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Ruinscapes and Subversion of Temporalities in *For the Mercy of Water*

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Abstract: *For the Mercy of Water* is the story of a writer travelling to an unnamed, abandoned countryside, in an imagined Global Southern country, to interview an old woman identified as "Mother" after the murder of the young girls by the water security guards of "the company." I examine *For the Mercy of Water*'s representation of exploited, marginal rural space as a 'ruinscape' that manifests the palimpsestic overlay between linear time, industrial time, colonialism, and neoliberal globalization. I use the term "ruinscape" in the literary imagination, not as imagery of damaged space, but as spatial representation of the negative social, economic, and environmental processes across historical periods that interpenetrate each other. I argue that the novel also presents an emergence of new potentialities by counter-hegemonic temporalities that reconceptualize the present moment as an ongoing accumulation of time and space, rather than a linear organization of resources.[1]

Keywords:

21st-century South African novel, Temporalities, Neoliberal globalization, Water wars, Ruinscape

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For the Mercy of Water Romanında Harabeleşme Alanları ve Zaman Deneyimlerinin Tahribatı

Öz: *For the Mercy of Water* (Suyun Merhametine), bir grup genç kızın "Şirket"in su güvenlik görevlileri tarafından öldürülmesi üzerine hayali bir Küresel Güney ülkesinde isimsiz ve terkedilmiş bir kasabaya "Anne" olarak adlandırılan yaşlı bir kadınla söyleşi yapmak üzere yola çıkan bir yazarın hikayesidir. *For the Mercy of Water*'daki sömürülen, marjinal kırsal alan temsilini doğrusal zaman, endüstriyel zaman, sömürgecilik ve neoliberal küreselleşme arasındaki tabakaları belirginleştiren bir 'harabeleşme alanı' (*ruinscape*) olarak incelemekteyim. Edebî tahayyüldeki 'harabeleşme alanı'nı bir zarar görmüş alan imgesi olarak değil de tarihsel periyodlar boyunca birbirinin içine geçen negatif sosyal, ekonomik ve çevresel süreçlerin mekansal bir temsili olarak kullanmaktayım. Aynı esnada, romanın şimdiki zamanı, doğrusal bir kaynak organizasyonundan çok, devam eden bir zaman ve mekân birikimi olarak tekrar kavramlaştıran hegemonya karşıtı zaman deneyimleriyle yeni olasılıkların doğuşu olarak gösterdiğini savunmaktayım.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

21. yüzyıl Güney Afrika romanı, Zaman deneyimleri, Neoliberal küreselleşme, Su savaşları, Harabeleşme alanı

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[1] This article is based on research conducted for my PhD thesis titled *The Temporalities of Ruinscapes in Twenty-First-Century South African Fiction*. 2023. University of Otago, PhD dissertation. The ideas and findings presented here are largely derived from that thesis.

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Introduction

Karen Jayes's novel *For the Mercy of Water* (2012) situates water distribution politics within the contexts of the imperial *longue durée*, the externalization of nature, the organization of time, and gender. Narrated by an unnamed woman, *For the Mercy of Water* tells the story of indigenous women living in a mostly abandoned, remote village in an imagined Global Southern country. The names of places, people, and organizations are omitted and replaced with placeholders. In this imagined countryside, the distribution rights of water are under "the company," which ultimately generates the region's systemic inequality by usurping the water sources from the indigenous people.

The novel opens with the narrator making her way to a rural site of recent upheaval. After experiencing years of drought, the people of the countryside have left for urban areas to restart their lives. Following a rainfall in one of those villages, security guards set out to secure the water for the company, only to discover that a group of young girls still live there. In the village's classroom, the guards sexually assault four young girls. Only Eve escapes to the city, after injuring her assailant. In the aftermath, "Mother," the village's elder who had cared for the young girls, is accompanied by a representative of an NGO, a male journalist, a doctor, and the PR representative for the company. The narrator, being a writer herself, wants to take this journey to write an imaginative work. On her way to the village, she is also assaulted by a company guard while her guide is asleep.

Upon arrival, the narrator meets Mother and listens to her story about the assaulted girls and the exploited village. While the PR representative denies the guards' criminal activities, the narrator undertakes a journey to find Eve in the city and return her to Mother. The narrator finds Eve in a detention facility and temporarily becomes her foster parent. Upon learning that one of the guards who assaulted the girls is still alive, the narrator tracks him down and helps Eve face her attacker. The novel portrays vengeful justice as a part of male oppressive systems, but Eve, despite her vulnerability and trauma, spares the guard's life and thus actively chooses not to be complicit in that system. At the end of the story, the narrator manages to return Eve to Mother.

