

Literary and visual representations of queer ecologies in South Africa's maritime and terrestrial environments

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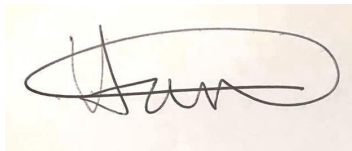
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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Harvey Lewis Dimond

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Harvey Lewis Dimond', written on a light-colored rectangular background.

Date: 14 March 2023

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Introduction

The research in this thesis will examine literary, visual and cinematographic representations of queer ecologies in South Africa. These representations move between being explicitly queer and those being analysed with a queering lens. Queer ecology theorises a perspective which views nature, biology, and sexuality through the lens of queer epistemologies. It objects to heterosexist notions of nature - particularly the positioning of homosexuality as 'un-natural' and heterosexuality as 'natural', which in turn influences how the natural world is signified and how hierarchies of value to human, animal, plant and ocean life are assigned. Queer ecology disrupts Western modernity by challenging binaries such as male/female, alive/dead, human/non-human. Robert Azzarello draws attention, however, to the problematics of the term 'ecology', describing it as 'not a thing but a self-conscious theory of a thing... it cannot hold the same ontological status as, say, Nature or planet Earth', and he instead advocates for the use of 'queer environmentalism' (Azzarello 84). However, in this thesis, I remain loyal to the term 'ecologies' for various reasons. Firstly, the term 'ecologies' applies also to the familial and cultural formations that queer people imagine and make real in their communities - for example, the voguing 'houses' formed by ostracised and vulnerable queer communities of colour in New York City during the 1990s, which mimic the heterosexual nuclear family by way of mimicking its structure; or the development of *IsiNgqumo*, (or *IsiGqumo*), a form of slang used by Black queer South Africans. The term 'ecology' also fits in with scholar Rachel Carson's conception of the 'web of life' - with humans very much 'part of a continuous and interrelated pattern of living things and natural processes' (Cock 124). J. M. Coetzee, in *The Lives of Animals*, describes an 'ecological vision' in which 'the salmon and the river weeds and the water insects interact in a great, complex dance with the earth and the weather. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In the dance, each organism has a role; it is these multiple roles, rather than the particular beings who play them, that participate in the dance' (Coetzee 98). 'Ecology' best describes this interrelation of our complete climatic, meteorological and oceanic systems - from the bottom of the ocean floor to the heights of the exosphere.

Signalling a departure from a study of queer identities in the urban context (a trend not unique to South Africa), this thesis instead looks to queer identities in relation to the nation's maritime and terrestrial environments. A key part of this analysis is an examination of 'queer hydrologies'; the application of hydro-critical theory to selected queer (and queered) texts. Hydro-critical theory is largely grounded in the concept of hydro-hegemony - 'hegemony at the river basin level, achieved through water resource control strategies such as resource capture, integration and containment' (Zeitoun & Warner 435). In the context of South Africa, the Orange River Project can be understood as a key moment in the hydro-hegemonisation of the nation. The series of dams and irrigation systems installed by the apartheid government both aided the economic development of the state, and bypassed the lack of under-development in border regions (where many armed struggle operations were stationed), with the intention of stemming 'the flow of impoverished militants to the military wings of the respective liberation movements' (Turton & Funke 55). Jacklyn Cock examines the alteration of the Kowie River in the Eastern Cape by British settlers (which I look to in the third chapter of this thesis), part of what Isabel Hofmeyr calls 'hydrocolonialism': 'colonisation by way of water (various forms of maritime imperialism), colonisation of water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarisation and politicisation of oceans), a colony on (or in) water (the ship as a miniature

colony or a penal island), colonisation through water (flooding of occupied land) and colonisation of the idea of water (establishing water as a secular resource)' (Hofmeyr 16).

The selected texts, cinema and artworks have surfaced in this thesis because they provide geographically, historically and culturally rich accounts of the queer South African experience. While some of the sources are not initially recognisable as queer, part of the ambition of this thesis is to detect murmurs of a queer narrative, or to engage in a 'queering' of said sources. The important contribution of literature, cinema and visual arts to ecocritical discourse should not be underestimated. In his discussion on K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, Anthony Vital envisions an:

ecocriticism that joins in multidisciplinary conversation about environmental futures, contributing to literary studies' special insights into language and its crafting. Such multidisciplinary is crucial: modern worlds take their form from a wide range of discourses, both specialist and non-specialist, and the quest for a less destructive path into the future will benefit from as much communication among representatives of these discourses as possible. (Vital 176)

Mariss Everitt meanwhile, pins their hope for climate justice on the 'elusive but powerful human imagination', arguing that:

literature can be used to persuade where environmental facts fail. After all, stories have been used as a didactic tool from the beginnings of human civilisation. To put it another way, it is not knowledge of our biological and evolutionary heritage but, rather, our uniquely human capacity to make art which may reunite humankind with the rest of the natural world. (Everitt, in Fincham 132)

I believe that many of the literary and visual forms outlined in this research report work to reunite the human with the rest of the natural world, to end what ecologist Vandana Shiva calls 'eco-apartheid', 'a much wider and deeper apartheid (than the South African case) ... based on the illusion of separateness, of humans from nature, in our minds and lives' (quoted in Cock 144).

Moving between the rural landscape of the Eastern Cape as visualised in the film *Inxeba*, the sugar cane fields of KwaZulu-Natal in Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's text *Black Bulls, Ancestors and Me* and the littoral topographies of the Western Cape as presented in the film *Proteus*, this body of research spans the vast geography of South Africa. The periods represented in these texts stretch from the 18th century to the contemporary and examines an array of diverse terrestrial and oceanic geographies. An examination of this vast temporality is crucial because it grounds contemporary queer South African experience in the Dutch and British colonial projects and their repression of indigenous cultural and sexual formations. The suppression of homosexuality by Dutch and British colonists was part of a wider attempt to subjugate and eradicate indigenous familial formations such as polygamy, which were also viewed with disdain by European settlers. T. J. Tallie, in *Queering Colonial Natal: Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in South Africa*, entangles indigenous familial and sexual practices with queerness. Referring to the historical province of Natal, as a stand-in for the wider British settler-colonial project, Tallie positions the othering of African indigenous practices by Europeans as inherently marking them as queer, tying indigenous cosmologies

to queer realities. In this research report, the term 'queer' also stands in for ways in which Western modernity can be resisted.

Literature Review

Eco-critical and hydro-critical writing

The concept of 'ecologies' based on facets of identity is a relatively new scholarly endeavour. Much of this discourse has revolved around the concept of 'feminist ecologies' and 'Black ecologies', where the relationship between the natural world and human life is examined through the lens of feminist studies and Black studies respectively. Queer ecology animates ecological discussions further because of the complexity and magnitude of the queer experience globally. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, the 2010 anthology edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, is intrinsic in queer ecological discourse, in its examination of themes as diverse as animal sex, homosexual nationalities, AIDS literature and gay 'ghettos'. However, these studies are often terrestrial and global north-focused, which this research report aims to work against.

In this thesis, I depart from a terrestrial vantage point and signal an interest in the study of queer hydrologies, building on an extensive scholarly and literary examination of the ocean as a methodology for disrupting terrestrial discourse. Tiffany Lethabo King, in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, uses the metaphor of the shoal (a constantly shifting offshore geological feature) as a site where Black and Native studies converge to imagine new epistemologies in the wake of anti-Black racism, enslavement and Indigenous genocide. King positions this 'liminal, indeterminate, and hard to map' (King 3) conceptual space as existing far from the shores of Western thought, where Black and Native studies can meet and engage in an autonomous environment. King's exploration of oceanic formations imagines a discourse that counters land-based cosmologies and knowledge production.

Spawned largely out of ocean studies, hydro-criticism complicates the land-based tendencies of environmental theory. While much historical and contemporary literature about spatiality in South Africa has focused on the land (such as Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa*) the ocean muddies conventional, landed presumptions around agency, temporality and belonging, as it does to gender and sexuality. Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley claims that 'the brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences now called blackness and queerness surfaced in intercontinental maritime contacts hundreds of years ago: in the seventeenth century, in the Atlantic Ocean' (Tinsley 191). Tinsley explicitly references the ocean as a particularly potent site of 'un-gendering' and potential gender transformations outwith the binary.

As this research report also investigates the relationship between queer people and the ocean, I must also consider a hydro-critical framework. Hydro-critical discourse has forced scholars working in the humanities and social sciences to adapt knowledge production to a world where ice caps are melting exponentially and increasingly frequent hurricanes and cyclones are devastating regions of the global south (Winkiel). Therefore, this research report invests in a balanced examination of queer ecologies across the oceanic and terrestrial realms, considering a parallel study of 'queer hydrologies' in a South African

context and how water is an active component in forming, configuring and narrating queer subjectivities. In *Underflows: Queer Trans Ecologies and River Justice*, Cleo Wölfe Hazard provides a framework for examining queer hydrologies, albeit in a North American context. Hazard employs a multi-species approach, entangling narratives of animal and habitat recovery projects, ecological grief, and their own experience as a transgender ecologist. They use the concept of the 'underflow' (the non-visible parts of a river's flow and the underground currents from aquifers) as a metaphor for the marginalisation of indigenous communities (and their cosmologies relating to the environment) in the face of settler colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Lesley Green in *Rock, Water, Life: Humanities for a Decolonial South Africa*, undertakes a historical and social study of the region's hydrological histories, examining how the hydrology of the Cape was used by Dutch colonists to dispossess indigenous people of their land and consolidate colonial authority in the region. Green also discusses the dichotomy between the extractivist agricultural and hydrological methods of the colonists and the cosmologies of indigenous people relating to the natural environment. Green's examination of indigenous cosmologies relating to the land and water is an example of how these epistemologies can be centred in discussions on the environment. African eco-critical writers such as Wangari Maathai, Yvonne Vera and Amos Tutuola all engage with the environment using African cosmologies, which is explored in the first chapter in reference to the Cape's threatened natural environments. Terry Gifford argues that 'ecocriticism has not developed a methodology, although its emphasis on interdisciplinarity assumes that the humanities and science should be in dialogue and that its debates should be informed equally by critical and creative activity' (Gifford). However, this research recognises that 'science' is only one form of knowledge production, so focuses also on indigenous cosmologies in South Africa and beyond, in synthesis with critical humanities methodologies and literary analysis.

