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The coloniality of time in the global justice debate: de-centring Western linear temporality

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ABSTRACT

Differences between, and struggles over, plural forms of time and temporal categories is a crucial yet underexplored aspect of debates about global justice. This article aims to reorient the global justice debate towards the question of time by, first of all, critically problematising the coloniality of the Western temporal assumptions underlying the literature, and furthermore by stressing the need to account for the plurality of time. I argue that in the global justice debate, the implicitly racialised teleological narrative of linear time is particularly prevalent in the discourse on development as well as the debate on historical injustices. In order to avoid the epistemic violence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of Western temporal frameworks as universally valid, global normative theorising needs to move reflections on time to the centre of their considerations. This article suggests that relational theory offers pertinent resources for making sense of alternative ways of narrating, conceptualising, and experiencing temporality. The article encourages a conversation between Western and non-Western relational approaches, proposing the temporal dimension of feminist as well as African *ubuntu* thought as particularly promising starting points for contesting the epistemological privilege of analytic approaches dominating the global justice literature.

1. Introduction

Contemporary theories of global politics and justice are deeply rooted in the resources of the Western political imaginary, of which Western time is a crucial aspect. Academic fields that contribute to global normative theorising, such as international political theory and International Relations, have begun to make more central reflections on time as 'a theoretical tool and political phenomenon in its own right' (Hom 2018, 305; see also Hutchings 2008; Agathangelou and Killian 2016; Hom et al. 2016; Rao 2020). As Kimberly Hutchings notes, thinking through time allows us to see the ways in which temporal assumptions influence the analysis, interpretation, and normative judgement of (world) politics (2008, 4). Generally speaking, however, global justice scholars within contemporary

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moral and political philosophy tend not to identify time as an object of analysis in itself, but privilege spatial over temporal considerations. Common contributions to the field of global justice focus on questions around the expansion of the scope of moral concern from fellow nationals to all humanity, the (spatial) redistribution of resources from the Global North to the Global South and the negotiation between local, national, and global levels of political organisation, to name but a few examples. Differences between, and struggles over, plural time frames and temporal categories, or, as Charles Mills has put it, 'chronopolitical conflicts', are a crucial yet underexplored aspect of mainstream accounts of global justice (Mills 2014, 2020).

The central aim of this article is to reorient the global justice debate in the Western academy towards the question of time. Doing so, I argue, is necessary in order to critically problematise the dominance of the Western linear temporal framework underlying the literature as well as to avoid the reproduction of problematic ontological assumptions and unquestioned epistemic privileges aligned with knowledge- and norm-entrepreneurs in the Global North. The general lack of attention towards time as it operates within theories of global justice is particularly problematic insofar as it obscures the false universalism of the Western temporal imaginary. As Oumar Ba has recently argued, 'global justice' is a racialised discourse, which is why we need more scholarship making visible the many ways in which coloniality manifests itself in contemporary global normative theorising (Ba 2021; see also Mills 2015; Bell 2019). Furthermore, I propose feminist relational theory and African *ubuntu* thought as resourceful starting points for critically engaging with the plurality of time and temporality in the global justice debate. Relational theory offers pertinent conceptual frameworks for making sense of alternative ways of narrating, conceptualising, and experiencing temporality in a way that resists the preproduction of the persistent coloniality in Western linear assumptions about time.

The first three sections of this article address the 'coloniality of time' that is prevalent in liberal theories of global justice. By viewing the conceptualisation of time in the Western academy as deeply 'caught and woven into the imaginary of the modern/colonial world-system', we can begin to understand the urgency of challenging the dominant way of thinking about time in the global justice debate (Mignolo 2011, 152). The colonisation of time, a process within which the time of the European colonisers was institutionalised as 'the Greenwich Mean Time of normativity', created a discourse of otherness through time that helped to construct the racial and cultural inferiority of non-Europeans as well as the marginalisation and suppression of non-European ways of narrating and relating to time (Mills 2014, 27). I argue that the inattentiveness to the problem of time and how it operates within theories of justice can be seen as linked to the relative absence of debates on colonial exploitation and racial oppression within liberal approaches to global justice. In this context, a critical examination of the ways in which the academic debates to which scholars based in the Global North contribute are based on problematic temporal commitments such as progress, development, and linearity must be a fundamental aspect of good academic practice.

Decolonising the global justice literature, I argue, does not only entail a critical problematisation of the Western temporal narrative, but also requires the creation of space for an appreciation of marginalised temporalities and temporal categories. The last two sections of this article therefore turn to two examples of relational thought that offer conceptual resources that are more receptive to and can account for non-linear modes of temporality. First, I explore feminist relational theory as a pertinent way of engaging

with time, looking specifically at the notions of temporal vulnerability and relational remembering. I argue that feminist relational thought is uniquely qualified for foregrounding layers of normatively salient temporal relationships that are otherwise missed in the normative frameworks of analytic approaches dominating global justice debates. Lastly, I discuss African *ubuntu* thought as a particularly promising starting point for de-centring and pluralising the dominant Western temporal imaginary. The article ends with a call for a sustained engagement with further non-Western theories of time and temporality.

