episteme. Nicolás Vizcaíno Sánchez's reflects on dispossession with the institutional site; Nadine K. Cenoz's dissociates the explorer-colonial narratives forced upon Cerro Chaltén land in Argentina.

We, the editors, would like to express our utmost gratitude to all the authors and artists who have trusted us to compile their contributions into this intricate snapshot of decolonizing time. Thank you to Kimberly Bradley for the meticulous oversight and proofreading of all the authored works, biographies, and work descriptions anthologized in this edition.

We would additionally like to give an extended thank you to the thoughtfully designed intervention by HuM-Collective, consisting of Hannah Häußer and Maximilian Borchert. The printed book from which you might be reading this introduction will gradually change when the paper is exposed to haptic imprints and/or light washing, suggesting a subtle embrace of things used over time. Along the margins of the page is a sentence incorporated by HuM-Collective, where normally page numbers would be; to tell time instead of to count (reading) time.

For this iteration of the *Solitude Journal*'s cover, studio Beton processed a drawing from the 2022 series *Studies in Aqueous Time* by artist Zahra Malkani. We would like to thank the artist for the possibility to using one of her drawings as the cover subject. Reproductions of Malkani's original drawings can be found in the journal. We would like to thank Elke aus dem Moore for her trust in us editors and the initial conversations we had with her and Fatin Abbas, which laid the foundation for the journal. Enjoy these timely readings.

Today is the Magical Cube

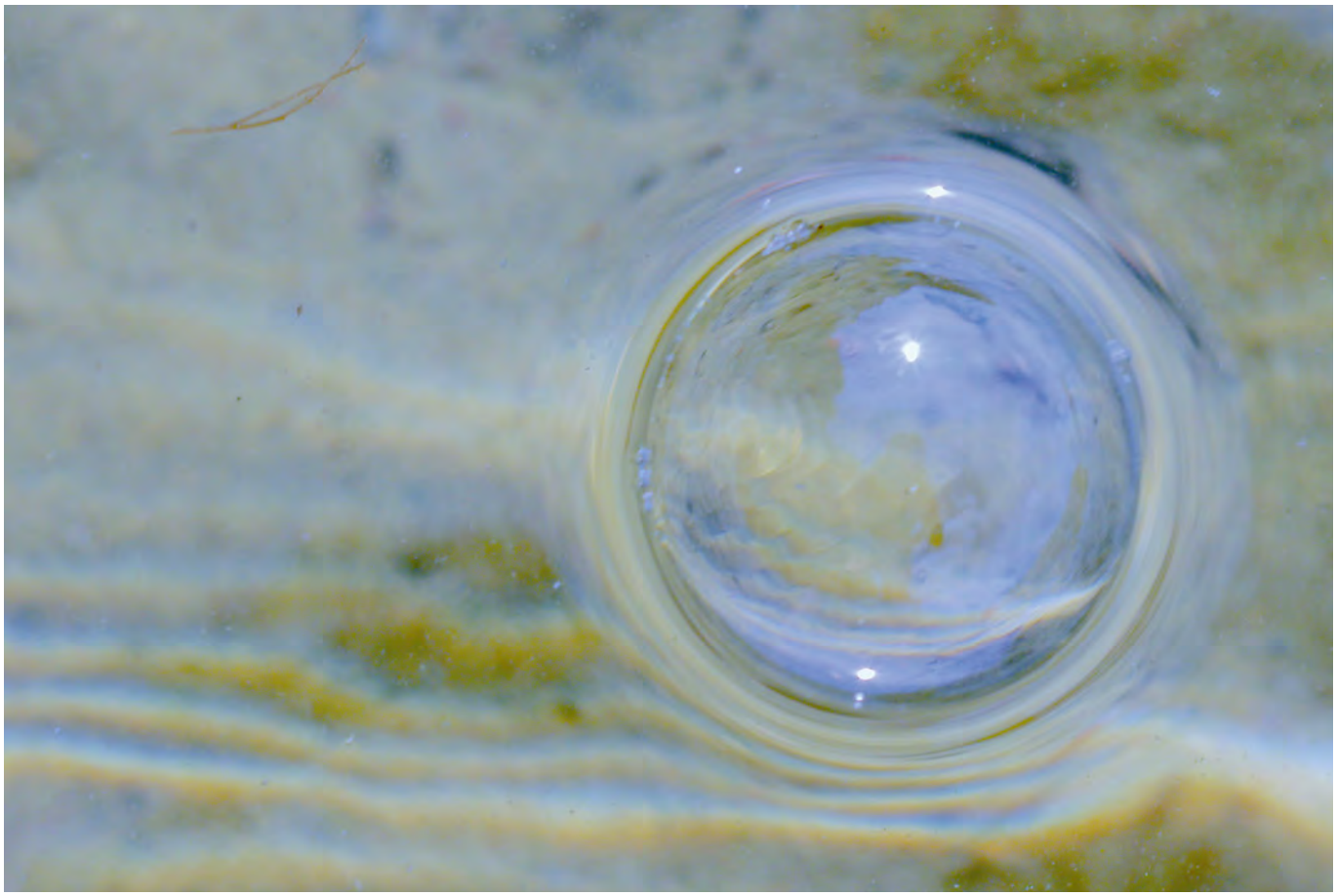

Photo by Eric Macedo. Courtesy of the artist.

