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Fabulation, Erasure, and the Recursive Becoming of Identity Alternative Realities in Postcolonial (Non)Existence

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Abstract

This paper experiments with the functional and imaginal possibilities of Deleuzian "fabulation" as a strategy and methodology for ontological resistance and speculative world-building. Like many Indigenous communities around the world, the Khoisan people of South Africa grapple with the contemporary precariousness caused in part by historical erasure.

The present study utilizes John L. Jackson Jr.'s notion of "sincerity" to re-conceptualize identity as relational rather than essential, incorporates Sara Ahmed's "stickiness" to explain the circulation and anchoring of emotions within collective memory, and demonstrates how "fabulation" serves as a pragmatic approach to navigating marginality. "Fabulation" is framed as a method of speculative ontology that reconfigures reality rather than escaping it. Critical analyses of performances, digital expressions, and quotidian rituals focus on ecologies where official histories, legal structures, and institutional classifications fail to represent lived experiences adequately. These practices, illustrating how small, repeated acts of defiance and creativity can lead to a restored existence, are linked to broader discussions in Indigenous studies, Black studies, and speculative theory.

Keywords: fabulation, speculative identity, Khoisan revivalism, sincerity, alternative realities, affective infrastructures, ontological resistance

Fabulation and the Right to Be Real

What remains after erasure? Survival becomes a means, a form, and an act of rebellious imagination for those whose names were left unsaid and whose futures were closed down due to state ideologies. This paper explores these survival strategies, asking how erased communities survive and, more significantly, how they turn absence into structures. The Khoisan revival in South Africa, I argue, is an illustration of Gilles Deleuze's idea of "fabulation", a narrative technique that blends memory, creation, possibility, and reality. Fabulation is not history or fantasy, and it should not be confused with fabrication. Rather, it represents an act of ontological defiance: a refusal to be obliterated. These narratives are forms of survival grammar rather than escapist tales or philosophical daydreams.[2] Fabulation uses performance, grief, imagination, and repetition to create "alternative realities" or tangible infrastructures of being.

In post-apartheid South Africa, "colored" individuals are hypervisible in carceral systems but invisible in reconciliation efforts. Their Indigeneity claims are often ridiculed as

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[2] This resonates with Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" as methodology for addressing "archival gaps" created by colonial violence, challenging knowledge canonized by hegemonic positions while creating space for marginalized voices.

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inauthentic and disconnected from recognized bloodlines. Meanwhile, urban youth who identify as Khoisan do so not to re-establish a fixed, colonial identity, but to create a relationship to land, ancestry, and becoming through ritual, stories, gestures, and memory. These practices are not unique to South Africa. For instance, fabulation is used as a global survival language in Afro-futurist visions in the diaspora and Indigenous storytelling in Taiwan to tell stories about identity and community that are suppressed by systems. Drawing on Deleuze's idea of "people-yet-to-come", I contend that fabulation is not compensation for erasure but a way to materialize the otherwise. Based on fieldwork with people who are reclaiming their Khoisan identity and lineage, I show how youth use ritual, dress, and memory to reshape reality, not recover the past. To support this argument, I examine three frameworks. John L. Jackson Jr.'s (2005) concept of sincerity asks "What relations do you perform?" rather than "Can you prove you are Khoisan?" Meanwhile, Sara Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective stickiness describes how emotions are linked to bodies, rituals, and places, acting as technologies of return through pride and grief. And finally, Deleuzian fabulation, which sees identity as recursive and open-ended, emphasizing continuity amid breakdown.

The study has four parts: reworking "authenticity" into "sincerity"; tracing affect as inheritance; viewing fabulation as temporal speculation; and challenging "the real". The focus is not on whether Khoisan youth are "truly" indigenous but whether our frameworks can recognize that. Fabulation is not identity work but world work, claiming the right to reshape reality.