2. The coloniality of time in the global justice debate

In order to analyse and explain world political developments, institutions, and structures, Western academics tend to employ a Eurocentric, unitary narrative of political time that problematically conflates Western political time with world-political time, which is 'the time of liberal capitalist states and the globalisation of capitalism' (Hutchings 2008, 159). By assuming the Western trajectory of political time to be the only available and comprehensible temporal framework, the Western narrative of time renders the idea of an alternative temporal perspective on world politics 'literally unintelligible' (Hutchings 2008, 159). While 'the illusion that the Western code is the only game in town' might have been broken in some aspects of Western epistemic hegemony, temporal narratives like progress, development, and linearity continue to persist as the unquestioned base of many theories of politics and justice (Mignolo 2011, xvii). What is more, the very subject of time as an object or dimension of analysis itself is marginalised by dominant Western temporal assumptions such as time as 'a neutral medium and measure', as 'universally the same' and seemingly unaffected by cultural and historical contexts (Hutchings 2008, 6). Even the debates within the global justice literature that do have a clear temporal orientation, such as the literature on historical injustices and intergenerational justice, often fail to critically engage with the temporal assumptions underlying their interventions. When conceptualising ethical and political obligations towards past and future generations, these debates employ temporal narratives that are rarely explicitly discussed (see Nuti 2019).

This is an attitude that is especially worrisome for global normative theorising, since this area of academic thinking often appeals to the universal scope and validity of its claims. Feminist, queer, post- and decolonial thinkers have drawn attention to the epistemic violence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of Western temporal frameworks as universally valid, such as the inferiorisation, neglect, and silencing of alternative temporal framings and of non-Western histories and experiences (see Spivak 1988; Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2011; Rao 2020). The ignorance towards the problem of time can be understood to be symptomatic of a wider phenomenon of underestimating the lack of epistemological and ontological diversity in the global justice debate. As scholars have pointed out, the absence of a truly global debate in the global justice literature adds to the epistemic marginalisation of non-Western knowledges and ways of being in the world (see Graness 2015; Masaka 2017; Okeja 2017; Shapcott 2018; Watene 2020).

What is more, the absence of a critical engagement with the question of time and temporality conceals the racial dimension of time in Western political philosophy in general and in dominant Rawlsian theories of justice in particular. As Mills has discussed, the temporal narrative underlying the dominant discourse on justice is really a 'White temporal

imaginary' (Hanchard 1999; Mills 2014, 29). As a central voice in discussions of race and racism in contemporary political philosophy and normative political theory, Mills is particularly critical of ideal theory and its appeal to abstract universals (Mills 1997; Mills 2015). The whiteness of the temporality underlying the literature, he argues, is concealed by the 'putative atemporality' and alleged 'postraciality' of philosophy: 'dealing as it ostensibly does with the (timeless) human condition as such, philosophy can boast it was postracial through being aracial, while never conceding it was ever racial' (Mills 2014, 32). For Mills, this purported timelessness and racelessness is the core of white time, that is, a temporality in which whiteness functions as an abstract, universal norm and ideal that is never explicitly problematised. The occlusion of the question of time, then, can be seen as part of what Mills calls the 'epistemology of ignorance', that is, the inability to notice systemic racial subordination and a resulting disregard for the unjust histories of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery (Mills 1997). Indeed, as I will show in the discussion below, the Western narrative of time was and continues to be a central instrument in the creation and reproduction of othering of non-Western temporal cultures and non-white producers of knowledge. Instead of taking time as a given, the ongoing challenge of the decolonisation of global normative debates must therefore entail the de-centring of white epistemic authority by contextualising white Western temporalities within the broader dynamics of colonial modernity.

The pervasive, enduring epistemic traces of the colonial experience have been conceptualised as the coloniality of knowledge, which refers to the unequal distribution of epistemic respect 'in a way that both reflects and reproduces empire' (Alcoff 2007, 83). The marginalisation and silencing of non-European ways of seeing the world was a crucial instrument of colonial governance. By sanctioning Indigenous knowledge practices, imposing Eurocentric curricula, restricting access to educational institutions, and destroying Indigenous archives, the possibility of thinking beyond Western ontologies and colonial dominance became severely limited, which in turn facilitated the epistemic dominance of the epistemological and ontological paradigm of the coloniser. Due to its construction of a 'myth of universality', the European or Western culture of knowledge production came to be seen as the neutral norm of orientation for the development of knowledge in general (Grosfoguel 2013, 76; Mignolo 2011, xvi).

Time is a prime example of the coloniality of knowledge, since the uncritical employment of white, Western time in academic discourses of the Global North can be understood as a central facet in the ongoing socio-cultural legacies of colonialism. Parallel to the colonisation of space, the colonisation of time began in the sixteenth and seventeenth century through the imposition of Western temporal rituals and routines and the silencing and negation of Indigenous, non-European temporalities, and temporal narratives (see Nguyen 1992; Donaldson 1996; Perkins 2001; Nanni 2012; Ogle 2015). For European missionaries, settlers, and colonial officials, time was used as an essential tool for evangelisation, colonial domination, and capitalist exploitation. Non-linear ways of temporal knowing and of experiencing time prevalent in, for example, Hindu cosmology, Australian aboriginal thought, and many Indigenous cultures of the Americas, were perceived as threatening the colonisers' attitudes towards work, order, and productivity which relied heavily on the 'synchronisation of labour rhythms and meshing of industrial timetables' (Nanni 2012, 4). Colonial temporal domination also functioned as an instrument for 'controlling knowledge' and creating epistemic colonial difference (Mignolo 2011, 161). This

was particularly the case for the project of Christianising and 'civilising' colonised people, which heavily relied on the suppression of competing modes of temporal practice in order to impose European temporal rituals and routines, such as the seven-day week and the Sabbath day, that would save the colonised for 'the kingdom of heaven' (Nanni 2012, 3).