Camila de Caux and Eric Macedo

Can time run backward in the future? Does time run slower in distant galaxies? The following text depicts a fictional dialogue with Nico, an eight-month-old, about his perception of time. Nico turns his efforts to show us that time should not be conceived as a unidirectional timeline and that the idea of future is a misconception that can only exist in the delusional minds of adults. The fictional conversation examines a few non-Western philosophical traditions in which only what we conceive as the past and, more importantly, as the present, play a role.

Nico: Mama, what is time?

Cami: Oh, dear, isn't it a bit too soon for this question?

Nico: But doesn't »too soon« already imply a specific notion of time? If something is »too soon,« it means that we shouldn't be talking about this now, but *will* be talking about it at some point in the future. It means that things are attached to certain moments in time, as in a fixed order. Like crawling ...

Eric: Like crawling? Do you mean that crawling has a specific order between knees and hands?

Nico: No, I'm saying that you are all the time encouraging me to crawl. And you told grandma the other day: Nico is almost crawling. And people are always saying: my baby is already crawling.

Cami: Yes, I guess you are right. Since children develop in more or less similar ways, we can sort of predict the order in which things happen when a child is growing. There are many studies about it. And although much of them are quite questionable, we still rely on them more than we admit.

Nico: Oh, I feel so claustrophobic! Like I am trapped in the future.

Cami: Poor baby! I guess the adult world is always expecting children to be something else, pushing you to do things as adults do.

Nico: Bingo. Watch out, next thing you know you are calling me »cute little man!«

Cami: Oh, come on ...

Nico: But I understand that this may be quite inevitable for you since we babies are really growing. Now what do you say: if people can tell how I am going to develop, is this a way of remembering the future?

Eric: Well, to make it as simple as possible, we usually say that we remember the past, live in the present, and make plans or guesses for the future. But there are probably some ways of remembering the future, although they escape me right now.

Nico: Oh, I'm having a *déja vu* here ... Or is it *vújá de*?

Cami: Tricky. What if we think of time as a river? Let's say you are in the middle of it, looking towards the mouth. You have already traveled all the way from the springs. The past is the accumulation of your memories, or actually of all that you are. And as the river gets wider and wider, it accumulates more and more water.

Nico: Am I using water wings?

Cami: Yes, I'm pretty sure you are. And you are constantly floating toward the future, which always starts from where you are and moves forward. But you can only know what you've already seen, you don't know what's coming.

Nico: And why do I want to go there? Is there a playground or something?

Eric: Now that you are saying it, yes, the future could be some kind of playground, an imaginary realm of possibilities with which we play in our thoughts.

Nico: Ok, so I'm in the middle of a large river, alone, floating endlessly toward an imaginary playground that I'll never reach.

Eric: Well ... this is what we conventionally call the »arrow of time.«

Nico: Oh, curious! I remember holding an arrow at aunt Luisa's house and you telling me to watch out, that I could hurt myself. Isn't an arrow a weapon?

Cami: Well, yes, maybe the arrow of time can be some sort of weapon ... It has been imposed by the industrial West everywhere, erasing other conceptions of time.

Eric: Although it seems to describe something real, don't you agree?

Nico: Yay, we are finally having the »what's real« talk!

Eric: Oh, please, not today! It's just that the arrow shouldn't be seen as the only way to describe time. Even among modern conceptions, there are ways of seeing time way differently from the clock time model, this linear and abstract sequencing of past, present, and future.

Cami: And there's a danger of just denying linear time and ending up exoticizing extra-modern peoples, saying that they live in ahistoric, eternal, or static time, or else that they only rely on cyclical periodizations. But it is not because people do not describe their temporalities by means of the clock that they don't think of things as coming before or after one another.

Nico: But wait, isn't clock time itself a cycle?

Eric: Isn't it? And all our calendars are based on cycles, and a lot of our daily talk is based on cyclical references, like days and nights, or else when we think of seasons. We do not need to deny the arrow of time to use other conceptions of time. But what we call clock time is often denying other temporalities, resonating with racist ideas of progress and civilization.

Nico: No! »Boo to captain clock!«

Cami: Ok, so we're quoting now. But I have to say again that it's not so simple.

Nico: What do you mean? Down with the clocks! Can we rip that one apart and play with the little pieces?

Cami and Eric: Just don't stick them in your mouth!

Eric: Things can get pretty complicated if we look at them closely. Physicists say that they can be quite sure about the direction of time for three reasons: first, that we remember the past, but don't remember the future (this is the psychological arrow of time); second, that everything in the universe tends to go from more organized to less organized, like the toys in your room (this is called the thermodynamic arrow of time); and third, because the universe is expanding, with all the galaxies and stars and planets getting further away from each other (this is called the cosmological arrow). Weirdly, some scientists have suggested that in the future time could start running backward, as the universe would begin to contract instead of expand. Then we would really remember the future.

Nico: Time would go backward? Would this mean that my room would get clean by itself?

Eric: Exactly. We wouldn't need to collect toys from the floor anymore. But now the physicists seem to concur that time will always flow in the same direction.

Nico: This sounds way more boring than the first option.

Eric: Yeah, right?

Cami: Not to mention the whole other universe of physicists who argue that time doesn't exist. But I guess we could leave that part for another talk.

Nico: Ok, because I think for us babies time flows backward.

Cami: What do you mean?

Nico: When I was born, I could not make much difference in what I saw or heard. And little by little things started to become more ... bounded. As if the room was tidying itself. So maybe I am facing the other side then? Of the river, I mean. I'm looking at the springs. Does it invert time?

Eric: Now the future would be coming in your direction, right? That's interesting. And the future would always rise from the springs, not as in a model of progress. The future is coming from the earth itself.