I examine *For the Mercy of Water*'s representation of exploited, marginal-rural space as a 'ruinscape' that manifests the palimpsestic overlay between linear time, industrial time, colonialism, and neoliberal globalization. I use the term "ruinscape" in the literary imagination, not as imagery of damaged space, but as spatial representation of the

negative social, economic, and environmental processes across historical periods that interpenetrate each other. I argue that while the novel's ruinscape exposes the overflowing temporalities between colonialism and neoliberal globalization, it presents an emergence of new potentialities through the reconceptualization of the present moment as an ongoing accumulation of lived and perceived experiences of togetherness in the text.

Jayes portrays how temporal distancing justifies the exploitation of indigenous lands in the text. The text exhibits the liminality between colonial forms of oppression and neoliberal polity, as the company denies the local girls' assault by the company guards while seemingly supporting the locals through PR campaigns. The company PR portrays the struggle of the indigenous people over water as a cultural clash between the old and the new. The temporal arrangement of the countryside manufactures the 'disposable,' the act of which is a part of the imperial *longue durée* and neoliberal governance. In "The Racial Constitution of Neoliberalism," Arun Kundnani argues: "Race enables the limits to the universalisation of neoliberalism to be naturalised and dehistoricized: political opposition to market systems mounted by movements of the global South or racialized populations in the North is read by neoliberal ideology as no more than the acting out of cultures inherently lacking in traits of individualism and entrepreneurialism" (64). The neoliberal framework assumes the history of economic deregulation to be race-independent. Paradoxically, the same framework perceives the disenfranchized people of color who oppose neoliberalism as less rational economic subjects. The colonial power structures between the globalized spaces and the exploited enclosures are narrated as matters of time—specifically, of belatedness. The invisibility of such enclosures within the global society's conscious is consistent with the cheapening of nature, thus neoliberal polity. The narrator challenges the village's marginalization and dehumanization by engaging with its ruinscape.

The village's description as a ruinscape rather than an empty space reveals the entanglement of past, ongoing, and recent processes of ruination. The narrator presents the company through its wounds on the landscape, which stands next to the abandoned village houses. The dominant imagery of the unnamed village does not indicate remnants of a past, exploitative regime, but rather the persistence of one. Jayes's observational style and detail enable a mindful mode of reading that disturbs temporal distancing. Regarding the subversive quality of ruined spaces, Ann Laura Stoler argues that "To speak of colonial ruination is to trace the fragile and durable substance of signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empire are reactivated and remain" (11). Ruinscapes reveal the palimpsestic overlay of imperial formations within the politics of the present. The rural ruinscape of the novel subverts the hegemonic temporal arrangement, which justifies the village's exploitation by enabling an inspective approach toward time and space. The narrator's mindful engagement with the rural ruinscape produces what Elizabeth A. Bragg defines as the transpersonal self: "self is a social process but at the same time, the self encompasses all the liminal areas between universal, individual, and the

spiritual" (28). The narrator's engagement with the liminality of time and ruination invokes a similarly liminal understanding of self and the other. The narrator's careful investigation of the rural ruinscape creates a sense of coalition in the text.

The narrator's mindful engagement with the rural ruinscape makes her consider the geological time of the landscape, which introduces her to deeper and accumulative temporalities. The narrator's interaction with the spaces that are infused with the indigenous locals' trauma stimulates a sense of existential unity through temporal means: The present as an ongoing accumulation of collective lived experiences positions the narrator as a part of a growing whole, rather than an isolated subject in front of an ahistorical background. As opposed to the linear timeframe that paves the way for the externalization of nature, this "interdependent present" produces a coalition across time and space that perceives the self through the other, thus challenging the profit incentive behind the male-dominated hubris in the story. If a linear timeframe is a conceptual instrument for the organization of labor and trade, it is also an ideological tool to naturalize the denial of coevalness, rendering the exploitation of nature invisible through temporal distancing of the dispossessed other. The narrator's relationship with the present is a slow unfolding of a lived experience that is both an end result and an ongoing process. Through this double movement, the reader witnesses the narrator becoming a part of the village and the dispossessed women's struggle, which she takes on out of a strong sense of interdependency rather than duty.