To be sure, the colonisation of time unfolded with different degrees and in response to localised circumstances and did not proceed uncontested (see Donaldson 1996; Perkins 1998; Ogle 2015). Scholars argue that time was not only an instrument of colonial power and domination, but also functioned as 'a tool for Indigenous resistance and cultural negotiation' (Nanni 2011, 5; Rifkin 2017). The resilience of both Indigenous culture and of time-consciousness, however, does not contradict the argument that the colonisation of time was very successful in narrowing the range of conceivable alternatives to the modern temporal imaginary. At the height of the colonial era, the official deployment of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in 1884 constituted 'the most patent manifestation of the intimate connection of time with Empire', since it aimed to replace diverse local times with a centralised and standardised notion of time that effectively made colonial Britain the temporal centre of the world (Perkins 2001, 19; Nanni 2011, 6). This 'grandiloquent gesture of temporal imperialism' culminated in the definite end of toleration of competing modes of temporal practice and perception and consolidated Western epistemic hegemony (Nanni 2011, 6). According to Mignolo, time should therefore be seen as 'a fundamental concept of coloniality at large', in the sense that the reproduction of the modern notion of time is intimately connected to colonial systems of oppression (Mignolo 2011, 152).

3. Racialised temporal othering

The gradual universalisation of Western time as the global standard can be seen as having institutionalised the 'temporalization of difference', as time played a powerful discursive role in constructing the notion of temporal Otherness (Freeman 2010; Ogle 2015, 7; Rifkin 2017). As Walter Mignolo has noted, the way in which non-European people were classified as 'Other' gradually changed during colonial modernity, as the subaltern position of 'the barbarian' was increasingly replaced by 'the primitive', who was located in time, rather than space (Mignolo 2011, 152). Arguably, the logic of coloniality bases its othering of racialised, non-European people on a specific temporal, rather than spatial, imaginary. In the 'chronopolitical discourse of empire', Eurocentric metanarratives such as the Western temporal framework played a key role in the characterisation of the colonised as racially, culturally, and epistemically inferior (Mills 2020, 307). Indigenous systems for structuring, communicating, and ordering time, if at all recognised, were interpreted as 'crude and primitive systems compared to the clock' (Perkins 1998, 338). Non-European peoples were characterised as having no complex conceptualisations of time, no understanding of time and thus being 'outside' of time, in the sense of being 'time-less' (Attwood 1989; Perkins 1998; Nanni 2012, 7). Non-Western peoples were stigmatised and racialised regarding working habits and time management skills, as colonial capitalist ideology created the myth of the lazy native (see Alatas 1977; Donaldson 1996). Western epistemic arrogance in the form of temporal certainties about punctuality and progress continues to be one of the ways in which non-Western cultures are marked as inferior. A prevalent example is the racist construction of what is commonly called 'African

time', an idea that conceptualises African temporal alterity on the basis of allegedly impre-
cise use of time (Masolo 1994; Lauer 2013). The prevalent coloniality in the association of
Black people, People of Colour, and Indigenous people with inferior temporalities high-
lights the close connection between ideologies of whiteness, white supremacy, and
Western temporal ideas (Rifkin 2017; Mills 2020).

The supposedly collective and cultural disregard for time came to be associated with
more general levels of evolution and historical development. Western notions of linear
historical and naturalised evolutionary time lend themselves to relegating non-Western
peoples to the time of 'catching up', as Europeans came to associate their alleged
'failure to keep time with an inability to keep up with time' (Nanni 2012, 10). Under the
colonisers' master narrative of time, the colonised were positioned in 'an anterior stage
in the history of the species, in this unidirectional path' and thus imagined as inferior late-
comers, backwards, and as vestiges of the past (Chakrabarty 2000; Lugones 2007, 192).
This openly racialised dimension of the Western temporal narrative features consistently
in the writings of prominent Western thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Voltaire,
Kant, Mill, and Hegel, describing non-Western cultures and societies as prehistorical
and ahistorical, uncivilised, immature, and stuck in premodern development (Tibebu
2011; Mills 2014, 30). Epistemologically, the temporal othering that implies the segre-
gation between moderns and 'primitives' (or 'pre-moderns') also mapped onto their
alleged (in)ability to produce generalisable knowledge of the contemporary world.
Writing about common characterisations of 'traditional' societies, Mbembe notes that
'in contrast to reason in the West, myth and fable are seen as what, in such societies,
denote order and time … Caught in a relation of pure immediacy to the world and to
themselves, such societies are incapable of uttering the universal' (Mbembe 2001, 4).
This kind of dehumanising developmentalist racism was used to justify and legitimise
colonial conquest, imperial domination, and missionary projects, and arguably still fea-
tures implicitly, albeit in modified form, in contemporary academic debates (Bhambra
2007; Fabian 2014; Rifkin 2017).