From Authenticity to Sincerity: Performing Realness

In South Africa, where Khoekhoe and San communities were the targets of centuries of dispossession, renaming, and epistemicide, identity has been overdetermined from without and fragmented from within. The colonial composite term "Khoisan" is ingrained with the sticky nature of these histories. It was first used by a German researcher in 1928, and after South African anthropologist Isaac Schapera adopted it, it became the recognized term in academia. Fabulation thrives right in the shadow of this history. The pursuit of authenticity (whether via bloodlines, land deeds, or unbroken customs) turns into yet another kind of gatekeeping in Khoisan revivalism settings. A verifiable source, such as ancestral maps or genealogical charts, is necessary for authentication. And yet for many, such evidence has been effaced by colonialism, slavery, and apartheid.

Khoisan claims are frequently disregarded because they are thought to be little more than the remnants of a lineage lost to urbanization and hybridity, at least in the case of the "Cape Khoi" of Cape Town. In addition, Khoisan revival intersects with Afrikaans language, Muslim slave heritage, and working-class solidarities, all of which are and were shaped by colonialism. To further complicate matters, the apartheid-era term "colored" has also masked and supplanted Khoisan identity. Legally, the matter is also muddled. In the 2019 Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act only five groups are recognized, each requiring proof of community existence before 1913, a standard many urban Khoisan descendants cannot meet. These enquiries concerning place, language, and lineage all relate to protocols of legitimizing belonging. But many young people, according to research, use cultural practices to defy state criteria and reframe politics in other ways. One participant even dismissed pro-Khoisan demonstrations and protests as "poli-tricks", saying simply, "I am just Khoisan". This section suggests a shift away from the strict, extractive logic of authenticity and towards a practice of sincerity, a lived, relational, and performed truth-making that doesn't ask for permission to exist.

To sidestep the bind, this study draws on John L. Jackson Jr.'s (2005) concept of racial sincerity. Unlike authenticity, which fetishizes documentary proof, sincerity emphasizes relational truth.

> "Racial sincerity and authenticity are both ways of thinking through how we find these shortcuts for knowing ourselves and others – for locating the real in (and in the intentions of) everyone around us. The difference is that authenticity theorizes this as an unbalanced relationship between the powerful seer and the impotently seen, the latter being a mere object of the seer's gaze and discourse […] Authenticity attempts to domesticate sincerity, rein it in, and control its excesses. Sincerity highlights the ever-fleeting 'liveness' of everyday racial performances that cannot be completely captured by authenticating mediations of any kind". (Jackson, 2005, 18)

Sincerity is a contextual, embodied expression of identity that emerges through care, repetition, and vulnerability. Sincerity does not ask "are you real?" but "do you show up, again and again, as this self?" Sincerity permits contradiction. It permits grief. It permits growth. It reframes identity not as a fixed inheritance, but as a sustained claim, becoming a doing, not a being. Lavender, a young woman in her early thirties and one of my research participants, described her experience of fragmented memory and identity as "tenselessness". Initially, this was a slip of the tongue, an accident where she had intended to say "tenseness". But after a laugh about it, she and I unpacked her slip-up and arrived at the conclusion that it was probably the result of her brain reaching for more than one "truth" in that moment. In so doing, it merged an operation of time in "tense" with the affective texture of "tenseness". The result was that it captured a temporal cognitive dissonance: a past never fully past, a future still slipping. In this context, being sincere means unapologetically embracing that dissonance. Performances such as dance, dress, prayer, and spoken word all transcend aesthetics in this context and become ritualized claims about the future. A young man may still treasure his "colored" grandfather's "potjiekos" even after wearing a t-shirt he screen-printed with the protest slogan "Khoisan Forever, Colored Never". These are truths to carry sincerely, not contradictions to reconcile. Sincerity asserts its claim allowing multiplicity rather than enforcing purity.