South African queer histories

As Bulelwa Mabasa outlines in her essay "Decolonising Laws and Policies to represent the people", in the anthology *Land in South Africa: Contested Meanings and Nation Formation*, the implementation of Roman-Dutch Law initially in the Cape, and later more widely across South Africa, was responsible simultaneously for the dispossession of indigenous people from their land and for the outlawing of homosexuality, which carried the death penalty in the 18th century. While homosexuality is no longer a criminal offence in South Africa, property laws in the nation are still based on tenets of Roman-Dutch Law and English common law. These legal histories entangle queer identity with contemporary political discourse on land possession in South Africa.

Integral to understanding the contradictions of the queer South African experience is how lived experiences diverge from South Africa's Constitution, which is one of the most progressive in the world in regard to the rights of its LGBTQIA+ citizens. However, the reality is far more complex, with spatial, racial and class inequalities creating a breadth of stratified lived experiences. Homosexuality was a criminal offence in the apartheid era (1948-1994), punishable by up to seven years in prison. This followed centuries of widespread persecution of queer and transgender people in the Dutch and British Empire colonies, under legislation relating to sodomy (which included the death penalty). In 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) decriminalised homosexuality and later enshrined full

constitutional rights and anti-discrimination legislation in the Constitution in 1996 (Department of Justice). Simultaneously, the end of the apartheid era saw mass migration from rural areas of South Africa to the metropolises, after restrictions on freedom of movement and spatial segregation were ended. As a result, extensive and rich scholarship and literature from this period onwards has, unsurprisingly, focused on the queer urban experience, particularly in Johannesburg and Cape Town. While the urban environment does configure in this thesis, it is my intention to focus on the rural, littoral and oceanic micro-regions of South Africa.

The 2003 film *Proteus* (around which the first chapter of this thesis centres) examines the early period of Dutch colonisation, the narrative being based on 18th-century Dutch court records from the Western Cape. The film centres on a romantic relationship between a white prisoner and a Black prisoner on Robben Island. Jesse Arseneault writes that 'the film both places queerness within South Africa's historical narrative where it has been effaced and queers the landscape of South Africa's history by putting a same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa's post-apartheid national identity' (Arseneault 41). Francois Olivier, in their 2014 essay *A Queer (Re)turn to Nature? Environment, Sexuality and Cinema* describes how *Proteus* 'delineates the historical and discursive dimensions of an ongoing relationship between the politics of nature and sexual politics' (Olivier 2). In the film, the interchange between the natural world and the human is constant, although it is largely an extractive relationship under the direction of European settlers, who mined the Cape's various resources through the enslavement of people of colour and through carceral labour. One sub-narrative of the film is the attempt by the colonists to categorise and rename the flora of the Cape, essentially erasing indigenous knowledge systems and altering the natural environment. The first chapter also works with Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* and K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* to reveal queer ecologies amidst the geographies of the Cape in the post-apartheid era, as well as cosmologies relating to African forest environments as outlined by scholars and writers such as Amos Tutuola and Wangari Maathai.

Proteus can be contextualised within a wider post-apartheid literary and cultural moment that reckoned with the histories of the Cape, and an attempt to reveal the experiences of enslaved and incarcerated people in South Africa. *Proteus*'s entanglement with the landscape and oceanscape of the Cape places it in dialogue with Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed*, which follows the story of Sila, an enslaved Mozambican woman. Christiansë's novel deals with the sexual violence of enslavement in the Cape during the early 19th century, with Sila's experience being tied to the carceral and plantation geographies of Robben Island and the Western Cape. In *Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House*, Isabel Hofmeyr describes Southern African waters as 'creolised', framing them as 'the imagined domain of African ancestors, Khoisan ("first nation") water spirits and deities, and Muslim water jinn associated with enslaved communities brought to the Cape under the Dutch, as well as imperial ideals of maritime manliness' (Hofmeyr 23). *Proteus* unpacks these creolised, colonial relationships while simultaneously addressing forms of 18th-century masculinity - particularly how experiences of enslavement and incarceration shaped male sexual identity.

Urban-rural tensions

The second chapter of this research report examines the practice of the South African visual activist Zanele Muholi. Several works from their ongoing photographic series *Somnyama Ngonyama* reveal the artist's oceanic and environmental concerns. One of these photographs is titled *Kwanele, Parktown, 2016*. In this image, (where Muholi has adorned themselves with a halo of synthetic plastics) like in the majority of other works from the series, Muholi employs what hooks calls the 'oppositional gaze', which she describes as 'the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opening up the possibility of agency' (hooks 116). Muholi's gaze operates as a challenge but also as an act of witnessing the global north's rendering of the African continent as a site of extractivism. Ama Josephine Johnstone meditates on Muholi's radical queer futures in their essay *Imaging An Assisted Evolution*, where they draw attention to the interconnected violence of ecological destruction, border control and homophobia and transphobia. In this chapter, I also examine *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*, where Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde narrates the story of their life that moves between the ecologies of Soweto and rural KwaZulu-Natal - and how their queerness and spirituality are embedded in both contexts.

This colliding of themes typifies some of the concerns of this thesis, particularly the relationships between land, colonialism, gender, sexuality, and indigenous knowledge systems. Nakhane Touré also reckons with these shifting identities in the rural and urban spheres in *Piggy Boys Blues*, which follows Davide M. as he travels from Johannesburg to pastoral Alice, his ancestral home. His arrival interrupts and upsets a precarious and contentious familial domestic normality. Touré's novel is particularly notable for its normalisation of queer sexual and romantic relationships and the way it is embedded into Xhosa culture and into the landscape of the Eastern Cape - although sex is also used as a means of violence and domination. The 2017 film *Inxeba* (which features Touré as the protagonist) is essentially a queering of Thando Mqolozana's novel *A Man Who is Not a Man*, where the protagonist Lumkile finds himself removed from a life of petty theft in Cape Town, and forced into a lonely mountain hut as part of the Xhosa initiation rite of ulwaluko. The novel examines Xhosa masculinity and the expanding and retracting definitions of what it means to be a man in rural South Africa; *Inxeba* grapples with these rural-urban tensions and reframes them through a queered lens. A close analysis of the film through an eco-critical lens informs the third chapter of this thesis. The director John Trengove, who is not Xhosa, wished to challenge assumptions that homosexuality was a product of western culture and was alien to traditional African cultural practices. The visual depiction of secretive initiation rituals caused controversy and protests in the Eastern Cape (led mainly by traditional leaders), with critics of the protestors arguing that they were expressing thinly-veiled homophobia. An analysis of the reaction to *Inxeba* must take into account the problem of positioning a globalised, contemporary queer culture against indigenous cultural practices and beliefs, which are often mischaracterised as 'primitive and patriarchal practices' (Moraka 9).

Inxeba is set amongst the forests and rivers of the Eastern Cape. Scenes of both queer intimacy and violence take place around bodies of freshwater, tying queer identities to the hydrological formations of the region. This thesis will focus on how the film uses the landscape to negotiate homoerotic subjectivities and how the environment actively disrupts, reconfigures and interrogates the interface between queerness, nature and Xhosa tradition.

Methodology

Primarily deploying analysis of primary and secondary texts, this thesis examines how queer South Africans relate to the land and to the ocean. This is undertaken through thematic content analysis of explicit and implicit queer historical and contemporary texts and visual culture as well as an analysis of regional environmental, social and political developments. As well as an analysis of texts, the thesis also deploys cinematic and artistic sources - the first chapter reflects on the 2003 film *Proteus*; chapter two focuses on the visual activist Zanele Muholi and other South African contemporary visual artists; and chapter three interrogates the environment as represented in the 2016 film *Inxeba*. I am invested in entangling literary, visual and cinematic sources, as I believe that these methods of representation studied together provide opportunities for more expansive readings. The visual and cinematic sources are analysed with both an ecocritical and queer lens, detecting interactions between queer people and the natural environment. It is of great importance to read the natural environment not as a passive entity in the textual sources, but as something with an agency that guides, populates and influences the course of the texts.

Research report structure

This body of research is organised into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on filmic and literary representations of queer ecologies in the Cape region, reflecting on the 2006 film *Proteus*, Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller*, and K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*. The second chapter focuses on an ecocritical analysis of Zanele Muholi's practice, informed by contemporary South African artists Nolan Oswald Dennis, Nicholas Hlobo, Noria Mabasa and Luvuyo Equiano Nyawose. The third chapter looks to the 2017 film *Inxeba*, and how river ecologies are presented in the film. A wider contextual reading establishes histories and realities of river justice in the Eastern Cape. This chapter considers methodologies and devices which are used in the production of the film and how they relate to a construction (or de-construction) of masculine identities, as well as tensions between urban and rural South Africa.

Chapter One

Queer ecologies in the Western Cape

Introduction

This chapter studies the 2003 film *Proteus*, alongside an analysis of Zakes Mda's novel *The Whale Caller* and K. Sello Duiker's novel *Thirteen Cents*, as a departure point for examining literary and filmic representations of queer ecologies in the context of the historical and contemporary Cape. Drawing on Cape Town's iconic geographies, particularly its geological and littoral formations, this chapter introduces the concept of 'queer hydrologies', a concept which is examined across the other chapters of this thesis. The source of the term queer hydrologies originates within the concept of 'queer ecologies' (a largely terrestrial-focused field) but instead looks to what Margaret Cohen describes as 'waterside chronotypes' (such as lagoons, rivers and estuaries) as potential 'literary microregions' (Hofmeyr 18). My examination of queer hydrologies departs from an understanding of the central positionality of the ocean in both the colonisation of South Africa and in the post-apartheid imagination. Isabel Hofmeyr notes how 'the ocean, by contrast, has been forgotten, first by the emerging settler colonial nation attempting to erase its origins and then by anticolonial nationalism turning its back on the ocean as the source of imperialism' (Hofmeyr 19). This is particularly important in the context of Cape Town, whose settlement was undertaken in order to facilitate the Dutch and British imperial expansion and consolidation of power around the Indian Ocean basin. Hofmeyr's definition of 'hydrocolonialism' (as previously outlined) is therefore important when considering the role of the ocean in these histories.

Key also to this discourse of 'queer hydrologies' is Cleo Wolffe Hazard's theorisation of the 'underflow'. Thinking of water as fluid, reciprocating, circular 'microregions' - using the metaphor of the *underflow* to present a queering of river ecologies, Hazard's embodied research prompts a consideration of the qualities of water. While Hazard explores the concept of the 'underflow' in the context of river systems, Hofmeyr's categorisation of water systems into three broad physical and meteorological categories - 'low', 'middle' and 'high' - allows for a consideration of reciprocal and fluid regions. This discourse allows for an examination not only of the 'familiar' environment that forms part of quotidian human experience, but an acknowledgement of other forms that are 'inanimate, the geologic, the distant, the invisible, the systemic, the strange... that we can never fully know and that make no recognizable attempts to know us' (Ensor 157). Oceans are the perfect example of an unknowable and distant entity - humans have only explored and charted 5% of the world's oceans (Fava).