One example of the persistent coloniality of Western temporal assumptions in the
global justice debate specifically can be found within the discourse of development.
Emerging as the primary response to global poverty, the narrative of 'development' is pre-
mised, sometimes quite explicitly, other times implicitly, on the teleological framework of
progressivism. These academic literatures and policy discourses have, from the 1960s
onwards, been framed almost entirely in terms of a 'developmentalism' that urges
moving from an impoverished, undeveloped past towards a new and improved future,
guided, of course, by Western models of economic development (Escobar 1995;
Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Rutazibwa 2018; McEwan 2019; Pailey 2019). The pervasive, see-
mingly universal idea of progress underlying much Western political theory positions
the West as the ultimate point of reference and reproduces the racialised temporal hier-
archy by constructing the temporal inferiority of the non-West (see Hutchings 2008; Allen
2017). From this perspective, the notion that states or peoples 'progress' through linear
historical stages from 'underdeveloped' to 'developed', categories which arguably func-
tion to replace the previous racialised terms of 'primitive' and 'civilized', is highly proble-
matic (Mills 2014, 2020). Furthermore, the practice of universalising racialised Western
temporal assumptions that reproduce the asynchrony between the West and 'the rest'
serves to obscure the histories of colonial exploitation and racial oppression responsible

for 'the unadmitted temporal connections between Global North wealth and Global South poverty that would make them synchronous developmental/underdevelopmental times' (Rodney 2018; Mills 2020, 312). Many of the central ideas about global justice, such as the idea of the human right to development or the narrative of redistributive justice, have been formed and influenced by this prevailing developmentalism that is based on racialised temporal assumptions which are almost never acknowledged.

4. The epistemic devaluation of the past

Another related aspect of the coloniality of time in the global justice debate that has received considerably less attention is the problematic epistemic devaluation of the past in the Western teleological narrative of linear time. In the Western temporal framework, the present is imagined as the temporal anchor from which the relation to some broader temporal narrative can be made sense of, 'an orientation that is only possible if it is assumed that the present can be demarcated from past and future' (Hutchings 2008, 155). While the future holds 'the capacity for fulguration, for irruption, for explosion, for revelation' as well as the promise of progress, the past is banished into relative insignificance as having mere 'documentary value' (Santos 2014, 74). By implicitly conceptualising the past and present as a hierarchical binary, the linear progressivist conception of time epistemically devalues the past as the realm of the 'primitive Other'. Similar to the how the past is imagined as a detached, static object of study that is 'experienced and conceptualised as not inhabiting the present' (Nuti 2019, 21), the Other is also 'denied coevalness' (Fabian 2014). In the Eurocentric imaginary of modernity, modern Europe was established as the present by creating the 'otherness of the past and the past of the other', temporally displacing racially inferior or sexually deviant people outside of the present (Mignolo 2011, 6). This delinking of the past from the present lends itself to the construction of a demarcation of the identities of the coloniser and the colonised, as well as the West and the non-West.

The colonial temporal domination included the imposition of this delinking between the past and the present as the exclusive mode in which a society should relate to the past. As Maureen Perkins has noted, European colonial discourse interpreted an alleged confusion about the distinctions between the past and the present among Indigenous peoples as a complete unawareness of time (Perkins 2001, 16). The devaluation of the past as the realm of the colonised reproduces coloniality by rejecting the past as a site of experience (Vázquez 2009). By dismissing the past as the realm of the colonised, the Western temporal framework accorded the present the problematic status as the 'only site of the real' (Vázquez 2009). This led to the marginalisation of alternative, non-Western forms of experiencing the past (see Nandy 1995; Chakrabarty 2000; Seth 2014; Rifkin 2017). Writing of a form of temporal displacement resulting from the violent imposition of Western temporal narratives, Alcoff notes how peoples previously colonised develop an 'alienated relationship to their own temporal reality, and that they imagine the real present as occurring somewhere else than where they live' (Alcoff 2007, 85). The epistemic violence resulting from this temporal split between the past and present can thus be seen as a case of hermeneutical epistemic injustice, since this bias in favour of the dominant collective interpretative resources on how time is conceptualised can be seen to reflect and perpetuate racialised marginalisation (Fricker 2007, 1; Medina

2013; Koggel 2018). The coloniality of time and its connection to the unequal distribution of epistemic respect highlights the need for a kind of decolonial resistance that entails a critique of the dominant linear-progressive paradigm.