Nico: And the bubbles and the little waves around my body are the present. Now the present is the playground!

Cami: But I have to say I glimpse a problem here. When the past just flows away from me, and I flow away from it, I'm constantly letting go of my memories. This can, of course, be a good thing, but it can also serve as a pretty good excuse for colonialism's continuing erasure of its past and present violences.

Eric: Yes, and now that I'm thinking about it, the future becomes too highlighted. When you have your eyes so focused on this source, on this spring of eternal future, it can draw the Future, with a capital F, the future of progress. This future, springing from the earth, becomes some kind of resource to be exploited.

Nico: Wasn't it Ailton Krenak who said that the future doesn't exist?

Cami: Yes, he was talking about how the idea of the future is convenient for capitalist, colonialist, extractivist powers. And how it is so closely related to the idea of progress. He says that the future is a promise, some kind of hope for a thing that is coming, but never comes.

Eric: And I think he was talking about what changes, if you think of it as the immediate aftereffect of our actions and decisions. Then it doesn't exist beyond our actual doings, and hence it is also our present responsibility for the world.

Nico: Hum ... Even though adults relate babies to the future all the time, maybe we babies don't really work with the idea of future ourselves.

Eric: Gotcha. See, this morning you were really excited about eating strawberries, but you got distracted three seconds later, before we even headed to the kitchen.

Nico: Time passes differently for you! No offense.

Cami: None taken. But maybe we can say that time passes differently for everything that exists. Some physicists also think that this is a consequence of Einstein's relativity.

Nico: Are we talking about the guy with the tongue and funny hair?

Eric: Oh, you know who Einstein is.

Nico: It's just that I thought you didn't!

Eric: Ok. But it's mindblowing to think that one instant here would last more than eight years in a galaxy such as Proxima Centauri b, and even more if you invert it: what is our correspondent of one second in Proxima Centauri b? You kind of extend time to such small intervals that it kind of stops making sense.

Nico: Wow, speed it up! For me, it's like there are so many things happening between what you call now and what comes next ... You seem not to have such a hard time waiting for things, but for me it's just hell. What you call the future is usually so extended that it seems quite a random election of probabilities, colored by a handful of other interesting events.

Eric: If things pass through you less quickly than they do for us, does it mean that the future is closer for you than it is for us? I mean, if we keep the point of view of our speed.

Nico: Gee whiz, I just said I might not have a sense of the future and you take the opportunity to shove it even closer to my nose. I mean, why would you need the future if you already have it, huh?

Photo by Eric Macedo. Courtesy of the artist.

Cami: All this reminds me of how the Aymara people locate time in space. The past is what stands ahead of you, the »front time.« It is what stands before their eyes – and quite literally since the word used for »eyes« and »earlier« is the same. So the Aymara point to the front when talking about the »old times,« or the earlier generations, or even the »gentil timpu,« the times before the Spanish invasion. And accordingly »a future day« is what stands on the back. The curious thing is that, while they use many different gestures to sign the past (in front) and the present (on the floor), their gestures are far less elaborate when they want to refer to the future.

Nico: So it's like I am looking instead at the mouth of the river? But the springs are the future?

Eric: So the future stands behind you and you cannot see it. Or maybe you just get some glimpses of it when you turn your head. But you are mostly looking at the past and playing with bubbles in the present.

Nico: So the past is yet to come – yes, I'm quoting that talk of Karen Barad now.

Cami: Anytime! But also, if you think about it, now the past is changing. You are constantly looking at the past, but the past is never the same. It's as if the past events continue to exist with their own futures, that can be different than the one you are living now.

Nico: So it's not possible to step in the same past twice, huh? Adiós, my good Heraclitus!

Eric: And now the future is coming toward your back. So all the random projections and possibilities of the future are slipping away, except for the particular ones that are actually touching your body, becoming bubbles and splashes. Right now. Around you.

Nico: Yes, especially if it rains!

Eric: Oh, yeah, the rain! The flux of the river changes with the conditions, more water, less water, evaporation, mist ...

Cami: Would it be too much of a cosmological cake if I mentioned that for the Quechua the future is above and the past below?

Nico: More of a *pan*-cake, I would say.

Cami: Okay, but the mix becomes particularly interesting if you think about what Vine Deloria said about a spatially situated notion of history. History for the West occurs primarily on a temporal frame, even if that frame is metaphorized on a spatial surface like an arrow. Deloria contrasted it with his and other peoples' strongly spatial mode of thinking. Locations in native peoples' homelands have countless and multiple stories. And temporal knowlegdes are intrinsic to the landscapes, deeply specific, dealing with precise geographical formations, conditions, features, and rhythms.

Eric: So we don't have to stay only in the river anymore. Time is all around. Everywhere you look there is history.

Nico: But with different times at every location.

Eric: And different pasts are still happening. So a new act in the present can change the past.

Cami: Yes, the landscapes change, and I move through them, and make them while living through them. So if the past is not changing, I can turn to a different place. If what's inhabiting my view is a bad memory, if it makes my body heavy and sad, I can change my horizon. Walk to forget, say the Katxuyana.

Nico: Then you have it, huh?

Eric: What?

Nico: Your ending.

Cami: I don't get it.

Nico: Because if it's too soon for me to crawl, it's even sooner to walk. And, well, if I don't walk, I can't forget. I see it all.

Inspirations and further readings

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Camila de Caux is a writer, ethnologist, and parent, working around notions of corporeality and multiple ontologies, and their reverberations in political practices. Since 2010, she works with the Araweté ethnic group in the Brazilian Amazon.