The title *For the Mercy of Water* implies a temporal formation against the systems that justify the dehumanization of the other for capital extraction. If water is linked to mercy, then there is an implication of trauma; in the novel, water attracts imperial patriarchy, which is mostly represented by the company and the guards. The enclosed spaces of globalism are also marked by the persisting temporality of trauma. Meanwhile, water is also metaphorically positioned as a source of healing, hence the term mercy. When running, water carries marks and residues of what it passes over and through in its chemistry, along with the new interconnections. What I call 'moving with,' or what Donna J. Haraway calls "ongoingness," implies a willing encounter with the traumatized self, a duration that "resists processing," as trauma involves a frozen moment that repeats itself and will not let go of the present (Haraway 101). This encounter externalizes the trauma and releases the subject from "an eternal present, consigns her or his experiences to the past and opens up the future again" (West-Pavlov 107). The eternal present is dissolved only after processing, which requires facing the traumatized moment, and therefore the past self. In the linear organization of time, the self is expected to remove itself from the past as a distinct subject, but the subject is not able to do so, as it feels imprisoned by the self in a spectral, transient present. In this collision, the time and place of trauma are reconfigured. This does not mean that a trace of the trauma does not linger, but rather that the subject regains their agency from the imprisoning transient present. The novel defines the notion of mercy as a regaining of "here and now" against a void present. The

organization of time that is in favor of the accumulation imperative can justify the externalization of nature.

Temporal Distancing: Time and Justification of the Village's Exploitation

Time can also be conceptualized as an organization of resources. Also, time as an organizational tool can depoliticize the externalization of nature. Because time itself is invisible, it can present itself as irrelevant to cultural structures that inform socio-political imaginaries. Matthew Eatough argues that "Cultural forms are historical agents in environment-making, not merely reflective of re-organizations of capitalist nature, but co-productive of them" (111). The relationship between the accumulation imperative and time 'is' an organization of nature itself. The ways one perceives, imagines, and acts in the present do not simply reflect hegemonic systems, but in fact, constitute and support dominant ideologies. Therefore, the study of temporalities is also the study of hegemonic ideologies and practices. According to Jason W. Moore, capitalism advances an epistemic rift "in our understanding of how human organizations are embedded in nature" (601). This separation between nature and society is instrumental in recreating cheap natures while maximizing profit/labor efficiency: "Nature as an external tap and sap" (Moore 601). In this context, time loses both its ground in lived experiences and its body, what Barbara Adam calls "the creation of a non-temporal time" (66). Once time becomes interchangeable with money, it becomes a measuring device, devoid of life and decontextualized from its content. Jayes's use of placeholder names, rather than actual names, makes it easier to identify the agents that externalize and cheapen nature in the novel.

The narrator's choice of utilizing nominal placeholders reflects the faceless, replaceable, and dehumanizing character of institutions and characters that deny coevalness, such as "the company," "Doctor," and "NGO." Jayes chooses not to name most of the characters or institutions in the novel, except for the girls.[2] "The company" is a nominal placeholder for the neoliberal economy. "Doctor" who works in the "NGO" does not portray any form of resistance to the company, despite her knowledge of the social dynamics within the region. The lack of names in the novel reflects how the empire perceives itself outside of history. This relationship between the political economy and the 'tap-and-sap' mentality is either rendered invisible or justified through epistemic displacements. The doctor justifies the company's practices by saying, "The company needs to secure the water in order to ensure that the country survives, that we survive" (Jayes 68). The doctor's security narrative cloaks the company's business interests, and she adds a nationalistic angle to her point: "There are other countries who want the water now, our water, and we need to secure it to gain leverage with them… The water war has started here and it will spill over and into the whole world" (68). Doctor's use of "our" is

[2] The narrator assures everyone in the story that the people in her testimony will be anonymous. However, Eve insists that her name stays in the text. This is the narrator's creative rationale for using place-holders for names.

a form of reductionism that mystifies the conflict between nature and corporatism. During her dialogue with the narrator, Doctor resorts to deflection to avoid culpability: "You drink the water from the company and you bath in it and you flush your toilet with it" (67). Doctor equates having to use the resource that has been usurped by the company with being complicit in the company's systemic exploitation. Her accusation seemingly recognizes what water constitutes but obscures the company's role in its exploitation.