Within the global justice debate, one consequence of the delinking of the temporal spheres is the general privileging of the present over the past – when deciding which injustices to focus their attention on. Global justice scholars such as Jeremy Waldron, Richard Vernon and, to some extent, Thomas Pogge, tend to argue that present injustices should take precedence. The epistemic devaluation of the past in white Western time continues to inform normative judgments about historical injustices, in that they are relatively marginalised issues. One the one hand, this move allows some theorists such as David Miller to engage in 'methodological cherry-picking' with regards to a selective appreciation of which pasts are recognised as important (Mihai 2019, 594). Selective silences common in national myth making are made possible by a temporal horizon that only makes visible those abstract or mythical pasts that are deemed useful for the construction of a community's political imaginary (Go 2020). On the other hand, Alasia Nuti has noted that the past/present binary prevalent in Western temporal narratives fuels the scepticism in many philosophical accounts of the importance of addressing historical injustices (Nuti 2019, 13–29). Critics of historical justice take an issue with its normative ground, arguing that we should focus on the here and now, as 'present circumstances are the ones that are real' (Waldron 2002, 159). On this account, acknowledgement of an unjust distant past might well have an important place in public debates. But in order to envision a more just future, redressing that distant past should not be seen as a demand of justice.

Another common argument against foregrounding historical injustices is based on feasibility concerns. According to scholars such as Vernon (2003), since we have in the present all the normative resources to assess and address contemporary injustices, even those that have their roots in the past, past injustices do not matter – if we achieve the just distribution of resources and opportunities in the present, any injustices that happened in the past need not concern us. However, these arguments against the relevance of historical injustices somewhat contradict the 'intuition that history does matter when thinking about justice' (Nuti 2019, 13). Beyond intuition, an engagement with recent work on temporality in, for instance, queer studies and postcolonial theory (Freeman 2010; Rifkin 2017; Rao 2020) offers insights into the ways in which the past can very much remain in the present. Examples of scholarship that defies the normative temporality of whiteness can also be found in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Saidiya Hartman, whose work suggests that white Western time is simply inadequate for fully accounting for the coloniality of statements that stress the temporal remoteness and relative insignificance of historical injustices.

In his analysis of racial-colonial oppression and its dehumanising effects on 'les damnés de la terre', 'the wretched of the earth', Fanon explores the ways in which the colonial construction of the racist idea of an inferior 'native' is marked by temporal otherness. Fanon writes that 'the Negro' is locked in what he calls the 'zone of nonbeing', meaning that he is often portrayed as having 'no culture, no civilisation, no "long historical past"' (Fanon 2017, 2, 21–22). Concerned with the psychology of colonial racism, Fanon shows how the Western temporal privileging of present over past contributes to making 'the Other' invisible by severing the oppressed from their past and their memories. Arguably, the epistemic devaluation of the past constitutes a radical denial of Black subjectivity. For

this reason, Fanon 'rejects the "belatedness" of the Black man because it is only the opposite of the framing of the White man as universal, normative … the Black man refuses to occupy the past of which the White man is the future' (Bhabha 1991, 195). Fanon therefore foregrounds the complex temporal situatedness of survivors of trauma, in whose lived experience the violent past can very much remain present. His work exposes one of the most troubling and long-lasting consequences of colonial violence for Black people and People of Colour, namely the internalisation of racist portrayals of the self. This 'inferiority complex', Fanon writes, is 'the outcome of a double process: primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalisation – or better, the epi-dermalisation – of this inferiority' (Fanon 2017, 4). The past imposes 'psychological shackles' that imprison the individual in the continuous present past of the endured trauma. From that perspective, the temporal nature of colonial trauma and its postcolonial aftermath work to tie together past, present in future in a way that does not fit into, and is not recognised by, the dominant Western temporal framework.

In a similar way, Saidiya Hartman's reflections on the time of slavery also highlight the importance of lived experience as a site of knowledge production when it comes to the marginalised temporalities of the oppressed. The interwovenness of present and past revealed by the time of slavery, so well-explored in novels such as Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Yaa Gyazi's *Homegoing*, receives extensive scholarly attention in Hartman's work. Recounting her experience of African-American roots tourism in Africa's former 'Gold Coast', she explores the enduring presence of slavery, a presence that challenges the 'seemingly remote anteriority of the past' (Hartman 2002, 763). Writing about the complicated politics of memory, Hartman offers highly insightful observations on the ways in which narrating the history of slavery as a history of progress runs the risk of disavowing and thus perpetuating the violence of the slave trade (Hartman 2002, 768). The experience of slave route tourism, in which visitors to former slave prisons are encouraged to empathetically identify with the horror felt by those captured and enslaved, reveals the ways in which the time of slavery 'negates the commonsense intuition of time as continuity or progression, then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead' (Hartman 2002, 759). Hartman's argument goes beyond the often-invoked continuities of dispossession, exploitation, and enslavement in the form of contemporary racial oppression, 'incarceration, impoverishment and second-class citizenship' (Hartman 2002, 766). The haunting legacy of slavery runs deeper than 'the intransigence of racism', in that it points to a horizon of loss, the enormity of which highlights the limits of Western temporal narratives. Her focus therefore turns to the 'interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath' and its role in unsettling the confidence in the temporal break between the past and present (Hartman 2002, 758). The ongoing process of mourning can open up a space for critically revisiting the past and the present and can therefore 'be considered a practice of countermemory that attends to that which has been negated and repressed' (Hartman 2002, 771). Hartman describes grief as creating the possibility for an emancipatory temporality that makes space for 'the intractable and enduring legacy of slavery' in a way that creates 'an opening for counter history, a story written against the narrative of progress' (Hartman 2002, 769). The time of slavery challenges us to rediscover the political and ethical significance of the past and the role of collective memory for thinking about justice.