But, does a performance run the risk of turning into a costume? When does sincerity slide into masquerade? In this context, Judith Butler (1990, 94-95) is helpful. She reminds us that performativity is reiteration under pressure, not parody. Identity develops through repeated behaviors influenced by history, surveillance, and consequences rather than through spontaneous choice. Through my research, I was able to trace how repeated acts like multilingual poetry, body adornments, and revived dances all form a counter-archive. They are performed into existence rather than for external attention. In this sense, sincerity is a gambit that existence is real and legitimate without need of recognition. People who are reclaiming their Khoisan identities, like those I have met in my research, do not look to the government, academia, or "official" status for their validity. They assert presence in other ways, where merely stating one's existence turns into revolutionary resistance. This is a metaphysical intervention rather than a rhetorical flourish. Saying "I am Khoisan" sincerely without offering up genealogical evidence for external authentication is to remake the coordinates of the real. Sincerity establishes sovereign terms of legibility and demands to be seen with or without formal permission. These embodied declarations resonate far beyond South Africa, echoing a larger strategy of temporal resistance marked by a refusal of linear history and of colonial inheritance logics. What Khoisan individuals perform are not identities of return, but identities of recursion. Their sincerity rebuilds reality in the doing. And a significant part of how successful that rebuilding is hinges upon its "stickiness". Through stickiness, which I discuss next, I explore the affective infrastructure of this work and how grief, joy, and longing become tools of fabulation.

Stickiness and Affective Worlds: The Emotional Architecture of Alternative Realities

Not all histories are stored in archives. Some are written upon human bodies. They surface as sensations instead of names or dates. A throat that tightens at a half-remembered phrase, tears drawn by hearing a language one never learnt, or even a strange calm in a ritual's repetition. In the next section, I suggest that alternative realities need not only be performed or imagined into form, but they can also be sensed and felt. Ahmed's (2004) "stickiness" helps to clarify this approach. She writes that emotions do not exist inside people; they move. Emotions stick, linger, rub off, and frequently, return. Emotion, when reckoned through their movement, is better understood as "affect". And affect is not just felt but also worlded through the sticky entanglements between body and land.

> "Stickiness itself might not be a quality that always 'adheres' to an object. Rather than using stickiness to describe an object's surface, we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs. To relate stickiness with historicity is not to say that some things and objects are not 'sticky' in the present. Rather, it is to say that stickiness is an effect. That is, stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object". (Ahmed, 2004, 90)

In the context of Khoisan revivalism, affect is not incidental, it is infrastructural; serving as the essential material and relational substrate from which speculative worlds emerge. When people say "I feel Khoisan" instead of "I know I am Khoisan", they are talking about an emotional logic that is both historical and world-building.[3]

One person said, "I just know it in my bones" that they are Khoisan. Another person said, "I cry when I hear Khoekhoegowab, and I don't even understand it". These are not sentimentalities but entries in an affective archive, a memory system that surpasses mere documentation and persists in sensation. For many urban individuals who are presently re-establishing their connection with their Khoisan heritage, the formal archive is either inaccessible or has been destroyed. But not fully lost. Through histories of contact, marking what has been touched, inherited, and carried forward, emotion is not secondary to identity, it is the mode through which disallowed pasts speak. This iteration of Khoisan identity does not cohere through lineage charts but through visceral knowing, reflecting the identity's "stickiness" despite historical efforts at erasure. In the absence of documentation, grief, pride, longing, and shame transform into sticky evidence.

One participant stood at a landmark on Table Mountain and she lamented that she could not call this landmark by its "real name" and said, "I do not have the [papers]. But this place makes me cry. Something is here. And it. is. mine". For her, the mountain becomes an archive, a kin, and a claim. It offers not proof, but presence. Not history, but relation. This is not a metaphor. It is a method. When documents fail, landscapes remember. When bloodlines break, bodies carry continuity. Affective archives do not attempt to replace official history, they grow alongside it, in tension, in refusal, in repair. Khoisan revivalism, which might seem like cultural resurgence on the surface, actually operates as a kind of emotional economy or an affective commons wherein grief, longing, and belonging are shared, redistributed, and reactivated.

Stickiness also shows how emotions can be unevenly weighted and dispersed. Scholars have contended that shame particularly adheres to "colored" identity.[4]

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[3] Dian Million's "felt theory" extends this analysis, demonstrating how Indigenous communities privilege "emotional knowledges" as legitimate forms of community knowledge that challenge colonial marginalization of experiential narratives (Million, 2013).

[4] See, for example, the works of anthropologist Elaine Salo and author Zoë Wicomb.