Temporal othering is another form of dehumanization that relies on the notion of linear progressive time to rationalize colonialism. The journalist at the village confirms to the narrator that the company resorts to essentialism to justify their violence: "You know the line: the violence is 'deeply rooted in their history', that they are riding on a 'tradition of non-payment' and of 'entitlement that's just unworkable in today's economy'" (54). In a linear timeframe, the local is perceived as traditional and therefore has a lesser status (Ferguson 178). The company's temporal discourse is able to dislocate the indigenous people from the present and pushes them out to the moral periphery, as the indigenous people and the company do not have the same visibility or power in constituting the present. "Tradition" implies belatedness, and the phrase "tradition of non-payment" portrays the right to access safe water as an outlandish entitlement. Ironically, the true entitlement lies in the ability to decide who belongs to the "here and now;" the phrase "today's economy" is already charged with a suggestion of belatedness, as the stress on "today" produces a binary between the speaker's "now" and an imagined "then." Even the idea of arguing against the exploitation of the company implies being out of time, what Johannes Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness": "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (Fabian 31). The temporal terms define the other's proximity to dehumanization and accordingly enable the other's displacement. The denial of coevalness serves as an intellectual and cultural basis for the justification of colonialism. Whether during the peak of early colonialism or later neoliberalism, the praxis of accumulation through domination relies heavily on oppressive cultural systems that justify the violence inflicted on the other.

After the narrator arrives at the periphery of the village, she follows the waterway to find the village center: "The town must have been cloaked in a fog of heat so thick that it had been invisible, because I came upon it without warning, through a sheet of watery air as if I had walked through a mirage" (Jayes 25). The stress on invisibility through the use of the words "cloak," "fog," "invisible," "a sheet of watery air," and "mirage" emphasizes the obfuscation of the zone and contributes to the invisibility of the village. The narrator later admits her blindness to the village's water scarcity after the independent journalist from the village informs her that the reason for the problem's invisibility is because the city gets water first (56). The narrator's description of the area continues:

> There were three buildings. They had no doors, and the spaces inside the old frames held the thick dark of the departed. In the corners and along the tops of the walls, they were crumbling. . . . It was the first time I had seen such a place, where the company had been and gone, where the face of defeat was set in all its wan peace, in all its blank, stifling present. (25)

The stress on the village's invisibility is repeated, but this time the narration's focus is on the spaces themselves, which are likened to frames that hold the absence of a presence. What the space holds is the absence of what has departed. However, that absence is described as a "thick dark." The narrator fleshes out what is normally perceived as "empty" by descriptions such as "a thick dark" and "a sheet of watery air." Breathing becomes physical contact with something other than air. The contrast between what-could-have-been and what-now-is is visceral and almost tangible. The company "had been and gone," yet the ruination that is infused by the company's remnants governs the here and now of the scene. The exploitation is shown to be a persisting process, rather than a one-off event. The present moment of the passage is accentuated by the company's non-presence, which echoes Leila Dawney's reverberations of materiality: "The afterlives of infrastructure endure both in their material remains and the affective and experiential modes through which those whose lives were shaped by their promise make sense and meaning in the present" (407). The legacy of the company as an exploitative agent is highlighted even more by its present lack of presence. The ruinscape does not imply a change in the power dynamic, however, and the company and what it entails lingers on. Upon seeing the desolate, abandoned town, the narrator historicizes ruined spaces:

> I thought how for others, towns like these are simply ruins, 'sleepy' places where there is only a mysterious forgetfulness, a sameness that has no answer for anything and offers only the next second and the previous one, all of which resemble each other as if twined together by some invisible cord, and this cord is the only tremulous fragment that remains of a force they call time. (Jayes 25–26)

Ruinscapes without history are objects of a fetishizing gaze. Ruins are not described as reflective spaces, but as decontextualized ruins that would evoke daydreaming and imagination in the spectator. The stress on "sleepy," "forgetfulness," and "sameness," highlights the erasure of memory, decontextualization, and invisibility to the system that the company represents. As an invisible chord, time vibrates and thus temporalizes space and makes the ruinscape perceptible to the narrator. The cultural device that Rob Nixon describes as the "invention of emptiness" categorizes time and space as exploitable and generates invisibility for environmental ruination (165). The lack of imagination leads to forgetfulness as well as a rhetorical justification of exploitation. Emptiness as a rhetorical device for the externalization of nature assumes under-development and therefore implies a reorganization of a particular space and its human and non-human inhabitants. The concept of "empty" justifies the hubristic order of the deregulation of the economy.