The Whale Caller

Michael Lundblad warns about speaking 'for' the environment to the detriment of humanitarian issues (Iheka 38), which Jacklyn Cock also signals in her book *Writing the Ancestral River: A biography of the Kowie*. Cock warns against 'a narrow conservation movement focused on the protection of wild places, plants and animals' (Cock 143), while Lundblad describes environmental 'justice' that 'fails to take into account... human rights issues' (Lundblad 64) as 'malignant fiction' (ibid). Cognisant of this warning, this thesis aims to find a middle ground, a fine balance, between the ecological and the anthropological (Lundblad 64). I look to Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* in order to locate this balance.

Set in Hermanus, Western Cape, Mda's novel radically creates the possibility of ecologies that move beyond the binaries of domination and subordination. Using the schools of whales

and dolphins that inhabit this coast (and which have made it so iconic), Cajetan Iheka writes that '[t]he portrayal of the whale in Mda's narrative seems consistent with Jonathan Steinwand's position that postcolonial literature turns to whales and dolphins "for guidance in how human animals participate in postcolonial ecology" and to show "the liminal positions of both cetaceans and humans"' (Iheka 50). Mda's protagonist notes the 'two-hundred-year-old stench from the slaughter of the southern rights by French, American and British whalers at St Helena Bay in 1785... Seasons of mass killings! The smell still haunts these shores' (Mda 36). Here, *he Whale Caller* reflects on the commodification of South Africa's oceanic environments (what Elizabeth DeLoughrey describes as 'a new frontier for capital' (DeLoughrey 3) manifested by oil exploration, whaling, fishing, abalone poaching and other 'endangering practices' (Iheka 36). The destruction of the ocean's flora and fauna through these 'endangering practices' will inevitably endanger human populations - whether through pollution of water sources, loss of access to food, or the destruction of small-scale industries that rely on the ocean. However, the dominating practices of colonialism and apartheid in the context of Cape Town - from slavery through to forced removals and social exclusion, are also 'endangering practices'. Mda also exposes 'socially destructive profitmaking practices' (Fincham 139) and exploitation of the human and the marine on transnational circuits through the harvesting of abalone. *The Whale Caller* notes the 'coloured folk sell[ing] their harvest to white men who pay about two hundred rands a kilogram. The white men sell to the Chinese men for about a thousand rands a kilogram. The Chinese ship the abalone to the far east where they get about two thousand five hundred rands a kilogram for it' (Mda 175).

From the beginning of European settlement at the Cape, there are troubling historical accounts attesting to the environmental destruction wreaked by Dutch and British sailors and settlers on South Africa's natural environment. Referring to Robben Island, an English sailor in 1607 declared that '[i]n mine opinion there is not an Island in the whole world more frequented with Fowle and Seales than this Island' (Deacon 8), while another English visitor in 1604 declared that 'there were about fifty tons of penguins on the island' (Deacon 9). Morbidly, Deacon also notes that 'some sailors, such as the crew of the Dutch ship *Oranje* in 1608, were not interested in eating the seals, merely "clubbing fully a hundred to death" for their own amusement' (Deacon 11). The island's separation from the mainland Cape (and its Khoikhoi inhabitants) made it attractive to waves of colonists both settling in and passing through the Cape, and would become a site that would forecast the extractive and violent intentions of the Dutch and British settlers. The island forms the backdrop of *Proteus*, set in the 18th century when it was a penal colony with a cosmopolitan prison populace. Reflecting the expansive trading routes of the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), prisoners included exiled Xhosa leaders, aristocrats from Batavia (modern-day Indonesia), enslaved people from across Southern Africa, as well as Dutch and Khoikhoi convicts. In the apartheid era, the island would once again become a carceral space, with anti-apartheid freedom fighters such as Nelson Mandela being imprisoned there. Robben Island's earlier histories are often forgotten in lieu of this more recent history. However, both the film *Proteus* and Yvette Christiansë's 2006 novel *Unconfessed* exist within a moment of post-apartheid cultural production that is invested in these earlier histories of incarceration and enslavement, employing Robben Island as a symbol of terror and suffering.

Proteus follows two male prisoners on Robben Island - Claas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz - who engage in an interracial, homosexual relationship. Blank, a Khoikhoi herder from the

Cape, had been convicted of livestock theft in 1715 and sentenced to fifty years of hard labour in chains on the island. Meanwhile, Rijkhaart was deported from Batavia to the Cape for engaging in homosexual activity, avoiding the death penalty but instead landing 25 years on Robben Island. The film depicts gratuitous violence against the inmates, including flogging and waterboarding. While the two men are initially hostile to each other, they develop a secret relationship, using visits to a water tank to engage with one another privately. Meanwhile, Scottish botanist Virgil Niven develops an interest in Blank, for his knowledge of the Cape's flora, although the film also alludes to a subliminal sexual interest. When fellow inmates draw the authorities' attention to Blank and Rijkhaart's relationship, they are discovered, and they are sentenced to death for sodomy. In the closing scene of the film, they are shown tied together on a ship above the water's edge, from which they are summarily pushed, drowning together in Table Bay.

The opening scene of *Proteus* is symbolically rich. The viewer witnesses a slow-motion sequence of a protea flowering; the original court documents that the film relates to; and most strikingly, burning fynbos. The fynbos is indigenous to the Cape and speaks to the long-standing and contentious issue of land use and ownership on the Cape peninsula. The Cape fynbos is both fire-prone and fire-adapted, and it is these qualities which led the indigenous San people to deploy fire as 'an effective means of influencing the ecology of the natural environment to ensure the delivery of provisioning services' (Anderson & O'Farrell 28), particularly 'to encourage certain bulb species in a system of dedicated patch foraging for food provision' (ibid). The arrival of the Khoekhoen around 2000 years ago heralded a more intense and widespread use of fire across the peninsula, to promote plants suitable for their cattle and sheep herds to graze on (Mountain 2003, Deacon 1983). It is evident that fire has been foundational in the human alteration of the Cape's ecologies, and *Proteus*' visual deployment of it points to a recognition of indigenous experiences of life at the Cape that is not made in relation to settlers. The arrival of the Dutch heralded a rapid shift in land use, particularly with their demand for timber to build the fort at the water's edge, to build ships, and to provide fuel for the numerous ships that treated the new settlement as a refreshment station. However, exploitation of Table Mountain's Afromontane forest was so rapid and destructive that 'within six years of their arrival the Dutch East India Company put out a proclamation that there should be no further felling of yellow wood trees... the slow-growing indigenous forests had been dramatically reduced' (28). The forest holds a complex and often-contradictory place in the African literary imagination, and the destruction of the forests at the Cape has a wider symbolic poignancy. The exploitation, erasure and dispossession (alongside the introduction of disease by settlers) undertaken during this period is evidenced in the 'limited evidence of knowledge transfer', for example, in the 'little archaeological evidence of slave communities at the Cape adopting indigenous practices in environmental engagement in... hunting or gathering practices' (Anderson & O'Farrell 28).

In novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the forest inhabits an ominous space in the Igbo psyche, as the 'abode of negative spirits into which societal abominations such as the birth of twins and individuals with other abominable ailments...were abandoned to die or killed by the clan for fear of bringing misfortune into the community' (Rwafa 321). The forest simultaneously became the site where European missionaries built their churches, which threatened the Igbo culture. However, the opacity and denseness of the forest can also act as a site of safety, as exhibited in the 1996 film *Flame*. The film follows two young women, Nyasha and Florence, in 1970s colonial Rhodesia, striving to join the

male-dominated liberation struggle. Their desire to become freedom fighters leads them to the forests of Mozambique, where they are trained. The existence of the forest as a place of precarious safety and retreat is threatened by the 'ideological forest' of the masculinity of the freedom fighters and the sexual violence enacted against African women (Rwafa 324). Colonialism can also be understood as an 'ideological forest', a space for dramatising and enacting domination and control. Meanwhile, *The Palmwine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola vividly blurs the boundaries between the human and non-human, with the protagonist, the Drinkard, relying on the 'indelible hands of nonhumans' (Iheka 45). In the novel, they provide him with juju, which allows him to transform into a bird to escape danger and to transform into a canoe to traverse a river. Tutuola's forest is alive in carving out the narrative; it is certainly not redundant or passive.

Proteus is one attempt to make visible subjugated and silenced South African histories. Yvette Christiansë's 2006 novel *Unconfessed* operates with a similar method, by unearthing histories of enslaved women from the archive. Both works are drawn from court records from the historical Cape, which often has to stand in for other forms of recorded memory which are largely absent from South African histories of slavery. While *Proteus* works directly with materials from the archive, *Unconfessed* thinks through how to build an archive that holds histories of slavery in the Cape, using several court cases that relate to infanticide, or attempted infanticide by enslaved women. The unique stylistic qualities of *Proteus*, which at times feel awkward, disconnected and unresolved, reflects the difficulty of surfacing queer histories that have been marginalised for the sake of cultural and political agendas. These filmic qualities become a metaphor for the frustration of locating queer histories in the national archive. As Jesse Arseneault outlines, the setting of Robben Island is crucial in how *Proteus* projects queer narratives onto histories of struggle and resistance: 'the film both places queerness within South Africa's historical narrative where it has been effaced and queers the landscape of South Africa's history by putting a same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa's post-apartheid national identity' (Arseneault 41).

Francois Olivier furthers this reading by looking to the ecological aspects and multispecies potentiality of the film as a method of disrupting the colonial erasure of queer identity: this resistance to colonialism is ecological 'in so far as it takes seriously the capacity of seemingly casual, localized, and contingent relational practices to circulate throughout the broader social milieu in which they transpire' (Ensor 152), and speaks to wider indigenous practices of resistance that utilise the natural environment, such as in Zimbabwe, where the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) employed the rivers and mountains within the nation's forests as protection from Rhodesian fighters (Rwafa 321). *Proteus* demonstrates how queer desire creates its own ecologies while simultaneously operating within a particular set of ecologies that define the Cape in the 18th century.