Taking seriously these insights highlights the need for a kind of global normative theorising that is receptive to and can account for temporalities that do not fit into the dominant linear temporal narrative. However, the conceptual resources offered by mainstream approaches to global justice rooted in Anglo-American analytic philosophy are inadequate for accommodating temporal imaginaries in which the boundaries of past, present, and future can be challenged. As discussed above, the inattentiveness to the way time and temporality operate within theories of justice can be seen as a symptom of the white time on which the global justice debate is based. The continued use of unquestioned, false universalism of Western temporal experiences not only reproduces racial Othering, but also limits the scope of moral concern to co-temporal people. From this perspective then, the inattentiveness to the problem of time and how it operates within theories of justice can be seen as directly related to the relative inattentiveness of the global justice debate to histories of imperialism, colonialism, and trans-Atlantic enslavement. The two sections that follow will therefore be dedicated to the discussion of two relational approaches that offer conceptual resources for critically engaging with and rethinking time and temporality in global justice debates.

5. Time and feminist relational theory

Feminist relational theory can be useful in enhancing our ethical sensitivity and perception about what is recognised as relevant when it comes to the temporal dimensions of global normative theorising. Owing much to feminist theory and approaches such as the ethic of care (developed by scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Sara Ruddick and Virginia Held), feminist relational thought has been exceptionally successful in challenging deeply entrenched assumptions of individualism and liberal ideals of autonomy (see Downie and Llewellyn 2011). The liberal tradition of normative theorising informing most of the global justice debate has long been critiqued for assuming yet not recognising the significance of the simple fact that all human beings exist in complicated networks of ethically significant relationships. Unlike mainstream Anglo-American epistemology, feminist relational approaches focus on precisely this relational conception of personhood, arguing that doing so allows them to be much more perceptive to central aspects of human experience. Arguably, it is especially the experiential basis of theorising that provides the feminist relational approach with this capacity for paying attention to, rather than obscuring, processes of marginalisation and silencing based on lived experience, such as the temporal Othering as described above (see, for example, bell hooks (1991) and Sara Ahmed (2017) who write about theory *as* experience). Starting from the ontological presuppositions that the human self 'is constituted in and through relationship with others' (Downie and Llewellyn 2011, 4), scholars such as Lorraine Code, Annette Baier, Sue Campbell, Ami Harbin, Christine Koggel and Jennifer Llewellyn have established a growing body of work that foregrounds relationality as a central feature of human existence. As Koggel writes, it is important to recognise that 'all relationships, including the personal and those of caring for dependents, are nested in networks of relationships at public, national, institutional, and global levels, and these in turn influence and shape personal relationships and the abilities of those in them to care for others or to have a say in public debates' (Koggel 2014, 495). Through their emphasis on relationality, feminist relational approaches can help us appreciate the complex

situatedness of individuals, not just in space, but also in time. From this perspective, the epistemic devaluation of the past misrecognises the ways in which we are fundamentally temporally situated human beings that are related to, and dependent upon, past and future generations in complex ways.

Feminist relational theory is of course itself mostly, but not exclusively, embedded with the knowledge production enterprise of the Global North, and to some extent shares some of the premises and theoretical imaginary that have shaped the normative frameworks of those of the dominant global justice scholarship. While it thus cannot be presented as an 'antidote' to the colonial undercurrents of the latter's temporal assumptions, it can, I will argue, be read to unearth pertinent resources for foregrounding layers of normatively salient temporal relationships that tend to remain invisible in the normative frameworks of analytic approaches dominating the literature. I specifically want to briefly discuss two concepts developed by feminist relational theorists, namely a relational perspective on temporal vulnerability and relational remembering, since these concepts let us re-examine the link between the temporal spheres of past, present, and future and thus offer a more accommodating basis for temporal experiences that do not align with the dominant Western temporal narrative of linearity and progress.

One of the more developed accounts of temporal relationships comes from political philosopher Janna Thompson (2001, 2014, 2017),whose work foregrounds the temporal dimension of intergenerational relationships. For Thompson, incorporating a relational and temporal analysis in normative conceptualisations of justice is crucial for recognising the extent to which intergenerational relations constitute a vital aspect of human existence. A particularly helpful idea she offers that illustrates the ways in which human beings do not only have active, reciprocal relationships with co-temporal people, but also with past and future people, is the concept of temporal vulnerability. Thompson critiques what she calls the synchronic view of temporal vulnerability, which according to her does not offer a plausible justification for the source of this form of vulnerability of past and future people. The synchronic perspective reflects common ideas about vulnerability as stemming from the powerlessness that comes with 'nonpresence or nonexistence' (Thompson 2014, 169). The problem with this perspective is that it views individuals as temporally anchored in the present – it is an individual's relation to the present that determines her vulnerability.