Eric Macedo is a former Akademie Schloss Solitude fellow, anthropologist, and parent. His work deals with questions of difference and ethnocentrism, human-environment relations, colonialism and, more recently, with intersections between anthropology and science fiction.

Nico is their child.

Black Time

Fatin Abbas

In this essay, first published in *Kulturaustausch* magazine, Issue 4, 2022, Fatin Abbas reflects on our relationship with time: from the time crisis the pandemic created to how time is neither neutral nor objective and how our perceptions of time are shaped by myriad factors.

When I was a teenager growing up in New York, my friends and I would tease each other. When one of us arrived late to a gathering, we'd say, »You're on African time today.« Or »you're on Black time.« To be in Black time is to be unpunctual, slow, and unproductive. In the west, Black time is marked as deviant time. It's to violate an invisible norm: white time.

I've been thinking about this teenage joke in the context of the pandemic – a crisis that changed our relationship to time. Suddenly we were home, saving hours of commuting. Meetings, classes, events were canceled. Financial relief offered by governments opened up possibilities. There was time to rethink marriages and careers, to garden and bake and learn new languages. In spite of the havoc, there was hope that the pandemic might slow things down.

But for many, if not most people, the pandemic did the opposite: it created a time crisis. Especially for parents, those in the medical professions, essential workers, and working-class people, the COVID crisis set into relief another crisis that predated it: increasingly, we're expected to do more and more with less time and resources. Technology has only made things worse. Our time is continuously at risk of being hijacked with the ping of a text or an email notification.

The pandemic not only created a time crisis, though. It also coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement. This overlap isn't accidental, and also points to an overlooked link between time and discriminatory structures. Time is a double-edged sword, a tool used either to oppress or to set free. It's neither neutral nor objective, though we often treat it as such. Time is experienced, valued, deployed differently depending on culture, history, and political context.

Take Black time. That teenage joke has a basis in the fact that cultural conceptions of time vary enormously. I was born in Khartoum, Sudan, and have traveled between there and my adopted country, the United States, my whole life.

Switching between »American time« and »Sudanese time« is always a shock. In Sudan, people expect you to visit them not for one or two hours, but for seven or eight. Better yet if you spend the night (Sudanese living rooms are furnished with beds, partly to accommodate day visits that stretch into overnight stays).

After four or five hours of a social visit in Khartoum, I'm mentally thrashing my teeth, biting at the bit, ranting and raving in my head about how was it *possible* that these aunties of mine could think that I had all day to waste chit-chatting about nothing?

I have things to do! Deadlines to meet! And even if it's simply that I want time alone, I want time *alone* to rest so that tomorrow I can be more efficiently *productive*. For rest is only a means to more productivity.

It was only after years that I understood: in Khartoum, time is often used to create social bonds; it produces solidarity and community. In New York, time is used to produce things – primarily things for getting oneself ahead. This is not to romanticize Sudan, where the labor of hospitality falls on women: the cooking, cleaning, hosting that creates the conditions necessary for community (though communities everywhere are built on the labor of women).

But the dissonance between Sudanese and American time points to the fact that the »time« I was used to in the US, that I subscribed to as »right,« as normative, is rooted in a specific culture and economic system. I'll call it »white time.« White time is western capitalist time, understood as useful for producing material or intellectual goods for consumption. White time is linear, efficient, punctual, productive – for neoliberal capitalism.

The measurable seconds, minutes, hours that structure white time assume a linearity that is – for many Black people, people of color, formerly colonized people, queer people, any group shaped by histories of violence – an illusion. Black time is a joke, but it's also deadly serious. It's marked by layers of trauma: historical trauma of slavery and colonialism, out of which arises societal trauma of structural racism, out of which arises economic trauma of continued dispossession. Often, these overlapping traumas feed into familial or intimate trauma.

Time marked by trauma is warped. Past, present, and future blend together. That's why there's a ghost in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The dead baby comes back as the trauma of slavery haunting the Black mother, Sethe, in the present. Sethe escapes slavery. But she can't move into the future. How can she?

Time is not only shaped by trauma. It's also used to traumatize. The more oppressive an economic or political system is, the more compulsively it controls time. During the Holocaust, the Nazi dictum posted on the gates of concentration camps, »Arbeit macht frei,« was a disturbingly ironic statement about the way the Nazis controlled time to carry out the simultaneous objectives of exploiting and exterminating prisoners. Every second of the day was regulated and used up in labor. Prisoners often dropped dead. Concentration camps harnessed time as an instrument of torture. During the slave era, most field slaves were forced to work to the maximum (up to 18 hours during harvest season) and given minimum time to rest – just enough to ensure that they continued to be productive. Of course, countless people died.

As historian Caitlin C. Rosenthal has shown, time-intensive labor practices under slavery served as direct inspiration for modern business management practices. For instance, the »task« system, which was developed as a means of organizing slave labor (it required that each slave completed a minimum quota of »tasks« within an allotted time), was adapted by two founders of modern business management, Henry Laurence Gantt and Frederick Winslow Taylor.

This is not to equate late capitalism with slavery – workers are paid, even if badly, and they have rights, even if fewer and fewer – but it's useful to consider the links between these two systems. Today, accounts of Amazon warehouse workers having to pee in bottles because it takes too long to walk to the bathroom, in order not to miss the »fulfillment« demands of the company, point to the ways that capitalism keeps workers subject by controlling time. The »gig« economy that has become prevalent is built on paying workers little enough so that they have to work more and more (two, three, four gigs simultaneously). Time comes under the control of an ever-ruthless market. No room to rest, protest, or be creative. No time to challenge a system built on the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few.