The semi-fictional narrative of Virgil Niven, a Scottish botanist collecting plants at the Cape, who, like Rijkhaardt Jacobsz, is also linked to 'criminal trails of Dutch sodomites' (Olivier 86) forms a sub-plot in the film. According to records, he was a student of Carl Linnaeus, as well as part of a community of Amsterdam-based homosexual men. The rapid growth of colonial ports during the 17th and 18th centuries led to the development of a globalised homosexual culture, and thus the need for religious and institutional punishment for such activity. This inevitably caused tensions between the metropole and the colony, and in many ways Niven stands in as a metaphor for both spaces, with his fluctuating desires and interests.

The classification of plants is a theme that is threaded through *Proteus*, and visualises the entanglement between botanical history and queer desire in the 18th century Cape. The film allows us to understand the European classification of plants as being inherently linked to the classification of diverse gender identities and sexualities: in this case, as ‘unnatural’. The legal systems created by the Dutch and the British in the Cape (known as Roman-Dutch Law) operated in a similar way in regard to the creation of legislation for the criminalisation of homosexuality through ‘sodomy’, the dispossession of indigenous people from their land, and the classification of plants, as methods of possession, control and domination. Francois Olivier writes that ‘the film enables a reassessment of the Cape not only in terms of how colonialism affected its ecological systems but also how that same system of domination (which hinges on naming, identifying and controlling) sees queerness as a threat’ (Olivier 108). The film dramatises this contention, emphasising how potentially devastating this classification could be. Claas Blank uses language as a method of resistance to settler attempts to consolidate power over the Cape and its natural environments, an act which could result in corporal punishment. In one central scene in *Proteus*, where two white men are documenting species of plants with their indigenous names, Blank tells them the names of the plants which are in fact insults in the Khoena language - the comedic quality of this moment animates and agentialises the plants, which are otherwise rendered as passive specimens by the European settlers. This scene raises important questions around naming practices. Referring once again to Mda’s novel *The Whale Caller*, the discourse around the act of the Caller’s naming of the whale ‘Sharisha’ is divided. While Harry Sewlall argues that the Caller ‘exercises authority and ownership over her (Sharisha) through the act of naming’ (Sewlall 61), Cajetan Iheka understands this as an act of intimacy and respect that ‘bridges the gap between humans and other beings’ (Iheka 37). The queer potentiality of flora is evidenced in the photographs of the British-Nigerian artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode, whose homo-ecstatic photographs often use flowers to symbolise ecstasy and homoeroticism in the context of Yoruba cosmologies. In his 1989 series *Nothing to Lose (Bodies of Experience)*, the artist is shown grasping and biting what appears to be a Strelitzia flower - in another photograph, he is fed by water gushing off a long, triangular leaf that protrudes into the composition.

In *Proteus*, Virgil Niven is identified as a student of Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist and zoologist. Linnaeus’ system of botanical classification, which emphasised the sexual reproduction and sexual organs of plants rather than physical features, runs parallel to histories of the ‘othering’ of people of diverse gender identities and sexualities by Europeans during and after the age of the ‘enlightenment’. However, as seen in *Proteus*, the act of botanical classification also created space for expressions of male homosexuality. In his essay *Male Pleasure and the Genders of 18th Century Botanic Exchange*, Thomas Hallock argues that ‘changes in 18th century identity formation made this channelling of male pleasure through natural history almost inevitable; indeed, it was one of the many ways in which sexual identities proliferated’ (Hallock 701). Hallock quotes ecocritical writer David Mazel, who notes that, “though the individual may forge this identity on the bedrock of nature, the drag, or performance, remains no less socially constituted. Botanic culture exacted such performances, connecting enthusiasts to matters of sexual and gender protocol”. Plants served as conduits of same-sex feeling, supplying pleasures that were at once disembodied and immediate’ (ibid). A consideration of Richard Francis Burton’s theory of the ‘sotadic zone’ (set out in the final essay of his 1886 book *Arabian Nights*) inscribes

how colonialism tied sexuality to racialised geographies. Sub-Saharan Africa was not included in this zone, which spanned the Mediterranean, Central Asia and the entirety of North and South America - Burton believed that homosexuality was geographically endemic and caused by specific climates. Burton's theory tied same-sex desire and relationships chiefly to non-white and non-European bodies, as a method of reinforcing European imperial power in the colonies.

Ecologies of the castle

Proteus moves between the Castle of Good Hope, at the heart of the Dutch settlement at the Cape, and Robben Island, separated from the mainland by a seven-kilometre stretch of the Atlantic Ocean. The architecture of the castle very much reflected the intentions of the VOC's wider imperial project at the Cape, with carceral and discriminatory prerogative built into the very stone, the physicality of which cannot be separated from the geology and topography of Table Mountain, towering high above the Dutch settlement. Lesley Green outlines these connections, writing of the 'obscurely striped and spotted sandstone formations with granite intrusions that catch mists and form rain... changing the history of global capital in the 1600s - and thus also the history of Europe and its colonies' (Green 28). Settlers understood the rocks and waters of the Cape as a way to formulate capital, transforming water into an active substance 'shaped as much by capital as by contours' (Hofmeyr 16). Cape Town is notable for the ways in which its 'political and social history converges with its landscape' (Matebeni 2), and how Table Mountain itself continues to demarcate and enforce racial and economic segregation. The Castle of Good Hope, the centre of Dutch power in the Cape, was originally built along the Varsche river 'with the purpose of taking over the water point from the Khoena Watermans' (Green 31). The river was diverted into the moat with the intention of 'keep(ing) out the lions that would sometimes terrify the settlers at their doors, and the Khoena, against whom the Dutch went to war between 1659 and 1660' (Green 31). The Khoekhoen purportedly gave the name 'Camissa' (or 'sweet water') to the area immediately below Table Mountain, and it was this 'sweet water' that made this location so desired by the Dutch. The architecture of the castle, so entwined with the geology and hydrology of Table Mountain, was purposefully exclusionary with its own carceral prerogatives. Some criminal acts, however, were understood to be so heinous that they warranted the removal of those persons to the perimeters of the colony - in the case of the Cape, this was the ocean and islands around the colony. Francois Olivier writes how:

the castle and prison demarcated which bodies were legible and which kinds of criminality were erased from colonial society. Execution underlines sodomy's status as a mortal sin and a threat to the health of the colony, and is an act through which sodomites are physically displaced to outer perimeters of the colony.... However, some criminals sentenced at the castle were considered so against the natural order of things, due to the abominable nature of their crimes that their bodies had to be displaced entirely from the colony. (Olivier 97)

It is this fate that both Claas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz meet in *Proteus*. The final, devastating scene of the film sees the two men tied together and weighed down with lead on their feet and pushed into the waters of Table Bay - the punishment for 'sodomy' in the Cape in this era. The final shot of the film looks to the effervescent, distant surface of the water

from the depths. While the film ends at this moment, a queer ecological (or 'queer hydrological') framework may perhaps extend the temporalities of the film, noting the interactions of the two men's bodies with the submarine world - and the potentialities that indigenous cosmologies provide about the role of the ocean in both cycles of life and death.

'Queer Endangerment' and Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*

The site of Graaff's Pool in Cape Town brings together a constellation of queer ecological concerns. Photographs of South Africa's segregated beaches remain some of the most recognisable visual motifs of spatial separation. However, Cape Town's beaches remain contentious sites, seen in 2018 when a private security company evicted Black beachgoers from Clifton Fourth Beach, resulting in protesters undertaking a ritual slaughter of a sheep. The promotion of Cape Town as an international, LGBT-friendly tourist destination has rapidly accelerated processes of gentrification and exclusion, to the detriment of many of the city's inhabitants. In 2019, protests erupted following the eviction of refugees from a building in Greenmarket Square in the CBD, which they were occupying in protest at xenophobic violence.

Sea Point, one area of the city which has experienced rapid gentrification, is home to the site of Graaff's Pool, a former queer cruising and social space, where an intergenerational, interracial and cross-class community of queer men would meet to socialise, network and cruise for sex, forming what Samuel R Delany calls 'the lymphatic system of a democratic metropolis' (Delany 19). While Delany's exploration of cruising in texts such as *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* exists primarily within an urban North American context, the networks and ecosystems are useful in imagining the ambiguity of cruising as creating an alternative engagement with the environment and as an oppositionality to 'queer endangerment', as explored in Sarah Ensor's essay *Queer Fallout: Samuel R Delany and the Ecology of Cruising*.

Despite the homophobic legislation enforced by successive apartheid governments, Graaff's Pool survived as a cruising space into the 21st century, but it was the promotion of Cape Town as a global international tourist location and the rapid gentrification of Sea Point that led to the city council deciding to remove the perimeter wall, essentially making a private space fully visible to the public. The wall was removed in 2005 after complaints from residents and visitors alike, who complained of 'so-called sin, debauchery and homosexual orgies reportedly happening at the pool'. (Hutton 50). A solemn 2016 performance by Jaco-Barnard-Naudé and Pierre de Vos for the symposium *Queer in Africa: The Cape Town Question*, reflected on the swimming bath before its closure in 2005 and the devastation of AIDS on Cape Town's queer communities. It is perhaps the space of Graaff's Pool that forms the setting of Azure's home in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*. Duiker's novel, a harrowing bildungsroman, follows Azure, a thirteen-year-old Sotho child from Johannesburg living on the streets of Sea Point, Cape Town, following the murder of his parents. He survives through a network of friends and acquaintances, and through undertaking sex work. His clients are solely white, mostly closeted men that he elicits on or near the beach. The novel fiercely tackles the spatial and racial inequalities of Cape Town, presenting it as a nightmarish and violent city torn apart by gang and drug-related violence (in sharp contrast to the image of the city presented to international tourists). The end of the novel sees

Azure's final escape from the city to the heights of Table Mountain, before he witnesses a series of tidal waves inundate the city, the beginning of the apocalypse.

The ecologies of the mountain and the ocean are configured deeply in *Thirteen Cents*. The ocean offers Azure a space of semi-sanctuary - Anthony Vital writes that 'it is the ocean that gives Azure a sense of healing and cleansing power as he bathes in it, especially after sex work' (Vital 174). However, the ocean's ability to provide liberation for Azure is limited after a gang member forbids him to bathe in it. It is ultimately the mountain that provides Azure with liberation from violence and oppression; because, while the ocean 'lies entirely beyond the human' (ibid), the mountain 'has value for how it allows this vision by being a space for humans that exists nonetheless outside the city' (ibid). The mountain also allows Azure to experience a pre-colonial African spirituality. Through trance and the medium of fire (making reference to the San's people's spiritual invocations through the 'trance dance'), he encounters the spirits of the Cape's original inhabitants, including a woman who calls herself 'Saartjie'. His encounter with the spirit of Saartjie (presumably a reference to Sarah Baartman) through the medium of fire and trance, reveals the full depth of the enduring violence and erasure of colonialism, tying Azure to the historical fate of Saartjie.