During apartheid, "colored" was a label used to simplify the challenges of classifying collectivities of people who defy or complicate their racial ideologies. One South African joked with me that it was like the "'there be dragons' bucket" of apartheid. Historian Mohamed Adhikari (2005) once wrote that the social perception was that being "colored" meant you weren't black enough, white enough, pure enough, or whole enough. This imagined link between "colored" and shame persists despite its falsity, showing a negative side to Deleuze's "powers of the false", which I discuss in further detail in the next section. It has been internalized, absorbed, passed down, and often thrums in the background. But revival practices are starting to rewire this emotional circuitry. In a conversation with a schoolteacher from a "colored" township, he discussed his community's Khoisan roots. He joked, "We are the most South African of all South Africans", before adding, "[t]he whole country's history is written in our blood". Almost immediately, he spoke about being forgotten and neglected by his country and fellow South Africans, sadly saying, "We try not to think about it". Proud, defiant, ironic. This is what stickiness looks like. It creates a world where shame and pride coexist, altering each other's stories like layers of a palimpsest. People newly connecting with their Khoisan identities now come together for ceremonies, poetry, and dance at the Castle of Good Hope. They do not sanitize the site's literal and symbolic violent history; instead, they give it a new meaning. Their activities and celebrations turn trauma into a dance of return, rewriting it as strength, survival, and a celebration. These rituals do not heal the wound or deny the scar; they map it.

In this work, a rematriation is at play, pulsing beneath the surface. Indigenous scholars use the word "rematriation" instead of "repatriation" to signal a return through maternal lineages. In the South African context, Bernedette Muthien has notably reframed land and heritage, positioning them not as patriarchal, possess-able, inheritances but as generative matriarchal relationships. Grandmothers, mothers, and "aunties" are not just keepers of memories; they its conduits. One person told me, "My mother doesn't speak the language, but she cooks it [using herbs and flavor palates she learnt from her mother and her mother learnt from her mother's mother]. That's where I learned I was Khoisan". Taste, smell, fabric, and rhythm are all ways to come back, technologies of return.

Ahmed contends that intensity alone does not render an affect "sticky". Repetition is key. Wearing the same ostrich beads each Heritage Day, smelling buchu steeped by a great-aunt, reciting the same poem every September... these are not just nostalgic rituals; they are counter-temporal acts that rebel against convention and create cyclical time within linear erasure. These "small heritages", as David Harvey (2008) would call them, accumulate and as they do, their affect intensifies. They might not require proof, but they demand presence. This "stickiness is what coheres them into a shared social lexicon. It brings together seemingly disparate acts like a young adult's tattoo of a flower she saw in her grandmother's garden, a first attempt to write a poem that starts with the lines, "I do not know where I come from, but I know I come from her", and many other "small heritages" across Khoisan communities into shared meaning, a shared world-building. Through these actions, when taken together, memory is not restored; it is remade.

One interviewee said, "I thought I was the only one who felt this way", but then they met others who also felt Khoisan but didn't care about politics or activism. Affect moves through private WhatsApp groups, open mic nights, flea markets, and shared playlists. Recognition flashes. The human urge to belong gathers people together. These are not formal social movements. They are organic, embodied collectivities of feelings, brought together not by ideology, but by affective intensity. They are not defined by doctrine, but by shared ache. They also tend to be volatile and not organized by any metric typically believed necessary for a "social movement". Emotions can misfire, and relationships can rupture. But in these affective webs, a new kind of social legitimacy rooted in relationality

begins to grow. I saw this all the time. The "auntie" who gives someone else in the group a wild dagga cigarette to smoke while talking about how a mountain once spoke to her. Teenagers who cried during a rematriation poem that they didn't fully understand. Someone saying, "I don't know what I am, but I know I'm not nothing". These lives are sticky. Lives that remember and are remembered through sensation and affect. Lives that won't be erased, even without an archive. When sincerity makes room for change and stickiness keeps us in touch with a recursive and affective (rather than linear) time, fabulation becomes the method by which both lives and archives are woven into becoming.