Ruinscape as Temporalization of Spectralized Lives: Re-Conceptualization of Time and Self

In *For The Mercy of Water*, Jayes exposes the imperial within the Anthropocene through her mindful description of the landscape and exposition of temporalities. The narrator's microscopic depiction of her interaction with her surroundings draws the reader in by focusing on the sharp details that are deemed unimportant, or "empty" in Nixonian terms. Jayes anchors the reader's present moment by immersing them in the details of the moments when the narrator carefully inspects her connections between the human and nonhuman. Through these connections, she realizes both her and the other's historicity manifesting within the present and highlights the visibility of the imperial *durée* within the present moment.

As the narrator gets closer to the unnamed village, she stumbles upon a material remnant of the company from its older operations: "And then I found a rusted metal sign lying in the ground half buried, and I read the word 'Glacier' and some numbers and very old dates. I realised that I had been walking on the scar of a glacier that had once run through the valley, and the sign must have been written by geologists or tourist people in the days when such signs were made" (Jayes 24). The half-buried signpost bears the mark of an investment that is no more, as the measurement and historical data on the signpost reveal a use-value approach toward nature. The glacier's dry texture is the lingering material consequence of this approach. In other words, the glacier and its surroundings were left without a future, leaving only a "stifling present" (25). Walking on a "scar" of a glacier implies an inflicted condition rather than an outcome of a temporal cycle.

While the narrator continues her observation of the village's peripheral landscape, she notices spatial features that imply deeper temporalities than the company's inflicted damage there: "The scratches where plants and grasses erupted and gather were the marks of ancient ice and stone fragments carried over centuries from the mountains, in a time when the water had been plentiful and had run deep" (24). Unlike the rusty, half-buried signpost, which points towards an industrial activity, the landscape is marked with deeper, "ancient" temporalities. The temporal signifiers of nature are highlighted and rendered stronger with long-term transformations "over centuries." There is also a reference to a time when the extractive blueprint was not present, an era whose water was "plentiful" and would "run deep." In both of the above passages, temporal terms convey that the company is responsible for the scarcity of water. As time not only organizes everyday life but also shapes thought, the invisible toxicity of the imperial *longue durée* can be grasped by understanding time's role in nature's externalization, which can reveal forms of ongoing ruination that usually escape the senses. Jayes compares two temporalities: the first is a duration of extraction whose presence is marked by its absence, while the second is an ancient temporality that spans beyond human interaction. The company's blueprint on the landscape highlights the looming presence of exploitation. The ruinous nature of the glacier site does not suggest a phase

that is long gone. The active absence of the company in the region is due to resource depletion. The "scars" of glaciers, like the abandoned infrastructures, carry their legacies even when they are dead. At the same time, this ruinscape does not suggest a time of melancholy:

> The water they drank was hidden, the blood of a glacial memory held within thin veins and underground, watery batholiths. I walked like this, on the glacial pavement, until something made me look up. Coming from the mountains in a straight line, thin and muddied and tender as an infant vein, was a river. . . .
>
> It was only about five metres wide, but already had pushed a deep enough path in the earth to form small waves in the middle, and the waves caught the sun and gave off sparks of light, brighter and sharper than stars. (Jayes 24)

The ancient temporality of the water is given flesh with the vein and blood metaphors. Despite the exploitative nature of the company, the resource is still pumping with life. The narrator's observation of a thin vein of the river is described almost as a magical moment, as the river might be only five meters wide, but it is wide enough to create sparkles that rejoice and give hope to the observer. The sense of hope is strengthened with the infant metaphor.

The narrator does not lament the loss of the former water sources and instead forms a connection with the fresh source of water and moves along with it. Despite the warning from the company that natural water sources are not safe to drink, she decides to fill her bottle: "Instead I knelt down and I put my hands in it, and I moved them in front of me in wide circles, and I felt the silken body that is water push open the spaces between my fingers, and the pillows of coolness swelled and softened and pushed against my palms and it was gentler than a fleshy hand but heavier and more certain than air" (Jayes 24). The detailed description of a tangible connection between the narrator's hands and the body of water presents a moment of mutual pull and push. Where the borders of the narrator's body end, there opens up a connection to the nonhuman. As the narrator pushes her hands down, water covers up the back of her hands as if she is going through a moment of symbiosis. The body of water is not external to the narrator, rather it is a part of her. Time significantly slows down in the narrator's depiction of the moment she shares with the nonhuman. The slow and immersive nature of the narrator's gaze helps the reader recognize the imperial *longue durée* in the flowing rhythm of the everyday. The form of any gaze produces its temporality, and the practice of the "slow seeing," as Ashleigh Harris puts it, historicizes the looker's temporality and enables them to recognize themselves as a part of a collective experience (131). The narrator's inspective gaze subverts time from what is understood as a series of passing moments to a process of realization of interdependency.