However, Azure's experience on the mountain is also disrupted by the adults that he so thoroughly antagonises. The arrival of Oscar, a queer man who has scaled the mountain from Hout Bay, and who stumbles upon Azure's shelter, causes Azure great annoyance - but also further entwines him with queer sexuality beyond his positionality as a sex worker who sells his body only to men. Azure identifies him both as white and as a 'moffie', and because of his sexuality, insinuates that he would be interested in buying sex from Azure - a suggestion he declines. While the mountain provides sanctuary for Azure, he thinks that for Oscar, it will lead to his demise: 'The mountain will eat him up. It'll make him mad. It'll make all his friends mad. He'll stop coming to work and will only want to spend all his time on the mountain. His friends will think he's mad and that moffie guy of his, he'll leave him' (Duiker 141). This passage can be read in multiple ways; perhaps, Azure is insinuating that Oscar's sexuality renders him weak, unable to survive on the mountain. However, I understand this as Azure outlining that the city provides Oscar sanctuary by way of his whiteness - while Azure's blackness (and his further 'othering' that his blue eyes cause him) means he must find sanctuary away from the city, in a natural world that makes accessible a pre-colonial, indigenous knowledge. Later, Azure's mountain sanctuary is again disrupted, this time by a coloured man who berates him for swimming in the reservoir, reminding him of the 'structures of adult authority that he climbs the mountain to escape' (Vital 178). The reference to Cape Town's hydrological infrastructures points to the extent of the disruption of this fragile ecosystem that Azure has come to inhabit (as fragile and precarious as Azure's life on the streets of Cape Town), and the continued demarcation of space that denies indigenous and racialised people access to South Africa's natural environments.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed a number of textual and cinematic sources which relate to the queer narratives embedded in the natural environments of the Cape. The primary focus of this analysis, the 2003 film *Proteus*, is based on archival court records which document the fate of two homosexual men, Claas Blank and Rijkhaart Jacobsz, who engage in a romantic and sexual interracial relationship on 18th-century Robben Island. When they are discovered

by the Dutch colonial authorities, they are accused of 'sodomy' and sentenced to death by drowning. The film, by way of embedding a historical 'same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa's post-apartheid national identity' (Arseneault 41), establishes that queerness has always been an integral (if, at times, subjugated), element of South African cultural identity. The film also reveals how colonialism attempted to silence and erase both indigenous life and queer life. T.J Tallie, in *Queering Colonial Natal: Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in Southern Africa*, remarks that indigenous knowledge systems are inherently queer because they are anti-colonial: this analysis helps to broaden definitions of 'queer' that depart from a singular focus on human sexuality.

A sub-narrative in *Proteus* is the European colonial classification of plants at the Cape, which is undertaken by the semi-fictional botanist Virgil Niven. Niven befriends Claas Blank for his knowledge of the indigenous flora, and the film also suggests he is sexually attracted to him too. The opening scene of *Proteus* features a protea flowering in slow motion, and, most strikingly, burning fynbos - which alludes to pre-colonial ecological histories of the Cape. Representations of the pre-colonial Cape also figure in both K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller*. This imagery works as a method of both exposing and countering the widespread ecological destruction that has taken place across the region since the arrival of European colonisers, and the racialised inequalities that stratify contemporary South African society.

Chapter 2

Queer ecologies and climate justice in South African contemporary visual art

Introduction

Note: Zanele Muholi uses the pronouns 'they/them' at the time of writing. However, some sources in this chapter make reference to Muholi as 'she', as this was the pronoun they used when these texts were published.

This chapter surveys the concept of queer ecologies in the works of a constellation of contemporary South African visual artists. Examining firstly the practices of Johannesburg-based artists Nolan Oswald Dennis and Nicholas Hlobo, who both present sculptural manifestations of queer African ecologies through a myriad of conceptual and visual methodologies, I then gravitate towards the work of the visual activist Zanele Muholi. Departing from the ecologies of the township space (the setting of their photographic series *Faces and Phases*) and by reframing their ongoing photographic series *Somnyama*

Ngonyama through an ecocritical lens, I argue that Muholi's work poses urgent questions around the ecological catastrophe imposed on the African continent by the global north: a conversation that Muholi initiates with their direct 'oppositional gaze'. This analysis refers once again to the concept of 'queer hydrologies', departing from a terrestrial vantage point to instead consider the artist's work from an oceanic viewpoint through Muholi's 2016 work *Bhekisisa, Sakoui Beach (Mayotte)*.

Muholi's practice and Ama Josephine Johnstone's 'vulnerable writing' on and around the visual activist's output is useful in advocating for a queer reimagining of an approach to addressing the climate crisis in South Africa - one that de-centres the global north and its citizens. LGBT+ people, especially those in the global south, have a heightened vulnerability to the effects of the climate crisis. While Muholi's 'oppositional gaze' in their photographic series *Somnyama Ngonyama* can be read as challenging the white, male, cisgender, Euro-American gaze, their gaze also challenges the climate-related disasters already happening across the African continent due to 'climate colonialism'. Climate change knowingly instigated by the global north reinforces patterns of oppression, extraction and domination that have existed since colonisation and the subsequent 'industrial revolution' that took place in western Europe.

Sculptural interpretations of queer ecologies

Nolan Oswald Dennis, born in Zambia in 1988, is a visual artist based in Johannesburg, working primarily with sculpture and printmaking. In his sculptural assemblages, Dennis rejects the notion of the earth as 'seamless, smooth, unitary and knowable' (Goodman Gallery), instead distorting knowledge production in order to create the possibility of new ecologies on new worlds. This is seen in his work *garden for fanon* (Figure 1), a sculptural installation first exhibited as part of Dennis' exhibition *conditions*, which took place in 2021 at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. The exhibition centred on 'the spherical globe, an idealised figure of the planet in Western cosmology' (ibid). The artist presented a collection of transformations of the sphere, rejecting Western cosmologies as 'truth', 'stretching and distorting the model in order to find space for other worlds' (ibid). The eccentric and perplexing array of materials in the installation are listed as 'bioactive system, books, borosilicate globes, community of *eisenia fetida* earthworms, care protocols, microcontroller, steel armature, izinkhamba pots' (ibid). Through the use of a community of *eisenia fetida* earthworms, Dennis forms his own ecologies within the space of the gallery. Of this work, Dennis says:

the logic of colonial cosmology insists on the universality of the Western world: a planet rendered as private property, as social violence, as deliberate crisis. Occupying the same space and time as the colonial planet are other worlds. A planet rendered whole as indigenous land and life; a queer planet rendered just, feminist, socialist; a planet facing south, and east, and waterward. Altogether an ecology of black planets - a black cosmography (where black is a vector that opens toward hidden conditions of space and time). (ibid)

Dennis here imagines African, specifically Southern African ecologies, as resisting Western 'science' as the sole and all-encompassing form of knowledge production. By looking 'south, and east' Dennis deconstructs the 'literalisation of the stale Old World (as) a promise

perennially situated just the other side of a frontier that was always receding westward' (Garrard 51), instead prioritising cosmologies along a south-south axis. Dennis' reference to looking 'waterward' speaks to the privileging of land as an overdetermined cosmology in the colonial and post-colonial nation-state, with the ocean, 'forgotten, first by the emerging settler colonial nation attempting to erase its origins and then by anticolonial nationalism turning its back on the ocean as the source of imperialism' (Hofmeyr 19).

Like Nolan Oswald Dennis, Nicholas Hlobo's sculptural constructions are material manifestations of ecologies. Hlobo was born in Cape Town in 1975 and is currently based in Johannesburg. The artist's large-scale sculptures are three-dimensional visual landscapes of Xhosa imagined geographies of desire and sexuality. Hlobo's sculptures become hybrid objects, simultaneously human and non-human, ceremonial but humorous. His use of disparate materials set up a predicament, a contrast of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' (the artist uses materials including rubber inner tubes, ribbon, organza) and artistic processes that are at once meticulous and gentle, while also heavy-handed and seemingly violent. Hlobo's 2006 sculpture *Isisindo samadlozi* (Figure 2) captures the contradictions of his practice. An oversized, suspended pair of testicles hang from a black rubber phallus, which in turn hangs from the ceiling. While the testicles appear almost like punching bags, they are stitched together carefully with dark pink ribbons - suggesting a wound, the fragility of masculinity exposed. Hlobo is chiefly concerned with the 'validity of structures that marginalise homosexual individuals' (Makhubu 504), which he addresses largely through satire and references to the Xhosa ritual of male circumcision.

In his essay *Pride and Playfulness: Hlobo's Subversive Love of Xhosa Traditions* that accompanied Hlobo's exhibition at Standard Bank Gallery in 2009, Kopano Ratele and the artist draws parallels between masquerade in Xhosa culture and in queer culture:

Going back into my culture or my ethnic background... I find that masquerade is part of the culture. For example, when one goes into initiation, you are not supposed to be seen, especially by women; they should not know who you are, especially if you are in the camp as a group, so basically you have to cover your face. Weighing that against homosexual, especially gay culture, I find with the drag queens for example, people masquerade, sort of play this game of being like a woman at the same time as they are challenging conventions and hiding themselves. (Ratele 23)

In a sense, here we see Xhosa and queer traditions 'rubbing' against one another, and it is this friction (but also duality) that Hlobo subversively deploys in his sculptural practice. *Inxeba*, the 2017 film which I analyse in depth in the following chapter, also operates in this moment of tension between queerness and Xhosa tradition, but its context is the rural Eastern Cape rather than the urban contemporary art space that Hlobo operates within.

Somnyama Ngonyama - Hail the Dark Lioness

Zanele Muholi is a South African visual activist and artist working primarily with photography, but also with video and sculpture. Born in eThekweni in 1972, Muholi has been consistently documenting South Africa's Black queer and transgender communities for nearly two decades. Their first major body of work, *Faces and Phases*, was initiated in 2006, consisting

of a series of black and white photographic portraits of lesbian women and transgender men against plain or patterned backgrounds. Now consisting of over three hundred photographs, the series stands as an archive of Muholi's community - some of whom are alive, some of whom have passed away. In 2012, Muholi turned the camera on themselves, and began developing a series titled *Somnyama Ngonyama*, which translates from isiZulu to English as 'Hail the Dark Lioness'. While embedding itself in Zulu cosmologies specifically, the title also alludes to San cosmologies of the 'humanimal' - the 'bleeding' over of the human form into the animal one, with the eland holding particularly sacred positionality within the practice of 'trance dance', which allows the human transition into animal form. Muholi's decision to utilise the term 'lioness' perhaps alludes to a metaphor for a dominant femininity.