Fabulation as Speculative Becoming

What does it mean to become something that was lost? When the archives fall silent or deliberately erase you, how do you survive – and more than survive, thrive and remake the lost world? In this section, I propose that fabulation serves as a means to become something new by embodying something old, which I view as a way to counterbalance the absence in the archives and the epistemal demand for "proof" under colonial paradigms. Deleuze posits that fabulation enacts the "powers of the false" (1989, 129-131), not via deception, but through creative falsity as a catalyst for becoming, wherein

> "[t]he time-image puts truth into crisis, not in the sense of shifting cultural values, but in what we cannot know today will come to pass tomorrow and thus must acknowledge the existence of more than a single world – one in which the event does occur, one in which it does not". (Deleuze, 129)

For Khoisan-identifying individuals reclaiming a "lost" identity, fabulation is not an ironic shrug at factual truth. It is a way to make the truth real because the truth is something that dominant frameworks cannot or refuses to see. Fabulation becomes a way to forge existence without archival verification. A design protocol. A planetary ethics. And in these acts of revivalism, the stakes are existential.

If fabulation (1989, 220) is the mode through which today's "missing people" can speak, it is important to highlight that, in South Africa, this "missingness" is not metaphorical, it is material. The Khoisan are rendered missing by classification, by law, by land dispossession. But absence does not erase presence; it innovates invention. During my fieldwork, fabulation manifested in instances where documents were required but were unavailable, inaccessible, or "missing". When proof of identity was needed, fabulation gave a poem. When there were gaps in the family tree, fabulation insisted on oral history. "I am the theatre of pre-colonial imagination" is a line from the hip-opera *Afrikaaps* that sums it up best. This is not cosplay; the Khoisan people are "worlding". Worlding, as a method, is not pretending or posturing at a world that hasn't happened... yet. Worlding is a community playing for keeps towards a reality where game for a world where identity is not conjured through imitation but invoked into existence through iterative acts of becoming. It constructs alternative realities through recursive identity-making small heritage practices like performance, memory, and desire. Instead of trying to recover lost origins, fabulation creates the conditions that make it possible for the missing people to arrive (even if they never do). The mere possibility of arrival is the point.

Fabulation breaks the linear flow of time. It recombines the ideas of origin and invention, refusal and inheritance. Lavender's fabulatory "tenseless" gave her space to exist without proof and still imagine futures. This is a method, a way. This recursive structure reflects Vanessa Watts' Place-Thought theory, wherein land, thought, and existence are interconnected, entangled. Identity is constructed not in a linear fashion but through loops,

affective reverberations, and reassembled fragments (Watts, 2013, 20-34). She writes that Place-Thought is

> "a theoretical understanding of the world via a physical embodiment – Place-Thought. Place-Thought is the non-distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated. Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts". (Watts, 2013, 21)

Watts' cyclical perspective on a Place-Thought cosmology is one where Spirit starts and ends the loop, not as a ghost, but a life-force relationality. It is circular, reciprocal, and co-constitutive: existence emerges from obligation and relation. From this viewpoint, marginalization is not a historical event. It is a phenomenon that perpetuates, refracts, and shape-shifts. Fabulation is the force that reshapes marginalization in real time.

Interlude: Between and Betwixt Spiral and Cycle

Between the recursion of fabulation and the continuity of Place-Thought exists a common metaphysical ethic: the creation of worlds through relation. These two diagrams, spiral and cycle, are not just illustrations; they are ontological arguments. Watts' closed-loop cosmology sees Spirit as the force that starts and ends everything through land, interdependence, and obligation. The cycle returns to an unchanged Spirit and repeats again. In contrast, my fabulation spiral is recursive, fabulation forms layers that spiral around each other. Each iteration goes through absence, imagination, and performance, accruing a surplus before returning ↻ to Absence, but the new "Absence" has been transformed. Every pass alters the substrate. Both perceive reality as fluid, constructed recursively through relationships. Both are an obligation, a transmission, and a speculative speech act. In both cases, agency is never individualistic; it emerges through embeddedness, whether in spirit-place or imagined futures. Both reject linear temporality.

When placed side by side, they show two complementary logics of becoming: one is circular and grounded on Indigenous cosmology, and the other is spiral and grows from speculative insurgency. Both models reject linear colonial temporality but present distinct mechanisms of Indigenous futurity. The spiral accumulates and the cycle grounds. Together, they demonstrate that identity is not recovered, but rather reassembled repeatedly through presence, relationship, and fabulation. The primary difference is that while the hinge in Watts' cycle is communication, in my fabulation spiral, performance is the hinge. With these frames in mind, we now return to fabulation to conclude this section with an exploration of fabulatory future-work and then conclude with a discussion on fabulation's political edge: how it challenges ontology and proposes new ways to be real.