Thompson offers a more holistic conception of time that leads to a more convincing understanding of temporal vulnerability, as she views it through a diachronic perspective, which regards 'time as a process with no fixed point of reference' and thus puts a special emphasis on relationality and dependency (Thompson 2014, 163). Contrary to the synchronic perspective, she finds that the source and cause of vulnerability should not be found in nonexistence, but in intergenerational dependencies, which are an essential aspect of human existence in time (Thompson 2014, 170). A diachronic perspective 'encourages individuals to see themselves as participants in an intergenerational continuum in which each generation depends in various ways on its predecessors and successors' (Thompson 2014, 169–170). From this perspective, each generation depends on the previous one in terms of familial and societal structures and provision of care, as well as respect. The meaning that we attribute to our lives through the interests and values we hold are essential to our conception of ourselves and should therefore be seen to continue to hold importance even after our death. These 'lifetime transcending interests',

however, rely on our successors for fulfilment (Thompson 2014, 172). In turn, the future generations rely on their previous generation for the provision of a habitable, agreeable environment. This theoretical foregrounding of generational dependence is an approach that relational theory is uniquely equipped to accommodate. Considering the temporal dimension of relationality, then, highlights the relational links between the temporal spheres. The fundamental temporal situatedness of human beings leads to the insight that a strict separation of these spheres might not be a helpful way of viewing person-hood, and thus extending moral concern along the intergenerational continuum is the logical extension of the realisation that human beings co-inhabit time as well as space.

Feminist accounts of memory as an embodied, lived experience that is fundamentally relational can be seen as another promising approach based on feminist relational theory that stretches narrow Western understandings of clear temporal breaks between the past and present (Campbell 2003, 2004, 2008; Edkins 2003, 2014; Koggel 2014). Far from dis-missing the past as a temporal sphere too disconnected or remote from the present, these scholars highlight the important role of memory for obtaining meaning for our lives in relation to the past, present, and future. In Sue Campbell words, 'Sharing memory is fundamental to forming, maintaining, and negotiating relationships with others, which relationships in turn affect the meaning of our own pasts and thus who we become' (Campbell 2008, 43). Memory activities, according to her, need to be seen as operating in relation to specific social and political contexts in the past and present. They are never value neutral but must be understood with a view to the ways in which the reconstruction of the past always takes place in mediation to and embedded in relations of the present (Campbell 2004, 122; Koggel 2014, 498). The past is never simply the past in some generic sense, but always a particular type of past defined by specific experiences, people, and encounters, which then condition the particular type of present that grows out of it. Importantly, this process also functions 'backwards' along the temporal continuum: relational remembering highlights the ways in which the present shapes the past. In a way, relational remembering describes an activity that opens up a way to engage with and make sense of the complex meeting points of past and present.

Such a relationally and temporally embedded view of memory is especially relevant in the context of historic harms of colonial oppression and slavery, since 'an account of good remembering can do the work of understanding the effects of past wrongs and how they shape and maintain oppressive relationships in the present' (Koggel 2014, 498). In order to begin to understand the past and address historical injustices, we must also examine how memories 'embody and reflect conditions, practices, beliefs, norms, and institutions of the here and now' (Koggel 2014, 498). Fanon's and Hartman's engagement with the temporalities of trauma of colonial violence and enslavement are exemplary in this respect, as they clearly reflect the ways in which remembering is obscured by the coloni-ality of Western temporal discourse, but also that the necessity of remembering the past in the first place is triggered by unequal relationships in the present.

6. African *ubuntu* ethics and time

Thought traditions that explore and foreground relational features of human existence can also found abundantly in Indigenous and non-Western theories of being. Considering

the enduring racialised temporal othering and the epistemic devaluation of non-Western times, a sustained engagement with political and moral discourses beyond the Western liberal imaginary is long overdue, not least in order to avoid complicity in the racialised inequalities of knowledge production that have historically accompanied the European colonial project. Pluralising the basis for defining time itself and acknowledging alternative ways of being-in-time, I argue, should be seen as important elements in decolonial endeavours that challenge narratives of time as neutral and universal. Here, I want to propose a closer look into the 'African' relational approach of *ubuntu* ethics as a pertinent way of theorising temporal relationality. While the temporal dimension of *ubuntu*'s relational presupposition for thinking processes of becoming is not yet fully explored in scholarly discourse, this approach offers promising resources that can make a valuable contribution to the decolonisation of time and temporal imagination.

Similar to feminist relational thought, *ubuntu* also views human beings as fundamentally situated in a complex web of relationships, an emphasis which arguably extends to a temporal view of relationality that challenges the temporal frames associated with and imposed by Western modernity (see Ramose 1999; Metz 2011; Menkiti 2017; Graness 2018). Primarily developed by the South African philosophers Augustine Shutte and Mogobe B. Ramose, *ubuntu* ethics is usually 'illustrated with the Zulu-Xhosa aphorism umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, "A human being is a human being through other people", that is, every human being needs other people in order to be human' (Graness 2015, 132). Concerned with how human beings exist in the world, *ubuntu* is thought of as both a condition of being as well as a state of becoming (Ramose 1999, 55). *Ubuntu* narrates the notion of humanity as well as the ways in which we are coming to know the world and ourselves as radically interdependent. This relational ontology reflects the general tendency of African ethics to 'define human-ness as the interweavement of self and other' (Etieyibo 2017, 143). *Ubuntu* therefore understands personhood as a process of becoming through time; one can become more or less of a 'person' at any given stage of one's life depending on how one lives in relation to others and the broader world over time.