Deploying sculptural and theatrical assemblages that embellish the artist's body, *Somnyama Ngonyama* marks a departure from the more formal, documentary style of *Faces and Phases*, and towards a photographic style operating as 'post-colonial photographic self-fashioning' (Imma 229). For the first time in their practice, the artist acts as both image-maker and participant, mostly departing from the township space that was the setting for *Faces and Phases*. Muholi's photographic and activist practice disrupts a history of photography in South Africa that is particularly violent. The invention of photography in France in 1822 saw the medium quickly develop as an imperial tool for the classification and conquest of plants, animals and humans. In the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa, it is deeply entwined with 'ethnographic' studies, zoological and botanical studies. The censorship of photography was fundamental to the apartheid regime's continuation of power, as was 'a vigilant policing of sex and sexuality' (Imma 220) and interracial relationships. However, Muholi also operates with an awareness of how photography as activism can also be inherently violent, as evidenced in the case of Millicent Gaika. Gaika, a Black lesbian woman living in Guguletu, Cape Town, was brutally assaulted and raped in 2010. A local organisation, Luleki Sizwe, which provides support to victims of homophobic hate crimes, used a photograph of Gaika's disfigured face in an online petition which was circulated worldwide - and even placed on billboards in South Africa. Gaika said that this caused her to feel revictimised, and that she became a recognisable figure without consenting to having her photograph shared. It is these contentious and precarious conditions that Muholi both works within and attends to in their practice.

My initial analysis of queer ecologies in Muholi's visual activism in this chapter begins by briefly looking beyond the photograph. Instead, I look to that which takes place *around* the making and exhibiting of Muholi's photographs. Tessa Lewin importantly identifies the queer ecologies that Muholi manifests in their practice, but one that is outwith their photographic production: as Muholi's success has grown, so has the number of people that they travel with. For Performa 17, Muholi travelled to New York with 20 members of what Gevisser refers to as their 'court', 'including drag artists, contemporary dancers, a phalanx of documenters, the mother of a murdered lesbian and even a personal gynaecologist' (Lewin 197). This creation of social and community ecologies around the creation, curation and display of their work is one of the key reasons why Muholi's practice moves away from solely artistic practice and into 'visual activism' - because the work does not end with the 'work', but sprawls onwards and outwards into their South African queer community. Lewin describes the photographic works as an 'epistemological and pedagogical intervention' (Lewin 194), but indicates that Muholi's creation of a community is far more significant. This formulation of queer kinship and family operates in a not dissimilar way to a 'house' in African-American

queer culture, where formations of unrelated (and often homeless and ostracised) queer youth would gather to perform in 'vogue balls'.

Bhekisisa, Sakouli Beach, Mayotte, 2016

The first of Muholi's works I gravitate towards is *Bhekisisa, Sakouli Beach, Mayotte, 2016* (Figure 3). In contrast to the other photographs in *Somnyama Ngonyama* it is in landscape orientation, troubling the notion that this is a series of 'portraits'. It is also notable in the series as one of the only images which does not feature Muholi's direct gaze, which bell hooks describes as the 'oppositional gaze' - 'the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opening up the possibility of agency' (hooks 116). The positionality therefore of the audience is more ambiguous - whereas Muholi's gaze acts as a challenge in other works from the *Somnyama Ngonyama* series, here the audience is a passive but perhaps guilty witness. The decision by the artist not to look directly at the camera is curious - it is exactly this aspect of Muholi's work that holds so much power in how the viewer understands the artist and their own positionality in looking. However, the connotations of this photograph are multiple and disparate. It holds hauntologies of the refugee crisis, echoing the images of racialised bodies washing up on the shores of European countries such as Greece and Italy. Often less commonly acknowledged, however, is the situation for refugees within the African continent, many of whom have fled conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. A concern that must be considered in any study of queer identity in South Africa is the plight of queer and trans refugees and asylum seekers from other African nations. South Africa reportedly hosts around 250,250 refugees and asylum seekers from other African nations, mostly fleeing war and economic downturn (The UN Refugee Agency). Many of these asylum seekers are seeking refuge from nations with restricted human rights for LGBT+ people, such as Somalia and the DRC. While South Africa, with its progressive constitution and modern and diverse economy, is viewed as somewhat of a sanctuary for queer and trans people from the rest of the continent, the reality for many is vastly different. LGBT+ refugees face discrimination from immigration officials, xenophobia from host communities and ostracisation from other migrants and refugees from their own countries of origin. On top of this, asylum seekers must also report to a 'refugee reception centre' as often as once a month, having to travel to either Cape Town, Pretoria, eThekweni or Musina.

In this image, we see Muholi beyond the borders of the township and of South Africa, spaces that deeply grounded *Faces and Phases* and earlier film works *Enraged by a Picture* (2005) and *Difficult Love* (2010). Although seemingly distant and disparate from the context of urban South Africa, the setting of the island of Mayotte (a French 'overseas territory') is deeply entwined with Southern African histories. As a plantation economy on the Indian Ocean littoral with a colonial history (and like *Bhekisisa*... blurs the dichotomy between the terrestrial and oceanic), it shares commonalities with histories of enslavement and indenture which have formed contemporary South Africa. Mayotte is also the site of a major but largely unacknowledged refugee crisis, with thousands of refugees arriving from neighbouring Comoros on fragile and precarious *kwassa kwassa* fishing boats. Most of these refugees are deported upon arrival by the authorities, and there are widespread tensions between Comoran refugees and Mayottan citizens (Carver). Muholi, through this image, invokes those reproduced images (whether originating from the Mediterranean littoral, the Canary Islands or the coast of Mayotte) of bloated Black bodies on the shoreline, 'ebbing and

flowing throughout history and news channels and inherited nightmares/memories of bodies that look like ours, looking like this' (Johnstone 105). In this image, Muholi conjures the presence of ocean water without it being visually or physically present. The absence of water in the image with the presence of the artist's body lying horizontally on the rocks suggests that this image was indeed taken from the shoreline or from within the ocean itself. Muholi thus establishes both an oceanic presence and perspective, departing from urban and terrestrial cosmologies. The artist's body lying horizontally suggests a force that has shifted them against their will, something Ama Josephine Johnstone reads *Bhekisisa...* in relation to the climate crisis already manifesting across South Africa, which includes the threat of drought and subsequent tensions over access to water: in 2016 alone, South Africa directed 381 million rand towards drought relief (South African Government News Agency). While the spectre of drought relief continues to haunt the nation, South Africa must also contend with episodes of flash flooding. The KwaZulu-Natal littoral is particularly prone to these disasters, with the most recent disaster in April 2022 resulting in the deaths of over 400 people and an ongoing water management crisis in and around eThekweni. Echoes of this flood can be found in the floor-based sculptures of Noria Mabasa. These sculptures were made in response to the devastating 1987 floods in the region in which over 500 people lost their lives. *Carnage II*, carved from driftwood found following the flood event, depicts six people in a struggle with various animals, including a snake, a lamb and a crocodile.

The setting of the beach in *Bhekisisa...* also has a distinct symbolism in relation to South Africa's history. Photographs of signs demarcating the nation's beaches for 'Europeans' and 'Non-Europeans' have become some of the most enduring visual identifiers of the apartheid era. Cape Town-based artist Luvuyo Equiano Nyawose examines Black South Africans' relationship to the eThekweni coastline in their body of research and photographic works titled eBhish'. Nyawose's work responds directly to this spatial-racial demarcation, producing a contemporary archive of Black life at the beach, a space once coded as a site of white leisure at the social exclusion of people of colour during the apartheid era.

Between the binary of wet and dry, Johnstone distinguishes queerness as 'wet', as multiplicitous, and restorative, in contrast to the 'dryness' of cis-hetero-white neoliberalism. In *Bhekisisa...* Muholi's body is un-gendered, not female, male or non-binary. Their body, lying horizontal and dormant on the beach, cascades with meanings. One of these meanings is certainly the 'hyper-naturalisation' of the Black body. Formulated and entrenched by European settlers, this hyper-naturalisation signalled the exploitation, extraction and enslavement of African people: in the context of South Africa, one example is the case of Sarah Baartman, whose tragic life was carved out by Europeans' obsession with the 'natural' and the 'unnatural' female form. Johnstone also imagines Muholi's body in this photograph as something left-over; as 'the explicit female black body (as) an excessive body' (Fleetwood 109); as detritus.

Kwanele, Parktown, 2016

The second work from Muholi's oeuvre I look to is *Kwanele, Parktown, 2016* (Figure 4) which translates as 'enough' from isiZulu to English. Ama Josephine Johnstone reflects on this title in a poetic reflection from their text *Imaging an Assisted Evolution: The Environmental Futurity of Zanele Muholi's Somnyama Ngonyama*:

'Kwanele, Parktown, 2016. It is enough. Enough a plastic wrapper for a headdress. Enough chemical-spilled oceans. Enough burning of carrier bags. Enough the animal carcass choked with used needles and candy wrappers. Enough electronic waste that will never decompose. Enough acid poisoning that never washes off. Enough villages under sand. Enough sand stolen for cement. Enough salinised cropland. Enough desertification. Enough brown bodies on the shoreline... Enough plastic-strewn beaches. Enough. Enough. Enough. Enough. Enough. How many times must I say 'kwanele' - 'it's enough' - before what you hear is not 'more' but 'too much?' (Johnstone 102).