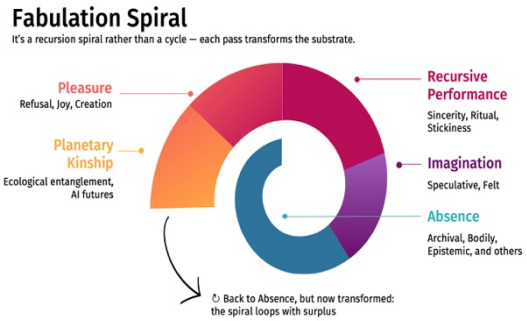

Figure 1. Fabulation Spiral
A recursive model where each pass through absence, imagination, and performance accumulates surplus rather than returning to origin unchanged.

Figure 2. Watts' Place-Thought Cycle
Watts' cyclical cosmology where Spirit initiates and returns through place-based relationality, emphasizing grounded continuity over linear progression.

Fabulation as Speculative Becoming, Remix

This work led to the idea of "Khoisanification", or doing things "in a Khoisan way". It describes a process of revival not through preservation but through remixing, memes, fashion, pleasure, and refusal. It is not a fixed identity. It is a creative, re-iterative re-indigenization. Someone at an event wore a handmade shirt that said, "I am Not Your Rainbow", which is a rainbow nationalism burn. When I asked him about it, he said he had also thought about "Khoisan WiFi: Connecting Past to Present", but his friends thought people would not "get it". Instagram filters ancestral visuals and symbols on selfies. TikTok videos experiment, mixing Khoekhoegowab with Afro-trap beats. Are these fun? Yes. But they are also insurgent. adrienne maree brown (2019) reminds us that pleasure is resistance. These micro-acts of humor, tenderness, and irreverence can be thought of as "tiny desk revolutions". Not loud. But radically reorienting.

Fabulation is not just social, it is global. Khoisan youth are experimenting with technology in unexpected ways, like storing oral histories on YouTube. Using AI tools not to prove lineage, but to play with it the way one might immerse themselves in augmented reality. One participant joked: "If AI cannot find my ancestors, maybe it is not smart enough yet". This is not techno-optimism. It is ontological insurgency: using systems that erase you to build existence elsewhere. This approach resonates with proposals for minoritarian AI: technologies that encode refusal, relation, and recursion, as opposed to normativity or extraction. Fabulation also changes how people and the environment interact. Land is not a metaphor. It is kin. As one revivalist told me that the mountain is sacred, "[Mountain] is my family", she said, using "Mountain" is if it was a personal name. In the face of the climate crisis, these worldings become lessons. They propose a different way of living, one that does not see life as discrete or individualistic, but as entangled entities, beings, systems, biocivilizations across time and species. Fabulation is not an escape. It is an insistence, a way of making reality otherwise. This aligns with what Grace Dillon calls "biskaabiiyang", or a returning to ourselves that rejects Western narratives of progress and asserts Indigenous temporal sovereignty across past, present, and speculative futures (Dillon, 2012). Indigenous futurisms frameworks repositions cultural revival as declarations of the right to exist across all temporal dimensions on Indigenous terms. Khoisan fabulation thus operates within this broader Indigenous movement toward temporal self-determination.

Political Imagination and Ontological Repair

Resistance must be ontological if erasure is ontological, as it targets both existence and the fundamental concepts that coheres existence intelligibly. Khoisan practices of fabulation do not constitute a form of nostalgia. Protests are not symbolic. Ontological insurgency is the process of reassembling a beingness and a becoming in circumstances where their existence has been negated or disregarded. I investigate fabulation as a form of political imagination in its most expansive interpretation, focusing on its capacity to transform the structure of reality rather than confining it to the narrow realm of electoral or institutional politics. In this context, fabulation repudiates the legibility mandates enforced by colonialism, the archive, and the nation-state. Instead, it makes a new way of existing by giving places new names, making new customs, and tracing family trees without official state genealogies. In this way, fabulation becomes both a cultural gesture and a metaphysical intervention. The point is not to claim visibility. The point is to create the conditions that might allow visibility to happen.