But there are signs that people are fed up. During the pandemic, some of us experienced »slow time,« others a »time crisis,« and most of us got a taste of both – if in unequal doses. We've realized that our relationship to time can be different. Between January 2021 and February 2022, nearly 57 million Americans left their workplaces, a 25 percent increase from the same period before the pandemic; and the rest of the world is reflecting a similar trend. The »Great Resignation« is partly driven by the fact that people are tired of employers who exploit their time while paying them terribly for it.

Quitting one job for a slightly better one isn't enough, though. Younger people – millennials and Generation Z – are waking up to the fact that the upward mobility hustle is a time waste. Inflation is spiking, affordable housing is out of reach, the climate is going to hell. Those who ascribe »laziness« to these generations misread a shift in values: young people are realizing that there are more meaningful (rather than profitable) ways to spend their time.

It's also why emergent initiatives – such as a Universal Basic Income (UBI) – are more popular amongst the young. Basic Income is radical because it can liberate people not just from economic precarity, but from time deprivation. It gives time not only to the rich but to the poor, to mothers, to artists, to those who are working not for the profit of a corporation but for the public good. It can open up exactly those spaces for rest, protest, and creativity necessary for confronting the challenges we face – from climate change to white supremacy to the gig economy.

We should lay claim to Basic Income, to slow time, to any notions of time that challenge the logic of the market. That includes Black time. Because it's out of sync, Black time disrupts the »efficiency« of neoliberal capitalism. It reminds us that there are conceptions of temporality that exist outside the norm of white time. Black time registers the traumas that shape the histories of marginalized groups. In slowing things down, it makes space for solidarity and community.

By prying open these pockets of time, we can create new possibilities. We might even be able to get rid of an exploitative economic system altogether. As the author Ursula K. Le Guin says, »We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.« But that takes time.

Fatin Abbas is the author of *Ghost Season: A Novel*, out from W. W. Norton in the United States and Canada in 2023. Her fiction has appeared in *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing*, *Freeman's: The Best New Writing on Arrival* and *The Warwick Review*, amongst other places, and her nonfiction writing has appeared in publications including *Le Monde diplomatique*, *Zeit Online*, *The Nation*, and *Africa is a Country*.

Dis(Possession)

Nicolás Vizcaíno Sánchez

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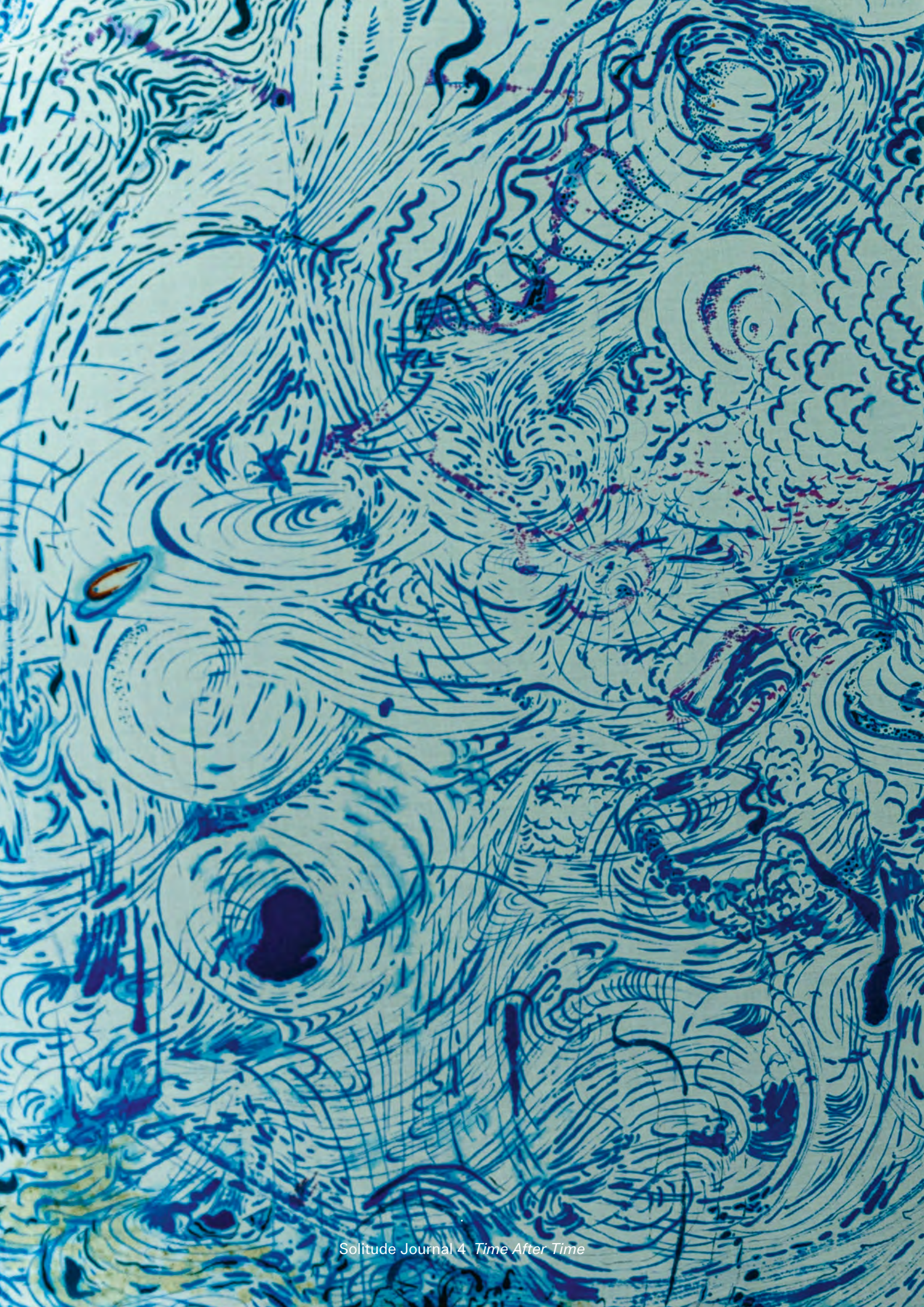
Solitude Journal 4 *Time After Time*