Johnstone here lists some of the environmental disasters already taking place across Muholi's country of birth. The surface of terrestrial South Africa from space reveals the extent of the damage that the wastage from gold and diamond mining has left on the natural environment. The specific geologies of South Africa provided the material and economic bedrock that facilitated race-based segregation and dispossession and its later legal solidification as apartheid. The threat of fracking in the Karoo (from a Khoikhoi word, possibly Garo, meaning 'desert') still looms large, prevented only by various lawsuits bringing a halt to operations in the region. Fracking causes devastating land, air and water pollution, which directly contradicts one clause of the South African Bill of Rights which states that citizens have the right to 'an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being'. This contradiction is also evident in the 1996 clause in the Constitution which protects the rights of LGBT+ citizens, which is far removed from the reality of many queer South Africans - particularly Black lesbian women and transgender people, who continue to face discrimination and violence. This photograph thus becomes a manifestation of ecological disaster in South Africa. The nation's scarred surface is 're-mapped' onto Muholi's face. Just like their face, defined and marked by the weight of struggle, loss, queerphobia and racism, the nation's landscape is scarred from the extraction of coal, gold and minerals, from the pollution and sedimentation of water sources for irrigation purposes, from the excesses of extractivism and its continued reliance on cheap Black labour. The artist aligns the violence against the black queer body with the violence enacted upon the earth. In *Kwanele*..., their gaze is tired, evidence that this struggle is perhaps a lifelong one - and that the struggle for land justice is a multi-generational one. Muholi's gaze operates as a challenge but also as an act of witnessing the global north's rendering of the African continent as a site of extractivism, and the unequal consequences of the climate crisis on the global south (as engineered by the global north's 'industrial revolution'). A global rise in temperature will not occur equally all over the planet, so while 'two degrees is considered survivable for much of the global north' (Johnstone 99), it spells 'certain death' (Johnstone 99) for Africa: an act which Sudanese diplomat and economist Lumumba di Aping describes as 'climate fascism' in 2009 (Welz). Indeed, thirteen years later in 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report named colonialism as a 'historical and ongoing driver of the climate crisis'. Muholi's gaze in the face of such cataclysmic potential futures works to reinvigorate 'the agential capacity of the queer Black body in relation to environmentally changed futures' (Johnstone 99).

Both *Faces and Phases* and Muholi's 2010 film *Difficult Love* deal with the township as contested space. Muholi attempts to subvert white supremacist discourse that positions the township space as homogenous and violent, as 'terra incognita, the third world backyard of the modern European first-world city' (Imma 221). While they do not shy away from their

subjects' experience of violence, they also reject 'contemporary narratives that fix homophobic violence as the defining characteristic of queer life in the townships' (Imma 219). *Difficult Love* juxtaposes the Soweto landscape with the intimacy of the late queer sangoma Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's ritual space. Nkabinde's autobiography *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* operates between the contested township space that forms the backdrop of Muholi's *Faces and Phases* series and the ecologies of rural KwaZulu-Natal. Deploying Zulu cosmologies, Nkabinde establishes their queer presence in both the ecology of the township and that of the rural space. They note their childhood memories of exploring the sugar cane fields of KwaZulu-Natal, which inevitably ties their narrative to geographies as disparate as Mauritius and the Caribbean (and histories of migration, indenture and enslavement - the crop was first introduced to South Africa from Mauritius in 1848). Kabinde also provides an insight into how the land and water of the region are tied to gender and sexuality:

The older boys would go out with a panga or an axe to get sugar cane. They would cut it into small sticks and put it in an uqhwenbe for the younger children. We would suck the sticks until there was no taste left and then throw them to one side for the birds. I wanted to go with the boys to fetch the sugar cane but they wouldn't allow it. They said there were snakes. When I was older I found out that the boys used to take their girlfriends into the sugar cane to make love to them there. (Nkabinde 19)

Both Nkabinde and Muholi operate between two worlds in their artistic, written and spiritual practices - that of the township, and the rural or littoral space (and in Muholi's case, often beyond the borders of South Africa). However, Muholi's departure from the township space with *Somnyama Ngonyama* brings into sharper focus their desire to implicate the viewer in systems of domination and exploitation. In *Bhekisisa...* and *Kwanele...* the artist deploys visual cues and devices to demand recognition of the climate catastrophe already taking place in South Africa and across the African continent - and how these are very much entwined with historical and contemporary experiences of dispossession, racism and homo/trans-phobia.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined two photographic works by the South African visual activist Zanele Muholi: *Bhekisisa, Sakoui Beach (Mayotte), 2016* and *Kwanele, Parktown, 2016*. These two works reveal Muholi's concerns around the climate crisis, in the context of South Africa and beyond. Their deployment of the 'oppositional gaze' implicates the global north in its rendering of the global south as a site of continued extractivism and exploitation, which has resulted in the climate catastrophe already taking hold across the African continent. *Bhekisisa...*, where the artist lies nude amongst the rocks of an Indian Ocean beach, replicates images of drowned bodies 'ebbing and flowing throughout history and news channels and inherited nightmares' (Johnstone 105). The refugee crises that are already unfolding across multiple Indian and Atlantic Ocean axes will only become more severe in the wake of the climate crisis. Meanwhile, the shroud of synthetic plastics that obscure Muholi's face in *Kwanele...* speaks to environmental pollution, but also the excesses and

extractive tendencies of the global north. The artist's sombre and tired expression becomes a metaphor for both the ongoing plight of LGBT+ South Africans, but also for South Africa's scarred, altered and exploited natural environments. *Somnyama Ngonyama*, the series from which both of these photographs originate, works to reinvigorate 'the agential capacity of the queer Black body in relation to environmentally changed futures' (Johnstone 99). This body of work sits within a wider ecology of South African contemporary artists who connect queer or gendered identities with the natural world; from Noria Mabasa's dynamic driftwood sculptures depicting the devastating 1987 floods in KwaZulu-Natal, to Nicholas Hlobo's sculptural interpretations of the convergences of Xhosa tradition and queer culture.



Figure 1: Nolan Oswald Dennis, *garden for fanon*, 2021 bioactive system, books, borosilicate globes, community of *eisenia fetida* earthworms, care protocols, microcontroller, steel armature.

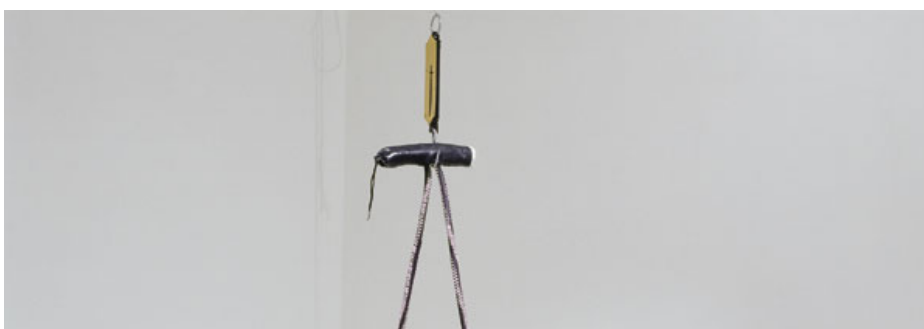


Figure 2: Nicholas Hlobo, *Isisindo samadlozi*, 2006 rubber inner tube, scale, ribbon, plastic tube, fabric.



Figure 3: Zanele Muholi, *Bhekisisa, Sakoui Beach (Mayotte)*, 2016, silver gelatin print.



Figure 4: Zanele Muholi, *Kwanele, Parktown*, 2016, silver gelatin print

Chapter Three

Inxeba and river ecologies of the Eastern Cape

Introduction

The 2017 film *Inxeba* is essentially a queering of Thando Mgqolozana's novel *A Man Who is Not a Man*. Directed by John Trengrove, the film follows protagonist Xolani as he fulfils his role of amakhankatha (caregiver) as part of the Xhosa ritual of *ulwaluko*. However, the visual depiction of these secretive initiation rituals caused controversy and protests, primarily from traditional leaders, in the Eastern Cape, with critics of the protestors arguing that they were expressing thinly-veiled homophobia. *Inxeba* is set amongst the forests, mountains and rivers of the Eastern Cape. Scenes of queer intimacy take place around a waterfall, tying queer identities to the hydrological formations of the region. This chapter will focus on how the film uses the hydrological landscape to negotiate homoerotic subjectivities and how the environment actively disrupts, reconfigures and interrogates the interface between queerness, nature and Xhosa tradition.

Mgqolozana's novel *A Man Who is Not A Man* examines Xhosa masculinity and the expanding and retracting definitions of what it means to be a man in rural South Africa. In the text, Lumkile finds himself removed from a life of petty theft in Cape Town, and forced into a lonely mountain hut as part of the Xhosa initiation rite of *ulwaluko*. Anathi Ntozini and Hlonelwa Ngqangweni explore queer experiences of *ulwaluko* in their essay *Gay Xhosa men's experiences of ulwaluko*. They write that queer Xhosa men may:

face added challenges at initiation school in order for them to gain acceptance, as their sexual orientation may be viewed as compromising the sacredness of the

practice', and that the 'ritual carries with it the implicit assumption that gay initiates have decided to "convert" to heterosexuality, thus their participation should be in line with the prescriptions it offers. (Ntozini & Ngqangweni 1310)

This tension is at the crux of *Inxeba*'s interrogation of masculinity and power. This colliding of themes typifies some of the concerns of this thesis, particularly the relationships between land, colonialism, gender, sexuality, and indigenous knowledge systems. Nakhane Touré also reckons with these shifting identities in the rural and urban spheres in *Piggy Boy's Blues*, which follows Davide M. as he travels from Johannesburg to pastoral Alice, essentially upsetting a contentious and precarious familial normality. Touré's novel is particularly notable for its normalisation of queer love and sex, and how the writer embeds same-sex desire into the landscape of the Eastern Cape.

Inxeba: The Wound

Released in 2017, *Inxeba* (or *The Wound* as translated into English) follows Xolani as he travels from Johannesburg to the Eastern Cape to join the Xhosa ritual of ulwaluko as amakhankatha (caregiver), but also to re-establish his romantic and sexual relationship with friend and fellow amakhankatha, Vija. The arrival of Kwanda, a young initiate from Johannesburg who is perceived to be homosexual, threatens to disrupt their relationship. *Inxeba* is essentially focused on a series of power dynamics; that of the amakhankatha over the initiates; Kwanda's perceived fragility and weakness; Vija's attempt to dominate Xolani; and the questioning of Xolani's authority by the initiates. This questioning of Xolani's legitimacy as amakhankatha, and indeed as a man, signifies that 'respect is only confirmed and solely based on the degree of hegemonic masculinity that one is able to perform and enact' (Kiguwa & Siswana 9) – to which Xolani's homosexuality fails to conform. After Kwanda witnesses Vija and Xolani in a post-coitus embrace next to a waterfall, Xolani realises that the initiate has the power to expose his sexuality to the rural community, potentially leading to his ostracisation. In response, in the film's penultimate scene, he pushes Kwanda over a ledge and into the river below, presumably killing him. He then returns to the village, before he is then seen sitting in the back of a van as it drives towards Johannesburg.