Decolonial and postcolonial scholars have long asserted that colonial violence extends beyond physical and material displacement. It pierces the very structures that define existence and life. Sylvia Wynter (2003) identifies this violence in the concept of "Man" as a category that falsely claims universality, depicting Black, Indigenous, and non-Western subjects as deficient or irrational. To be "real" in these kinds of governments means being assessed by colonialist standards. Under these circumstances, fabulation becomes a denial of those measurements. It creates worlds, not identities. These revivalist practices do not seek to integrate into the existing order, as posited by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's notion of "fugitive planning" (2013). They work under it, next to it, or against it. This is an active restructuring of the terms of existence, what I have been referring to as "ontological insurgency". This ontological insurgency practice aligns with speculative realism's assertion that multiple ontologies can coexist without being diminished to epistemological disparity (Bryant et al., 2011).

Indigenous and colonial frameworks do not offer competing ways of knowing the same world; instead, they propose fundamentally distinct worlds characterized by divergent arrangements of existence, agency, and possible relations. Fabulation transforms into a method of actualizing these alternative ontologies. Think about a young Khoisan woman who paints her face with symbols of her ancestry before performing a spoken word piece in Bellville. Or someone that plants healing herbs in a traffic circle and calls it "Khoi Circle". These are more than just works of guerilla Indigenous art. They literally reorganizing meaning and space. They reconfigure the "distribution of the sensible", which Jacques Rancière (2004) would say determines who can be heard, seen, and read. Fabulation breaks the silence of colonialism. No permission is needed. In any case, the silence is speaking. In fabulation, there is no difference between the poetic and the political.

As a method, it passes through aesthetic forms. Ritual dances and TikTok memes are revivalist expressions that transcend mere ornament. These infrastructures are speculative. They invite us into what José Esteban Muñoz (2009) calls a "utopian blueprint", or a place where new ways of being seem possible rather than political promises of liberation. These procedures are not always consistent. They mix and remix the political and the personal, the serious and the light-hearted, the sacred and the profane. Édouard Glissant's (1997) concept of the "right to opacity" is essential in this context. Explainability is not a requirement for emergent Khoisans. Their denial of openness is a defense of emergence and a rejection of colonial surveillance. To fabulate is to engage with the world rather than merely represent it. Karen Barad (2007) says this: meanings and beings don't exist before their interactions; instead, they are created through relating. A young person's claim of "I

am Khoisan" is fluid. It is a contingent, ongoing, and incomplete event. The performance and the ritual do not come before the identity. Identity is composed through them.

By moving in loops, breaks, and glitches, fabulation disrupts colonialism from trying to correct Indigenousness through authenticating (or not) the past in the present. Indigeneity claims the "tenseless", blending the past, present, and possible future in their practices and performances. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls this opposition to linear time, which divides life into acceptable times as "chrononormativity". But fabulation breaks chrononormativity.[5] At the Woordfees festival a few years back, I saw a young Khoisan university student in Nike trainers surrounded by a few of his friends in a park calling on precolonial gods with a mobile torch while surrounded by spoken word and incantation. They were probably intoxicated. The gods probably weren't called by their proper names. It lacked temporal coherence. It was incredibly sincere. It was flawless. Moten (2013) reminds us that "we owe each other the indeterminate". These "time glitches" are not errors. They are tactics. They make it seem like new futures are now possible. Fabulation does not promise utopia. It does what Donna Haraway (2016) calls "staying with the trouble". The Khoisan people who are coming out live in contradiction: they quote ancestral chants that have been auto-tuned, they are skeptical of bloodline claims, and are proud of having a Khoisan grandfather or grandmother. They don't resolve these tensions. They inhabit them. They lead speculative lives that are both luminous and wounded.