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Brother you say:¡Turn and return the stolen wealth! Sister you say:¡Turn and return the stolen dreams! Y el eco en este asilo ilustrado se vuelve elíptico. Vimos pasar el sord(id)o grito de una mujer, que en el justo ocaso de la monarquía, bailaba con un árbol, todo mundo en silencio (*secret sunrise* en solitude); y a la elipse la tajo una recta, como las de este parque que insisten en llamar bosque. Con la cabeza mía, en átomos volando bajo, hiciste de enredos caracoles. Era la coronación de Francia Márquez Mina, te ofrecí siete camarones. Debió ser por los untos que al cuarto entre dos veces, a la segunda, aturdida por el golpe, entré mareada. Me ofreciste agua en una tapa, y el consuelo que me habías dado antes lo convertí en lecho. Toda encerada en ese suelo seco, giré al sol sobre el alféizar y soñé un sueño pesado. Abelardo, ya menudo en sus últimas horas de sueño, se despertó pesado para su funeral. El cofre cargado entre seis pesó lo que pesa un árbol. María, en la apnea del sueño, nada junto a Obdulia y Librada en el lago de la memoria, por la fuente, Carlos y luego Emiliano, arriados cruzan mi cabeza, van doblados de la rasca en el lomo de sus caballos blancos. Acá otro tajo. Le digo yo al abuelo que esa espada de la república de las armas mejor se la lleve y así nos acorta el camino, Gabriel Orlando y Cristina nos estan esperando. Y me despido antes de que crean acá en esta colonia de artistas que yo soy abeja y vine a polinizar su fértil miseria.

(DIS)POSSESSION Despojo: diferentes mecanismos de expropiación que comprenden saqueos, confiscación y ventas bajo coacción, facilitadas por medios legales, extralegales (o ambos). Banu Karaca ha propuesto, más allá de los lentes de la tenencia de tierra y de la privación de derechos, conceptualizar el despojo como un proceso contradictorio que al mismo tiempo produce ausencia (pérdida) y presencia (redistribución). Esta redistribución (en el caso de las cosas, objetos, artes) no solo obscurece el contexto de donde estas emergen y las condiciones violentas bajo las cuales cambian de manos; sino que también crea redes complejas de beneficiarios y diferentes formas de implicación. De manera más amplia, el despojo fundamentalmente da forma a la producción de conocimiento y percepción de los objetos artísticos, así como a los contextos institucionales del mundo del arte, incluyendo los museos, las narrativas de la historia del arte y los archivos. Gracias Memory Biwa por el abrecaminos.

Nicolás Vizcaíno Sánchez, *Cría Fama*, Pacific Shark - Bogotá, 2022 (fotografías de Sergio Durán)

Brother you say: ¡Turn and return the stolen wealth! Sister you say: ¡Turn and return the stolen dreams! And the echo in this enlightenment asylum becomes elliptical. We saw pass the deaf cry of a woman, who in the fair twilight of the monarchy danced with a tree, everyone in silence (secret sunrise in solitude); and the ellipse was cut by a straight line, like the ones in this park that they insist on calling a forest. With my head, in atoms flying low, you made shells out of the tangles. It was the coronation of Francia Márquez Mina; I offered you seven shrimps. It must have been because of the untos that I entered the room twice, the second time, dazed by the blow, I entered dizzy. You offered me water in a lid, and the consolation you had given me before I turned it into a bed. All waxen on that dry floor, I turned to the sun on the sill and dreamed a heavy dream. Abelardo, already slight in his last hours of sleep, woke up heavy for his funeral. The casket, lifted between six, weighed what a tree weighs. Maria, in the apnea of sleep, swims with Obdulia and Librada in the lake of memory, by the fountain, Carlos and then Emiliano, arriados cross my head, they go wasted bending on the back of their white horses. Here is another chop. I tell grandpa that he'd better take the sword of the republic of arms with him and so he'll shorten our way, Gabriel Orlando and Cristina are waiting for us. And I say goodbye before they believe, here in this colony of artists, that I am a bee, and I came to pollinate their fertile misery.

(DIS)POSSESSION (Despojo): different mechanisms of expropriation comprising looting, confiscation, and sale under duress, facilitated by legal or extra-legal means (or both). Banu Karaca has proposed, beyond the lenses of land tenure and disenfranchisement, to conceptualize dispossession as a contradictory process that at the same time produces absence (loss) and presence (redistribution). This redistribution [in the case of things, objects, arts] not only obscures the context from which they emerge and the violent conditions under which they change hands; it also creates complex networks of beneficiaries and different forms of involvement. More broadly, dispossession fundamentally shapes the production of knowledge and perception of art objects, as well as the institutional contexts of the art world, including museums, art historical narratives, and archives. Thank you Memory Biwa for the abrecaminos.