The Emergence of New Temporal Formations and Response-ability Through the Rural Ruinscape

The village and the indigenous women are temporally and spatially distanced from visibility. The spatio-temporal distancing numbs the other characters' urge to respond, since as Ayşe Çağlar argues, "Perspectives based on a denial of coevalness prevent us from seeing the experiences, norms, and values migrants and natives share" (qtd. in Barber and Lem 29). Time as a series of passing points is intrinsic to the externalization of nature and labor relations. As I have discussed in the previous section, the inspective gaze of the narrator helps her to notice the connections between distant spaces and times in relation to the *longue durée*. I argue that Jayes's slow, inspective gaze towards the present moment enables a temporal formation that incentivizes a connection between human and non-human life forms. The self is perceived not as an outside agent, but as integral to the other. The historical compounds that constitute the collective moment actualize themselves through transpersonal temporalities. I call this temporality, which disrupts the nature and society binaries, "the interdependent present."

As the name suggests, the interdependent present is the temporality of co-existence. The narrator connects herself, the landscape, Mother, and the girls through moments of acknowledgment. Through such moments, time thickens and paves the way for introspection through the (human or non-human) other. This is the production of the present as interdependency. The interdependent present would require conceptualizing time not as an organizational tool, but as a cumulative assemblage of heterogeneous moments that inform each other. The accumulative quality of the interdependent present implies that the present is not perceived in a vacuum. The present moment is understood as an ongoing and building process where the individual is made up of human and nonhuman others.

Chthulucene[3] is Haraway's response to the Anthropocene discourse, with a focus on ongoing becoming between human and non-human systems that figure humans as not the only important actors in the ecosystem. This intermesh of systems enables a more conscious form of togetherness that empowers proactive autonomy for the other. Haraway explains that the term is a compound of two Greek roots: *Kainos* means "now as a fresh beginning," and *Chthonic* refers to being related to Earth. The temporality of *Kainos* rejects the linear organization of time, a "now" that does not disregard the past. Therefore, just like the glaciers the narrator walks upon, *Chthonic* both refers to what has been and what is now, "the temporality of the thick, fibrous, and lumpy 'now,' which is ancient and not" (206). She describes *Kainos* as a "sense of thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae[4] infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities" (2). Chthulucene resists the

[3] The name is similar to H. P. Lovecraft's "Cthulu" monster, but Haraway openly rejects the association for being misogynistic and racialized (Haraway 101). That is why it is spelled differently.

[4] Filaments.

Anthropocene by dropping "self-making" and replacing it with what Haraway calls a "sym-poiesis," or "making with," re-imagining humans as a part of the non-human, as opposed to the externalization of it (58). This way, the urgency of the other becomes the urgency of the self. In the novel, Jayes uses the motif of water to create a temporality that is parallel to Haraway's conceptualization of the Chthonic present as a thick, accumulative, ongoing, and ancient-yet-also-momentary temporal genre.

Water forms the temporal connection between Mother, Eve, the village, and the narrator. The narrator's "leaks," the dried-out glaciers, and the "liquefied" village are the marks of erasure that a human and nonhuman coalition faces in the text. Water also represents a gathering and flowing temporality. There is a sense of accumulated lived experience that does not obstruct the flow of time. A body of water is always at once accumulated and an immediate present that either grows or diminishes. In other words, the text portrays water as an anti-temporality to linear time, similar to *Kainos*. Water expands the narrator's here and now from the immediacy of her surroundings and enables her to perceive herself as a part of the girls' collective temporalities.

