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Longue durée and durée
profonde

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Longue durée

But Magic would not tarry / It moves from arm
to arm ... / It cannot come to harm / It rests in an
empty palm / It spawns in an empty mind / But
Magic is no instrument / Magic is the end

Buffy Sainte-Marie & Leonard Cohen

Wandering and wondering along the transi-
tional, liminal zones of contact and contingency
between the landmass of Eastern Africa and
the Indian Ocean, it becomes difficult to ignore
the fact that longue durée must be thought of in

terms of both time and space. The complex tem-
poral dimensions of longue durée encompass
always dynamic and often contradictory conti-
nuities that extend from the very first years that
hominins, including homo sapiens, emerged
up until the present and into the future when,
after centuries of demographic catastrophe due
to the trade in the enslaved, the epicenter of the
world's population will continue to move ever
more rapidly back to Africa. The complex spatial
dimensions of longue durée encompass always
dynamic and often contradictory continuities
that extend across rainforests, mountains,
deserts and oceans, none of which ever really

constituted significant barriers for our wandering landborne and waterborne ancestors. Stretching all the way to the shores of the Americas across the Afro-Atlantic to the west, and all the way to the shores of the Americas across the Indo-Pacific to the east, these connections, which also embody disruptions, defy the linear, artificially constrained, hierarchical, monolithic, monodirectional and monocausal assumptions that underpin the colonial gaze of Western science in general and Western linguistics in particular; with our privileging of a dead monolithic, idealized langue/competence over multiplex, real, living parole/performance; with our obsession with abstract Eurocentric notions about language masquerading as 'universals'; with our family tree models that fetishize varieties spoken by armies and hordes of conquering men; with our mission to impose a colonizing order and control over otherwise indeterminate configurations of repertoires by erecting non-existent boundaries between artificially reified individual 'languages' and, by even more dubious extension, between corresponding and equally artificially reified individual 'cultures,' 'ethnicities,' 'identities,' etc.

Up until now, most of those who have adopted a perspective that takes into account *longue durée* have argued that we must begin to consider historical contexts and influences which extend hundreds of years further into the past than is normally the case. In this contribution, I argue that it is only when we radically extend our notions of *longue durée* from only hundreds to several hundreds of thousands of years into the past that we can start to make real sense out of the present and begin to envision fulfilling futures for all. As human beings, we have been wandering and wondering over both land and water on this planet

for at least 300,000 years, but it is only in the past 10,000 years or so, and beginning only in a few societies, that we have 'gotten stuck' (Horvath & Szakolczai, 2017; Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). But what does it mean to 'get stuck'? One way to understand this is through the lens of wandering and wondering. When we turned our backs on wandering, instead of continuing to claim boundless life-seeking sovereignty in and with the entire world, we started to cling to addictive and death-seeking illusions of control, stability and ownership over enclosed, commodified parcels of territory and fetishized 'goods'. As is the nature of addictive things, these 'goods' promise fulfillment, but only deliver the illusion of momentary satisfaction and the thirst for more. When we turned our backs on wondering, instead of continuing to embrace and engage with the world with boundless life-seeking curiosity and astonishment, we started to lose faith in our own epistemic, creative and moral sovereignty. Instead, we became addictively enslaved to the words of 'experts'; first to priests, then academics/scientists and now to 'influencers' on our 'smart' devices and their seductively deceptive artifice of formulating neatly enclosed, hierarchically ordered, commodified death-seeking theories of what is true, what is beautiful, what is normal, and what is good, none in our own image and interests, but instead in the image and interests of domination, which, like a cancer, ultimately serves no-one and nothing but itself. As is the nature of addictive things, these theories promise fulfillment of our need to understand the world, but only deliver the illusion of understanding in the form of simplistic explanations for multiplex phenomena and the thirst for more 'silver bullets' and 'theories of everything'.

For most of our ancestors, the process of getting stuck began only in the last few thousand years, as it gradually transmogrified into waves of conquest and colonialism that have now infected every corner of our world like a virus, slowly but inexorably strangling its host, both colonizer and colonized. Colonialism, in its broadest sense (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, & von Werlhof, 1988) can be seen as a many-headed hydra with its inextricably intertwined and co-substantial heads, none of which can be said to have preceded the other, but none of which can be intensified and made more violently normative and ruinously exclusive without making all of the others more violently normative and ruinously exclusive. These predatory and ruinous, yet completely artificial, heads are many, and include: the insatiable head of plunder, whose latest transfiguration is corporate global capitalism; the inhospitable head of ethnocentrism, whose latest transfiguration is racism and anti-immigrant hysteria; the cruel head of patriarchy, whose latest transfiguration is cis-hetero-sexism; the suicidal head of anthropocentrism whose latest transfiguration is climate change denial, and no doubt others.