Nicolás Vizcaíno Sánchez, *Cría Fama*, Pacific Shark Bogotá, 2022.
Photos: Sergio Durán

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Nicolás Vizcaíno Sánchez is an Afro-descendant artist based between Bogotá and Quibdó, Colombia, whose work spans multimedia installations, critical writing, editorial practice, and curatorial and socially engaged projects on the counternarratives that distort and fight hegemonic power structures.

What Endures?

Osborne Macharia, from the series *Kipipiri 4*, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.

Wanjeri Gakuru

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The Mau Mau grassroots anticolonial movement was a turning point in Kenyan resistance under and against violent British rule – which suppressed creative expression, independence, and thought. The British military state's documented atrocities have been withheld in various archives or destroyed, diminishing their accountability for such horrific acts. From that revolutionary moment and a cultural past often erased by colonial hegemony, Gakuru asks, what endures?

> The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community. Colonization usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility.
> —Albert Memmi.

Undoubtedly, Africa continues to live in the long shadows cast by the 1885 Berlin Conference. While the continent had experienced various European spheres of power and influence in the preceding years, this gathering made decisive changes to the autonomy of large territories and communities across the continent. It was motivated by capitalism but couched within a moral argument for »civilization.«

The avaricious colonial project was married with religion and a superiority complex that justified all actions. Consequently, in the 70-year period the mutable territory of Kenya fell under direct British rule, the rights and privileges of the Indigenous communities resembled that of *homo sacer*. This is a figure in Roman law understood as someone who can be killed without the killer being regarded as a murderer; a person so completely stripped of status and value that even their material form could not be used as a sacrifice.

This reduced view was most apparent between 1952 and 1960, when Governor Evelyn Baring declared a state of emergency in the Kenyan colony. Issued merely 14 days into his new posting, this directive sought to tame the guerilla-style insurgency of the Mau Mau, a grassroots anticolonial movement. While political organizations and trade unions had valiantly fought for the rights of ordinary non-African loyalists, all the lobbying, diplomacy, and incidents of civil disobedience were not enough to push the needle toward real change.

Least of which in the eyes of the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru communities, which had been pushed out of their fertile ancestral lands and forced to return as laborers on these same fields now owned by Europeans settlers. By 1948, 1.25 million Kikuyu had been restricted to just 2,000 square miles (5,200 square kilometers), while 30,000 settlers occupied 12,000 square

Osborne Macharia, from the series *Kipipiri 4*, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.

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miles (31,000 square kilometers). It was this quest for *ithaka na wiathi* (land and freedom) that led to retaliatory attacks on farmlands and administrative posts; against settlers and the tribal police who helped them.

The British response to the uprising was brutal. In 1953, a large-scale system called »The Pipeline« was developed to process suspected Mau Mau sympathizers and fighters. It shuttled prisoners through a network of more than 100 detention camps across the colony. And, used tactics such as starvation, electrocution, and mutilation to try and break their spirits.

In September 1955, an article written by British MP Barbara Castle appeared in UK socialist magazine *The Tribune*. She stated that »In the heart of the British Empire in Kenya there is a police state where the rule of law has broken down, where the murder, rape, and torture of Africans by Europeans goes unpunished, and where the authorities connive at its violation.«[1]
She wasn't wrong. There are reports of wanton abuse of power, sexual misconduct, and British officers getting a £5 reward for each Kikuyu killed, regardless of the circumstances. They just had to make sure to cut off the victim's hands for later identification. This underscores an insidious side of the British administration in Kenya; meticulous record keeping. A census conducted in 1960 revealed that more than 300,000 Kikuyu had been killed or could not be accounted for. One thousand and ninety were said to have been hung on mobile gallows that traversed the country. And, there is documented proof that several captured Mau Mau rebels were forced to appear as extras in the 1955 film *Simba* and executed three days after filming.
It comes as no surprise then, that within a year of the end of the state of emergency, a Colonial Office guidance on the disposal of classified records and accountable documents was made. Known as »Operation Legacy,« it involved colonial officers burning documents in incinerators and using weighted crates sunk offshore. What could not be destroyed was permanently hidden.

If it is indeed the victor who writes history and counts the dead, then how many continue to go unmourned?

Perhaps it was an observation that their eight-year season of carnage wouldn't auger well with the winds of change blowing across the continent. Germany had lost hold of Cameroon and Togo; Congo was taken back from the cruel Belgians, while Italy left Somalia and France had seen Madagascar, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Central African Republic, and Mauritania revert to its peoples. Ghana, another former British colony, had already achieved independence in 1957 amid the horrors happening to their East African neighbors.

It has emerged that a key principle of the Colonial Office guidance was that no documents were to be shared that might »embarrass Her Majesty's Government (HMG).«[2] In 1963, this meant 294 boxes containing 1,500 files were sent back to England even as Kisoi Munyao climbed Mount Kenya to bring down the Union Jack and hoist the Kenyan flag. In 2022, with the nonagenarian monarch's passing, this fierce bid to sanitize the image of HMG has manifested as virulent suppression of criticism through intimidation and arrest of protesters and media reports that gloss over exactly how (and why) the royal family has an estimated $28 billion fortune.