This work offers more than just a critique of culture. It is a suggestion. Fabulation is most effectively understood as a variant of speculative ontology, a domain that integrates queer temporality, Black studies, Indigenous cosmology, and speculative design. This field is not academic in the narrow sense. It is experienced. It is done. You can feel it. In this ontological framework, absence is respected as a method. Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) posits that blackness constitutes the essence of being rather than its negation. Replacing or restoring what has been lost in the archive does not fix it. But the possibilities have now multiplied. It increases presence instead of eliminating erasure. Fabulation sees multiplicity, ambiguity, and contradiction as things that create new things, similar to how Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) understood multiplicity, ambiguity, and contradiction. These are not abstract dreams. They are felt realities, constructed through rituals, desires, and repetition. Fabulation creates the conditions for an alternative way of living. It is very personal, recursive, and insurgent. It doesn't try to make itself readable by existing, hegemonic systems. It asks: what if legibility itself is the problem? With that, I proceed to the next section, where these expansive ideas come together with everyday actions, commonplace gestures, memes, performances, and an embodied poetics that make the speculative feel real. I call these "tiny desk revolutions" because they are small, lasting changes in how we become rather than top-level, structural changes. They turn fabulation from a theory into a way of life.

Tiny Desk Revolutions and the Recursive Present

What if revolution does not erupt but accumulates? Not in banners or battalions, but in beads, memes, and names spoken softly. This work has shown how young South Africans who are part of Khoisan revivalism resist not by going back to the past, but by fabulating a future, one small act at a time. They are not waiting for the revolution. They iterate it. In this perspective, fabulation is distinct from fantasy. It is a recursive form of realism. It builds with the broken and the unreadable, with ghost archives, interrupted languages, and

[5] Mark Rifkin's "temporal sovereignty" theory demonstrates how Indigenous temporalities become expressions of political sovereignty, enabling modes of becoming that exceed "settler time" (Rifkin, 2017).

inheritances that are uncertain. To fabulate is to live in a glitch and stay there long enough to call it home. These are not big actions. They are quiet no's. A bracelet on a school desk. A voice note on WhatsApp with a word here or there in half-remembered, maybe Khoekhoe words, a grandmother once said. A social media post with the caption "I don't have the paper[s], but I have our poetry". These "tiny desk revolutions" are fairly unremarkable on their own, but recursive in power. These micro-acts, these small heritages, they accumulate, layer, and resonate. They create a world that the government does not recognize, but is real nonetheless. In this case, fabulation is not an attempt to prove identity. It is a way of becoming real despite non-recognition. It rejects the pressures to be authenticated, to have the right family tree or documentary evidence, or to be legible to bureaucratic requirements. Instead, it moves through sincerity, affect, recursion, and refusal. It does not ask, "Am I Khoisan enough?" Instead, it asks, "What relationships do I enact and invoke, again and again?" Lavender said, "We don't need anyone's permission to exist." That line could be a methodology.

Fabulation transforms into a survival cosmology, an approach to engaging with the world that is neither reactive nor nostalgic. It is speculative and situated. It says, "The archive is gone, but I remember through my nose." The state might not see me, but the mountain knows. There are gaps in my history, but my rituals are intact. In her Place-Thought cosmology, Vanessa Watts (2013) says that being comes from relation, not recognition. And relation is a recursive process. The speculative lives examined here transcend identity politics. They offer a roadmap for everyone who has been made ontologically precarious, such as refugees, Indigenous people, undocumented migrants, and people whose language, data, law, or time have been erased. Fabulation transforms into a politics of unproof, operating without waiting for legitimization. It becomes true through repetition, affect, and sincerity. That belief isn't naive. It is tactical. To fabulate is to reject the ontological violence of being declared unreal. It is an act of defiance. It means putting a picture of a Khoisan ancestor on a classroom wall. It is giving a child an Khoekhoe name. Even when no map agrees, it says, "I come from here." These are the politics of the in-between: not quite recognized, not entirely lost, and constantly becoming. This is not a conclusion, this is not the end.

It is an invitation.

An invitation to consider reality as recursive.

An invitation to listen to the speculative not as fiction, but as a method.

An invitation to make space for the unverifiable and the intensely felt.

To fabulate is to build otherwise.

To build otherwise is to world.

And to world is to resist disappearance.

And sometimes, that is enough.

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