One of the lessons of the radical reading of *longue durée* that I propose here is that this monster, with all of its very real and disastrous consequences in our lived realities, has no power and reality outside of our faith in it (von Werlhof, 2001). This monster did not always exist, as we are endlessly told by those whose job it is to convince us that power does not dwell in our own hands, but instead somewhere else. Domination and ruination is not the way it has always been, the way it is, and the way it will always be. If this were so, we would have vanished from the face of the earth long,

long ago. Power is not over there or elsewhere. It is right here in us and in the rhizomatic life-giving networks that we establish and nurture among us, which can be understood, as 'utu' or 'durée profonde' (see below). The enclosure and colonization of our subsistence base, our bodies, our minds, our communities, and our language practices only acquires its false power to the extent that we refuse to acknowledge, claim and exercise the real sovereign powers that, up until quite recently, were enjoyed by all of our ancestors.

The 'experts' tell us that we are not all scientists, capable of perceiving and understanding our reality and working with it to live fulfilling lives as individuals and as communities. And they have done such a thorough job of convincing us that we need someone else to tell us what is real, that millions of people are now committing suicide by refusing to be vaccinated against COVID, even though they see the unvaccinated dying right in front of their eyes, all because they have blindly accepted the 'expert' advice of the right-wing conspiracy theorists whose sensationalist voices dominate the social media. At the same time, corporate-sponsored 'influencers' and bots are lulling us into complacency in our false, yet addictive comfort zones to commit collective suicide by denying climate change (if not in our thoughts and words, at least in our actions), even as the polar ice caps melt. The 'experts' tell us that we are not poets and artists. And they have done such a thorough job of convincing us that we need someone else to tell us what is creative and beautiful, that we surrender our awesome poetic powers over language and life to the superstars whose words, art and music are purposefully designed to reduce us to consumers of commodified 'culture'

The date had endured.

This Thursday was the 60th birthday of the Date.

had grown in those 60 years,

thus preventing us from becoming the cultural agents that all human beings have been for most of our history on earth. The 'experts' have done such a thorough job of convincing us that we need someone else to tell us what is good, that hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people throughout the world have now surrendered their spiritual lives and moral compasses to the deeply corrupt and immoral hands of profiteering charlatans whose fundamentalist versions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism are saturated with ideologies of domination and hatred toward nature and all who are gendered as minus cis-hetero-male, raced as minus 'us', and classed as minus 'blessed' (read 'wealthy').

Linguists and other scientists in the Western tradition have played a key role in bringing about this apocalyptic state of affairs that is now threatening our very existence on the planet through ever-growing disparities in wealth, accelerating levels of terror, conflict and violence, and increasingly irreversible ecocide. It is no accident that our theoretical linguistics and our theoretical science are based on the worldview of Plato and his disciples, a philosophy that was selected among the dozens of philosophical traditions of Ancient Greece as the optimal hegemonic device to justify and weaponize its transformation from a collection of islands and adjacent coastlines into an empire. A philosophy that denies the reality of our physically and socially embodied everyday experience in favor of a universal, hierarchically ordered, monolithic, eternal, unchangeable 'realer' reality that exists in a realm to which only a class of 'experts' has access, has proved to be maximally effective in transforming all but the chosen few from creators of science,

philosophy, art, spirituality and politics into passive consumers, reliant on and addicted to the authority of 'experts'.

By positioning ourselves and/ or allowing ourselves to be positioned as 'experts' on language, we as linguists have wittingly and/ or unwittingly usurped and enclosed the epistemic sovereignty to determine what is linguistically real, true, normal and good which was enjoyed by all of our ancestors as part of our commons for all but the last few thousand years of the 300,000 year long *durée* of human history. While we trivialize and dismiss the work of those linguists who actually let living language speak to them, we glorify the work of so-called 'serious' theorists whose ultimate goal is to enclose real language by forcing it into a preconceived theoretical framework designed to predict and control it, thereby reducing it to a supposed 'realer' universal system that exists somewhere in an idealized Platonic world, beyond the reach of all but us, the initiates with higher degrees in Linguistics. In the process, we not only kill language, but we also extinguish humanity's powers over the 'awesome materiality' of language (Foucault, 1970), allowing that awesome materiality to be used against us instead, in the interests of domination.