Water serves as a spatio-temporal agent that generates the interdependent present which is experienced by the narrator. The pool in the cave where the girls were murdered provides an accumulated consciousness that transfers itself to the narrator upon her contact. After hearing Mother's testimony, the narrator finds the cave where the girls were murdered by the company guards. She squeezes through the narrow cave entrance and proceeds until she finds the chamber with a sunlit pool in the middle of it. The pool reminds her of the girls and the assault, but she decides to step in nonetheless. After a few steps, she loses her footing and dives deep inside: "Under the water, I could only see nearness: this and that, and now. Down there, the water made shapes from solid forms. But there were also tiny dust particles that turned and caught the sun, and they travelled through the water like tiny universes of light" (Jayes 146). Being deep in the water is marked with proximity and immediate temporality, near and now. This is a "now" that evolves and forms as the water shapes even the solid forms it interacts with. The present moment under the water is non-linear, and therefore unpredictable; under the sunlight, even the tiny particles that float around turn out to be universes within themselves. There is no hierarchical chain of being. The accumulation of all the elements in the pool governs the "here and now" in coexistence.

By falling into the pool, the narrator is thus introduced to a different temporal regime, and she goes through an epiphany of a coalition between herself, the girls, Mother, the continent, and nature itself: "I walked on and I turned around. I saw the rock I had slipped on was dark brown. The blood was old but still wet, and it covered the rock with the shape of the first continent. It was on me, on my hands and on my feet, and I saw down in it, and through my tears, the whole cave went red" (Jayes 147). The wetness of the old blood is a temporal marker for the imperial *longue durée*. The long temporality of the violence also carries a sense of immediacy. The narrator witnesses the nonlinear present

of co-existence by slipping on the blood-stained rock. In a way, the rock's wetness as an implication of reverberated damage pushes her to a state of entanglement in shared ruination. Within this entanglement, there is the rock that resembles the continent of Africa, the blood of the girls, and the narrator who is connected with all these experiences through the physicality and memory of water. The narrator's tears and the blood of the girls refer to distinct traumas, but they interact and inform each other, thus the pool turns red with the narrator's tears.

The narrator's symbiotic engagement with the indigenous girls' experiences through the cave enables what Arne Naess calls the "ecological self" (2021). Naess argues that an understanding of the self that constructs itself through nature is required. If the self is external to nature, then its exploitation of it is justified on an epistemological level. If the self is integral to nature, then the ecological struggle becomes a struggle for oneself: "Early in life, the social *self* is sufficiently developed so that we do not prefer to eat a big cake alone. . . . Now is the time to share with all life on our maltreated earth by deepening our identification with all life-forms…" (Naess 28). If the social self is the consciousness that the individual does not exist in a vacuum, the ecological self is the realization of the interdependency between human and nonhuman agencies. According to Bruno Latour, "To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but *to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy*"[5] (5). For Latour, subjectivity is actualized through sharing agency. Both Naess and Latour stress imagining the self as a shared interdependency. In *For the Mercy of Water*, the narrator's inspective engagement with geography and geographical temporalities inspires her to actualize herself through the experiences of the exploited indigenous women. By positioning her temporal experience as a part of an accumulative collective process, the narrator forms an existential unity with the human and nonhuman other. Similar to Haraway's Chthuluscene, the temporal formation of the present in the cave invites the narrator to entangle her experience to the village's. Thus, the interdependent present sets the temporal basis for response-ability for the narrator to act for the village as if her own life is under threat.

Conclusion

The discovery of the interdependent present has no short-term, direct effect on the presence of the company. At the very end of the story, the narrator manages to bring Eve back to Mother, and the company agrees to provide free water to the village for Eve's silence. However, near the end of the novel, the narrator *imagines* it is raining after she is done with her quest: "I thought about the rivers that poured down now from the old gorges and peeled away the dead plants and carried the patient, pregnant seeds to root again in the flesh" (Jayes 379). Imagining the rain upon Eve's return implies regaining the

[5] Latour challenges the idea that nature operates objectively as if it is without human agency, and therefore humans have control over their autonomy.

ability to imagine forward. The old gorges that refer to structures are filled with fresh water, and the old plants are being peeled away and replaced by seeds. Despite the company's persistent activities, a cyclical, and therefore dynamic, temporality is underlined, as opposed to the imprisoning present of the spectralized village.

The imperial *longue durée* is centered upon the externalization of nature, which is justified and made invisible through temporal forms of distancing and othering. As time formulates the organization of labor and the thought systems that govern it, the way that time is conceptualized affects how the self is imagined across the past and the present. The novel disrupts the cultural logic of *longue durée* by offering different temporal regime that illuminates the connections between the human and non-human, the past, and the present.

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