What is more, human existence is seen to be interrelated on three different levels, namely the dimension of the living, of the 'living-dead', and of the 'yet-to-be-born' (Ramose 1999, 62). These dimensions are envisioned to be fundamentally interconnected, experientially and temporally, meaning that they cannot be mapped onto Western linear imaginaries of time. Human beings situated in the dimension of the living temporally coexist with 'those beings who have passed away from the world of the living' as well as those that are 'yet-to-be-born' (Ramose 1999, 62). The temporal dimension of what we might want to call 'the present' is envisioned as a meeting place of intergenerational encounter. Contrary to the Western linear temporal imaginary, those beings called the 'living-dead' or 'ancestors' are not relegated to a temporally distant or remote sphere conventionally called 'the past'. As Ramose writes, 'death has discontinued their existence only with regard to the concrete, bodily and everyday life as we know it', but does 'not totally discontinue the life of these departed beings' (Ramose 1999, 62). The self, then, is not simply a self-sustaining monad, but an embodied being who has the potential to learn and grow as a person through an awareness and appreciation of the transgenerational sources of past, present, and future modes of being and their transmitted experiences. Because of these three interrelated dimensions of *ubuntu* (the living, the

departed, the yet-to-be-born), Ramose calls it an 'onto-triadic conception of be-ing' (Ramose 1999, 63). According to this 'ontology of invisible beings', the process of becoming fully human means not only cultivating a relationship of care and respect with currently living (human) beings, but also with the ancestors and the yet unborn.

Accepting intertemporal relatedness as an essential feature of human existence has, I argue, great critical potential for allowing us to ask different questions about what matters when reflecting on issues of global justice. In contrast to the Western portrayal of the deadness of the past and non-existence of the future, *ubuntu* views all three interconnected realms as equally important dimensions, and thereby mobilises a different sense of responsibility. Caring for, and fostering harmonious relationships with, human beings in different realms of existence is not antagonistic towards caring for those in the 'present' realm of living beings. Instead, the living, the living-dead, and the 'yet-to-be-born' are inextricably bound up with one another, meaning that suffering and healing are also transversally witnessed in all three dimensions. *Ubuntu* and its foregrounding of intertemporal connectedness lets us pause and think about the question of responsibility of the living, suggesting that we owe the living-dead and the 'yet-to-be-born' the same interest, concern, and care as we do the living.

Diffusing the tension between past, present, and future in thinking about temporal situatedness, *ubuntu* offers great conceptual and hermeneutical resources for rethinking relationality with a special temporal sensibility. The relevance of *ubuntu* for grappling with the living legacy of apartheid injustices and trauma is perhaps most prominently illustrated by its influence on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). While the TRC has served as a model for other contexts around the world attempting to come to terms with historical injustices, African contributions to thinking about justice have generally remained rather marginalised. Unfortunately, not only is African philosophy still largely ignored in Western discourses, but it is also nearly non-existent within the global justice debate. A small but growing number of contributions acknowledge this gap and the need for more scholarly attention towards it, such as Uchenna Okeja (2010, 2017), Anke Graness (2011, 2015), Edwin Etieyibo (2017), and Jonathan Chimakonam (2017). Further developing the relevance of this African perspective to the global justice debate and its temporal narrative could then more generally contribute to the further theoretical development of relational approaches for thinking about time. Continuing the conversation between different strands of relational theory, such as between *ubuntu* and feminist relational accounts, would also be an interesting path for future academic reflection (Mangena 2009; Metz 2013).

7. Conclusion

In this article I have argued for the importance of critically scrutinising and de-centring the dominant temporal assumptions underlying the academic global justice debate, specifically and especially from a decolonial perspective that stresses the coloniality of time, its history, and continuing legacy to which much of the global justice literature is indebted but that does not engage with in a sufficiently sustained manner. The Western temporal narrative, by being unable to grant equal epistemic respect to non-linear temporal imaginaries, renders non-Western temporal experiences irrelevant to world political time. An unquestioned employment of Western frameworks of time only reproduces the West's

epistemic privilege and racialised temporal othering. Within the academy, non-Western temporal knowledges are rendered invisible or marginalised to the extent that they are largely understood to lack epistemic authority. I have argued that the possibility for alternative conceptualisations of experiencing time to be voiced and heard depends on the realisation that temporal linearity and progress are not neutral and universal frameworks for thinking about time, but instead carry with them the heavy weight of coloniality. This article also aimed at being a part of the conversation that opens up the possibility for recuperating non-linear temporalities and pluralising temporal imaginaries. To be sure, once we decentre Western temporality and make visible the exclusions generated by coloniality, there is a broad richness of work to consider. I argued that conceptualising being-in-time from relational perspectives might be a fruitful starting point for challenging the notion of time as neutral and universal. Thinking further about relational theory's capacity for disrupting coloniality in academic knowledge production in the Western academy could be a relevant dimension for future research aimed at intellectual decolonisation.

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Katharina Hunfeld is a PhD student at the University of St Andrews. Her main research interests include (de)coloniality, epistemic injustice, and *ubuntu* thought.

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