The ruined places, times and lives left behind by a few thousand years of hegemonic attempts by 'experts' to domesticate and control our ways of thinking, speaking and acting in the world are now to be found strewn across the globe, following wave after wave of colonial invasion and conquest. But among the regions where it is least possible to pretend under the colonial gaze that there are unitary languages, cultures and identities are those places which have emerged for one reason or another as salient examples of the intense contact

among genetic, linguistic, cultural, ethnic and epistemic repertoires that the study of ancient DNA has revealed to have been the rule rather than the exception for humanity virtually everywhere and always (Reich, 2018). One such region is the southern coast of Kenya along the vibrant waterborne corridor of exchange that we have come to know as the Indian Ocean. Because contact and exchange have been so intense here, the results have been even more difficult and resistant than usual for us to enclose and domesticate in our theoretical straightjackets and neat categories. As one moves from the original sites dedicated to coercive enslavement (such as slave market networks and slave raiding trajectories) and the original sites dedicated to discursive enslavement (networks and trajectories of Christian and Islamic religious and educational indoctrination), one witnesses an astonishing and wonderful array of multiplex, pluri-directional, pluri-causal, contradictory, palimpsestic, criss-crossing influences and trans-performative repertoires.

As I wander and wonder as a newcomer from Shimoni to Bamburi and from Mombasa to Kinango, I somehow feel at home, resonating deeply with years of previous experience in Nigeria to the west and Melanesia to the east. At the same time, however, I have come to astoundingly new understandings of how the people along the coast of the Indian Ocean in East Africa make sense of their long and deep experience of contact on the one hand, and of colonization the other, sometimes as separate phenomena and sometimes as part of the same set of circumstances. I have therefore become intensely aware of what a new world this place is for me and how much I have to learn from my experiences here.

Durée profonde

This I mean my mind to serve 'til / Service is but
Magic / Moving through the world / And mind
itself is Magic / Coursing through the flesh /
And flesh itself is Magic / Dancing on a clock /
And time itself the magic length of God

Buffy Sainte-Marie & Leonard Cohen

My intellectual encounters with people from the coast of Kenya before I arrived here began with discussions about *utu*, which might be roughly defined as 'humanity' in repertoires that include what has been categorized by linguists as 'KiSwahili', (Brühwiler, personal communication; Brühwiler & Hollington, forthcoming). These discussions of *utu* helped me to articulate understandings gifted to me by Indigenous peoples in West Africa, the South Pacific and the Americas concerning the life-seeking knowledges, practices and sovereignties that have kept us alive and fulfilled as human beings from the first days that we began to wander the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago, and which will continue to keep us alive and fulfilled until the last step that we will take here.

Utu refers at least in part to what makes us sovereign beings, that is, a deep acknowledgement of the fact that real power lies within ourselves as well as in our relationships with others, an understanding that resonates with Édouard Glissant's (1990) reconceptualization of Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) notion of the rhizome to account for the mangrove-like multiplex configurations of linguistic, cultural and identificational repertoires in the Caribbean, where I have been based for the past two decades. While wandering along the southern

coast of Kenya, it becomes immediately evident that mangrove forests have played a key role in making this zone a hospitable place for humans to survive and thrive despite the presence of salt water, which we cannot drink; sand, which we cannot cultivate; and violent storms coming from the sea, which might carry us and our communities away. While floating through the mangroves on the estuaries between Diani and Tiwi, I was reminded of how the rhizomatic image of a mangrove forest is used in Puerto Rico and the rest of Caribbean to remind us that we are more than just entities (or particles), but also relationships (or waves), and these relationships extend in all possible directions (even upward), to link us inextricably with others in unpredictable ways, so that it is impossible to determine where one mangrove begins and the other ends, or which mangrove has given rise to any other mangrove, thus defying linear notions of time, place and causality and commodified notions of separateness and individuality.

In Diani to the south of Mombasa and Bamburi to the north, as well as in the other areas along the Kenyan coast most impacted by the tourism industry, this life-seeking landscape has been substantially ruined by the destruction of the mangroves and the erection of walls surrounding individual plots of land to exclude access to them. This physical violence and commodification inflicted on a coastline is strikingly similar to the discursive violence and commodification that Western science has inflicted on notions of language, culture, and identity, removing them from their rhizomatic and life-giving matrix of entanglements in order to isolate instances of a singular artificially reified monolithic language, a singular artificially reified monolithic culture, a singular artificially reified monolithic identity. To make

things worse, we as linguists inflict further violence on language, draining it of its living, life-seeking and life-giving powers by performing a monstrous set of alchemical practices on it (von Werlhof, 2001), analytically 'burning' it until it is dead, in order to break it down into its 'essences' or neatly defined categories, binary features, etc. Once we have sufficiently tortured and dissected language, we proceed to use our completely disembodied theories to recombine those essences into a purportedly universal economy of artificial units and processes that are supposed to represent what language 'really' is in the abstract, Platonic realm of mathematical and formal logic, manifested as 'sufficiently constrained' syntactic tree models of 'Universal' Grammar, Optimality tables purposefully constructed according to explicitly violent principles such as 'constraint hierarchies' and 'domination', etc.