Those 294 boxes are now referred to as the »migrated archive,« and these documents are part of a horde sprawling across 79 feet of shelf space. They speak to life in 21 former British colonies. Requests to access the Kenyan documents were repeatedly denied from 1967 to 2006. It wasn't until 2011 when they were finally declassified following legal action taken against the British government by Mau Mau veterans.[3] After a long struggle, the government finally paid £19.9 million in compensation to more than 5,000 claimants.

Within that mountain of data, time stands still.

These records of attrition are damning, right down to the thousands of destruction certificates that confirm deliberate absences within the archive. If it is indeed the victor who writes history and counts the dead, then how many continue to go unmourned? These gaps in knowledge are unforgivable. Equally egregious are the erasures cultural imperialism wrought. To be fair, this onslaught began with early missionary work on the continent that demonised indigenous traditions and norms.

For instance, the Kikuyu refer to their creator God as *Ngai*. He created the first man, Gikuyu, and took him to the top of Mount Kirinyaga to show him all the land that belonged to him. When Gikuyu descended the mountain, he found his wife, Mumbi, waiting.

Osborne Macharia, from the series *Kipipiri 4*, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.

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Together, they had daughters who formed the nine Kikuyu tribes.

Ngai, like *Mulungu*, *Akuj*, *Were*, *Enkai* and *Nyasaye*; the creator Gods of various Kenyan communities, went through a process of inculturation. Stripped of power and potency, they are today largely understood as the local language terms for the Abrahamic God of Christianity rather than singular deities. Author Matthew Karangi shares how in 1930,[4] when a storm fell a *mugumo* tree (the Kikuyu consider the fig tree sacred), missionaries sent the trunk to Scotland where it was turned into a cross and returned to Kenya to be displayed in their church.

This obliteration of ethnic values extended to language and cultural production. In his book, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, longtime advocate for indigenous language literature, Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thing'o, reflected on the 1962 Makerere Writers' Conference. Attending as a student, he observed how the first agenda at this historic gathering dubbed a »Conference of African writers of English Expression was: *What is African Literature?*« How could that be understood when the group had excluded their colleagues who published in Kiswahili, Amharic, Yoruba, and many other indigenous languages?

This assertion of colonizer hegemony over African thought in critical and creative production is the result of eons of conditioning. It is what happens when social, economic, and political spaces reward proximity to whiteness.

Prof. Ngũgĩ wrote, »English, like French and Portuguese, was assumed to be the natural language of literary and even political mediation between African people in the same nation and between nations in Africa and other continents.«[5] This assertion of colonizer hegemony over African thought in critical and creative production is the result of eons of conditioning. It is what happens when social, economic, and political spaces reward proximity to whiteness. Little wonder why outside of the Bible and government communiqué, many Kenyan communities do not interact with their local languages in a meaningful literary fashion.

In 2016, Kenyan photographer Osbourne Macharia produced a series of striking images called *Kipipiri 4*. The project was a collaboration between Macharia and Kevo Abbra, Valary Mdeizi, Richard Kinyua, Corrine Muthoni, Jeffrey Onyango, Victor Ndalo, Jared Maina, and Joseph Kyule. Combining their skills in photography, hair, costume, make-up, illustration and more, the photographs told a mesmerizing fictional tale of a special unit of four women from a small village within Kipipiri Forest in the Aberdare National Park.

The women's hair was voluminous and fantastical. Bobo's strands held a route map to the Mau Mau caves and Chep smuggled knives and other blunt weapons in hers. Achi adapted hers to carry large baskets of food and Mwende made it so her hair amplified her voice tenfold. »For me, it was the women who played a role, but their story was forgotten or never told. The whole idea was to spark that conversation where people could actually share their stories, and feel that they are not forgotten,« Macharia explains of the work.[6]

Archival imaginaries such as these are necessary. While they are the product of a blend of fact, imagination and the deep puddles of enchantment in-between, who is to say the stories they tell could not exist? For years, Kamiti Prison and Detention Camp was known as the only internment center for Mau Mau women fighters and sympathizers. However, the 2011 migrated archive documents revealed a secret place called *Gitamayu* that operated between June 1958 and April 1959. It was set up as a satellite of Kamiti to facilitate the intensive »rehabilitation« of women deemed »hardcore«. According to a November 1958 report, the »noncooperatives« could be »easily identified by their refusal to speak except among themselves, and in some cases their pathological inability to walk.«[7] They suffered greatly but remained so deliberately disobedient that Gitamayu was eventually shut down and the women were transferred back to Kamiti.

In the novel *Dust*, Kenyan author Yvonne Owuor asks »What endures?« We do. We always do. We persist, we refuse to diminish ourselves and remain silent. We push for the reclamation of thousands of stolen artifacts and human remains. We publish PhD theses in isiXhosa and ChiShona. We tweet. We write songs. We dance. We endure.

Osborne Macharia, from the series *Kipipiri 4*, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.

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Wanjeri Gakuru is a freelance journalist, essayist, and filmmaker living and working in Nairobi. Her work is presently focused on nostalgia and the human condition.

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4 Matthew Muriuki Karangi: »Revisiting the Roots of an African Shrine: the Sacred Mugumo Tree: an Investigation of the Religion and Politics of the Gikuyu People in Kenya.« February 12, 2013.

5 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: »Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature.« London 1986, p. 6.

6 Josephine Opar: »Osborne Macharia on Honoring Kenya's Female Freedom Fighters with Opulent Hair,« in: *OkayAfrica*.

7 Katherine Bruce-Lockhart: »Unsound minds and broken bodies: the detention of hardcore Mau Mau women at Kamiti and Gitamayu Detention Camps in Kenya, 1954–1960,« in: *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2014.

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