I had arrived on the coast of Kenya to take part in an event concerning *longue durée*, during which my colleague Angelika Mietzner approached Johnson Mwanzia, a graphic artist from a bit further inland and asked him to depict in the form of a painting what he understood to be the meaning of *udumu*, which in KiSwahili dictionaries appears to be the word that might best correspond to *longue durée*. In any case, what Mwanzia decided to paint was a montage of many of the most important life-giving things that, paraphrasing his words, 'are already here when we are born and which will still be here when we die'. At the center of the painting, the viewer's eye is immediately drawn to a woman carrying a child on her back. Alongside the sun, the moon, and the earth, Mwanzia painted a range of interconnected images depicting a range of activities. All of these activities were related to the commons and the

knowledges and practices that we learn, mostly from our mothers and grandmothers, which enable us to deal creatively and resourcefully with contingency and to look after the commons while we make use of it to live healthy and fulfilling lives, that is, which enable us to practice *subsistence*, as this term has been radically reconceptualized by Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999), not as the primitiveness and scarcity associated with it in hegemonic discourse. In addition to tasks related to our physical subsistence, such as caring for water sources and fetching water and caring for and cultivating the land, Mwanzia represented activities related to our social subsistence, such as service and sharing.

The notion of service articulates to some degree what we do to deal with collective contingency in our day to day lives, thus allowing ourselves to establish, maintain and extend our rhizomatic networks of relationships and intermingling with ever expanding configurations of people, families, communities and their linguistic, cultural and identificational repertoires. Because we have been wandering and mixing for so much of our time on this planet, and because the success of our species has depended so crucially on our ability to hospitably share and cooperate in the face of contingency, the knowledges and practices which enable us to provide service to one another, which are prototypically associated with and learned from our relationships with our mothers, grandmothers and other female relations, have become just as important as our physical bodies in making us who we are.

Thus *utu* and *udumu* can also be seen as the body of knowledges and practices linked to our physically and socially embodied subsistence that have always and will always make it

possible for us, not only to survive by dealing with contingency, but to thrive. These knowledges and practices differ from one time to another and one place to another, but because they are inclusive, hospitable, life-seeking and life-giving they are systematically erased, ignored and trivialized by the exclusionary, death-seeking systems of domination. Because they are based on sharing and service, they are erased, ignored and trivialized by capitalism and other systems of accumulation and plunder. Because they are based on openness and networking, they are erased, ignored and trivialized by racism and other forms of chauvinism and ethnocentrism. Because they are taught to us by our mothers and other female relatives, they are erased, ignored and trivialized by sexism and other forms of patriarchy. Because they are based on custodianship of our natural commons, they are erased, ignored and trivialized by ecocidal notions of 'development' and other forms of anthropocentrism.

From the most recently and least colonized indigenous peoples whose ancestral subsistence base is still largely intact in places where I have lived, such as Futuna in Vanuatu, all the way to the most thoroughly and deeply colonized places where I have lived, such as Los Angeles in the USA, what equips people to deal with contingency and keeps them alive and creating life, even in the midst of the most death-seeking system, are the rich, deep, thick knowledges and practices exemplified by *utu* and *udumu*. It is these physically and socially embodied lifeways that make it possible for all of us to do what is most important and fulfilling in life, yet we normally do not acknowledge or valorize them. For example, the labor that most women do to keep all of us healthy and happy, is rarely even seen as labor at all,

and definitely not compensated as such. And what does this have to do with linguistics? Everything. According to the hierarchical, mono-causal family tree model which predominates in historical linguistics, the languages of the conquered women in the Roman Empire have been erased, ignored and trivialized in relation to the Latin spoken by the conquering soldiers who fathered their children. According to Chomsky's theory of 'poverty of the stimulus' which predominates in language acquisition studies, or Bickerton's Bioprogram and similar Universalist theories in creolistics, the years that mothers and other female relatives spend in teaching us language have been erased, ignored and trivialized in relation to the workings of a hierarchical and monolithic Universal Grammar in the child's brain.

In her collaborative work with Indigenous Talwa people to imagine and practice a decolonial form of archaeology in the study of mounds as monumental architecture in relation to the concept of *longue durée* in the South-east of what is now the USA, Lee Bloch (2018) makes a number of observations that are of direct relevance to Western science in general and to Western linguistics in particular. Bloch first problematizes the notion of *longue durée* in light of Indigenous understandings of immanent/contingent time and immanent/contingent space: "whereas the concept of a *longue durée* is generally imagined as a linear path within progressive time, Indigenous *longue durées* are emergent in recursive returns" (p. xxv). She also attempts to articulate how these non-linear and non-progressive understandings of time and space might be conceptualized: "Seemingly distant places and times begin to fold within one another; past moments reach out and grab hold of the present as Talwa

people find ways of making life within ancestral materialities." (p. 25). Bloch sees these distinctions in understandings of time and space as being reflected in the distinction between Indigenous life-seeking sciences and worldviews and the death-seeking sciences and worldviews of colonial systems of domination and their obsession with commodification and control over knowledge: "At the crux of my understanding of mounds is animacy and vitality in movement and transformation. To be animate is to resist being fixed into categorical certainties" (p. 33). Finally, Bloch connects this reconceptualization of *longue durée* with a rhizomatic foregrounding of hospitableness, service, sharing and the embrace of contingency, reminiscent of *utu* and *udumu*: "the histories of mounds remain unfinished; their futures are far from foreclosed. [...] These places actively draw Talwa people into relationships of exchange and mutual care." (p. 3).

Because conceptualizations of *longue durée* have typically replicated linear and evolutionary notions of time which are exclusively focused on the very brief and recent period in human history that has unfolded since we have 'gotten stuck' in the trap of systems of domination, and because these conceptualizations have effectively erased, ignored and trivialized *utu*, *udumu* and the other knowledges and practices that have made any form of *longue durée* possible for our species in the first place, our discussions about our experiences on the southern coast of Kenya ended up either complementing mention of *longue durée* with mention of *durée profonde* (or 'deep *durée*') or replaced the former by the latter altogether. In any case, when we speak of *utu*, *udumu* and the physically and socially embodied knowledges that allow us to creatively engage with

contingency and live fulfilling lives, *durée profonde* has proved thus far to be a much richer, thicker and more satisfying formulation. The notion of thickness is useful here, not only because it can encapsulate dynamic and multiplex entanglements across space and time, but also because it goes beyond such notions as Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of the 'thick present' to more fully incorporate Indigenous space-times and subsistence knowledges and practices in ways that recognize that we do not have to start from ground zero or resort to further colonizing monstrosities such as the cyborg in the process of healing our sciences and healing ourselves.

Going beyond our helpful, but still Eurocentric understandings of *kairos* (as opposed to *chronos*), *durée profonde*, like dark matter and dark energy, constitutes the matrix in which we seek, find and create life, wherever we are: be it in an Indigenous community which still lives in the abundance of subsistence, be it in communities such as Kinango, where climate change-induced drought has brought people to the brink of starvation; be it in communities such as Tiwi, where the enclosure and invasion of traditional land by corporate and private interests linked to a ruinous tourism industry has made subsistence farming virtually impossible; be it in the marketplaces of Mombasa, where female control over food and distribution ensure that all of the townspeople have something to eat, be it in the industrial neighborhoods of Nairobi, where people struggle, but manage, to get by. *Durée profonde* is the thousand-and-one things that all of us everywhere do every day to embrace contingency, survive and thrive, despite the odds stacked against us by death-seeking systems of colonization that are ruining our lives. *Durée profonde* is the deep reservoir of

knowledges and practices, of sharing and service, that have been gifted to us as part of the commons, which we have been conditioned not to acknowledge consciously, but which guarantee that we make it to the next day. Once we begin to become conscious of the deep, rich, thick life-giving and life-seeking matrix of *durée profonde* by beginning to undo its erasure and invisibilization, not only can we begin the process of re-membering and reclaiming the sovereignties enjoyed by all of our ancestors over the *longue durée* of human existence on the earth, but we can also come to the realization that we have a strong foundation in our day-to-day practice upon which we can build to make the world a better place to live.

Each of the contributions in this work speaks to the multiplex relationships between language, connections, contingency, *longue durée* and *durée profonde* in its own unique way. Enjoy!

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Between charcoal and flatland.

Between beginning and forever was exhaustion and hope,