Much analysis of *Inxeba* has focused on the controversy surrounding the film's representation of ulwaluko, the Xhosa ceremony where ukweluswa (male circumcision) is performed. A 2007 SABC documentary on ulwaluko, titled *Umthunzi Wentaba, Inxeba*, caused outrage amongst traditional leaders for its depiction of the secretive ceremony, as well as the tying of homosexual desire to the practice of ukweluswa. Further compounding this controversy was the fact that the film's director, John Trengrove, is neither Black nor Xhosa, fuelling a debate that was formed of a matrix of concerns around indigenous knowledge systems, race, sexuality and representation. Much discourse on *Inxeba* has rightly focused on unpicking these contentions, and questioning whether the response from

traditional leaders was motivated more by the representation of ulwaluko, or homophobia. Pumla Dineo Gqola argues that the outrage in response to the cinematic interpretation of ulwaluko derives from the 'colonialist/anthropological intrusion into so many other sites of self-making which leads to a protectionism around this particular site' (Gqola 83) - this analysis tends to both fears around an external attack on Xhosa tradition, but also the potential incursion of a globalised queer identity into the rural space.

However, instead of focusing on the controversy surrounding the film, my analysis of *Inxeba* works from an eco-critical departure point; chiefly an examination of how bodies of water meander and flow throughout the film, carving out key moments of queer desire, anguish, and ultimately, death. This analysis then tends to historical and contemporary concerns around water usage and land dispossession as informed by Jacklyn Cock's study *Writing the Ancestral River: A biography of the Kowie*. In the final chapter of her text, Cock acknowledges the connection between rivers and social justice, and I build on this understanding using Cleo Wolfe Hazard's revelatory text *Underflows: Queer Trans Ecologies and River Justice*.

One minor scene in *Inxeba* typifies tensions over water usage and land rights in South Africa. In this scene, Vija leads some of Xolani's initiates up the slopes of the mountain in a 'silent display of power' (Kiguwa & Siswana 10). After Xolani finds the group, he daringly leads them towards the waterfall, as a refusal of Vija's dominance over him. However, they are prevented from accessing the waterfall by a white farmer, who is building a fence across the path to the waterfall. Xolani speaks to the farmer passively, exposing his vulnerability to the initiates who are present, revealing the 'impossibilities of manhood in contemporary South Africa' (ibid), specifically Black manhood. Here, we see how settler colonisation continues to deny and restrict indigenous people from the natural environment, and thus from undertaking important cultural rituals. Freshwater aquatic spaces are intrinsic to Xhosa culture and ritual. For example, one Xhosa ritual involves communication with the *abantu bomlambo* (people of the river), who are presented with tributes such as white beads or pumpkin seeds in floating reed-baskets. These rituals often take place in the pools found at the confluence of two rivers, or at the foot of a waterfall. The *abantu bomlambo* play a key role in the initiation and induction of amagqirha (divine healers). Xolani and Vija's sexual act in this space therefore embeds queerness in this sacred space - even while it is disrupted by the presence of the white farmer, a symbol of settler interference and the dispossession of indigenous people. I also understand Kwanda's disruption of Vija and Xolani's romantic and sexual relationship as a metaphor for the disruption and threat that urban expansion poses to rural spaces and indigenous knowledge systems. Kwanda's witnessing of Vija and Xolani lying together, nude, next to the waterfall, draws parallels with the supposed disruption his softness and effeminacy poses to Xhosa orders of masculinity. The only solution for Xolani, to protect himself from exposure and ostracisation, is to eliminate Kwanda - which he does, by pushing him into a ravine at the end of the film.

This interaction with the white farmer also speaks to the complex matrix Black men find themselves in within rural South Africa, and how the Black male body in South Africa has previously been confined to 'slave-like labour in the mines... as garden boys for white settler gardens' (Scott 29). It is clear in this interaction that Xolani has lost his agency in this moment, another instance where his masculinity is threatened. The presence of the white farmer is startling to watch because *Inxeba* largely takes place away from white South Africa

- and it was the film's exposure to a wider, multi-racial national audience that caused such furore.

However, Rantsho A. Moraka argues that the dichotomy created between Xhosa masculinity and African queerness in the film only serves to reinforce colonial binaries, and to cast indigenous knowledge systems as 'unprogressive and atavistic in relation to the African queer masculinity for which the film campaigns' (Moraka 9). By embedding a queer narrative (which the film champions and promotes) within the practice of ulwaluko (which Moraka notes 'already suffers mischaracterisation as a primitive and patriarchal practice') (ibid), the director has set up a dichotomy between a 'traditional' African masculinity and a 'contemporary' globalised queer identity, which denies queer Xhosa people a cultural and psychic space where they can live out both expressions of self. This polarity between the two, endorses a scenario where 'normative African gender embodiment' is what 'non-conforming queer masculinity is to challenge and free itself from' (ibid).

The 'anti-pastoral'

The scene that follows the interaction with the white farmer becomes perhaps the strongest indicator of a convergence of the queer and the ecological. Vija, irritated by the interaction with the white farmer and Xolani's passive response, takes a goat belonging to the farmers, who Nicholas Tyler Reich describes as 'colonial agriculturalists who have repurposed these ritual grounds into capital ventures' (Reich). Xolani, fearful of the consequences of Vija's act, berates him, resulting in a physical fight which culminates in Vija strangling Xolani; amidst the chaos, Kwanda, in an attempt to reveal and assert his strength, slaughters the goat violently. Here, we see how woundedness manifests in an ecological 'assemblage' - the wounded, bleeding goat; Kwanda's wounded penis from the circumcision; and the wounded land, altered by colonisation and alteration, its significance 'repurposed... (from) ritual grounds into capital ventures' (ibid). Reich describes the symbolism of the goat as belonging 'in a schism between the First people's methodologies of ecological belonging and cultural production and the Afrikaner husbandry as well as Western propriety' (ibid). The goat becomes the form through which colonial and ecological grief is expressed, slaughtered in an intense moment which unravels at the crux of 'Blackness, tribal sanctity and masculinity' (ibid). The river, however, consistent and resolute in its search for its destination, remains a consistent and omnipresent site of possibility and sanctuary, despite the settler attempts to demarcate and control it.

However, despite Xolani's seeming submission to Vija, he is also wealthier than him, at one point offering money to his friend and lover - here, urban living is equated with wealth. However, Xolani decries the loneliness of the city, and in turn highlights his commitment to Vija:

'Uba bendithanda ngekudala ndahamba apha. Ndiyasebenza, Vija, Ndihlala ndedwa, Nditya ndedwa. Kodwa ndiyabuya, ucinga kutheni? (cwaka) Vija ujongeuXolani. Ndibuyela ukuzonceda wena ... If I wanted I could have left ... Instead, I work. I eat alone. But I always come back here. Why do you think that is? I come back for you. To help you' (Trengrove).

Although Vija exercises physical and psychological control over him, Xolani's relative financial stability compared to Vija allows him some agency within their relationship. While Xolani positions the urban space as lonely, Kwanda personifies the urban space as a place of liberation and free sexual expression, while the rural space is informed by a violence of heteronormativity and policing of gender expression. The limitations and expectations of the space of the rural Eastern Cape that Inxeba constructs an 'anti-pastoral' narrative. Reich outlines a conception of the 'anti-pastoral' in great detail in their essay *Queer Ecology in (Gay) Post-Pastoral Cinema*:

[T]he anti-pastoral does not posit the rural landscape as a space of freedom, contentment, or harmony but as one of captivity, despair and alienation... the diegetic depictions for the queer anti-pastoral bring into the frame not only the violence deployed against queers within nature, but also the queers that instigate violence therein. (ibid)

If *Inxeba* manifests itself as an 'anti-pastoral', then Nakhane Toure's novel *Piggy Boy's Blues* also operates within the same framework. *Piggy Boy's Blues* is notable for the hierarchies of power and domination exercised primarily through sexual violence, and the competition of masculine identities that shapes the narrative. The novel is notable for the ways in which it embeds queer sexuality into the landscapes of the Eastern Cape. This sexuality is also notable for its complexity - it depicts sexual violence, casual sexual experiences and taboo forms of sexual attraction.

Greg Garrard describes three registers of the term 'pastoral', of which *Inxeba* and *Piggy Boy's Blues* both respond to, in their setting of the Eastern Cape as site of tradition but also transcendence:

the specifically literary tradition, involving a retreat from the city to the countryside, that originates in ancient Alexandria and becomes a key poetic form in Europe during the Renaissance; more generally, 'any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban'; and the pejorative sense in which 'pastoral' implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship. (Garrard 37-38)

Configurations of the river in *Piggy Boy's Blues*

Piggy Boy's Blues essentially ties sexuality and ancestry together within the landscape of the rural Eastern Cape. Relocating temporarily from Johannesburg, Davide moves into the ancestral house, with his uncle Ndimphiwe. He also befriends his uncle's partner Gray - their interactions quickly become the frontispiece of the narrative. The novel shifts between the rural space of Alice and the urban settings of East London and Gqeberha, which drive rapid shifts in Davide's psyche and understanding of his own family. River ecologies are configured throughout *Piggy Boy's Blues*; however, rather than the sanctuary and assurance that the river provides for Vija and Xolani in *Inxeba*, for Davide, the river is positioned as dangerous and disturbing. After Davide is raped by Gray, he flees, intuitively gravitating towards a nearby river in the darkness:

Drawn by a memory he did not remember acquiring, Davide was resolute and overcome as he walked down the desire paths, making his way to the river. All pleasure usually gained from walking was now absent... When he arrived on the

river bank the water was black from the absence of light. The loam under his feet had been turned to mud. He removed his shoes and sank his toes in it, wincing and responding to every twig that pricked the soles of his feet. (Touré 77)

Davide's gravitation towards the river is perhaps a distorted recreation of Xhosa rituals relating to water (such as the aquatic-focused initiation of amagqirha, divine-healers); or, perhaps, the sentiment of water as sanctuary and a place of healing that we see for Azure in *Thirteen Cents* is echoed here. Regardless, Davide's experience at the river is neither of these things - it is instead an experience of strife and struggle:

Fear had never granted him the courage to come to this river. As he was beginning to celebrate, he felt himself being pulled in by the front of his shirt. madly and unevenly, he flailed as unseen hands pulled at him. His head was intermittently buried in the water. a sinking vessel on an uneven keel... He writhed like a worm caught in the beak of a bird. He swam with all his might against the demonic current until finally he was lying on the mud, coughing and groaning, exhausted from the fight... There, like a beached whale finally coming to terms with its fate, he gave out an animal cry, sobbing with all the strength in his body'. (Touré 77)

However, this form of pathetic fallacy (the river's turbulence reinforces the strife and trauma that Davide is experiencing) expresses a reflection of 'human predicaments, rather than sustaining an interest in nature and for itself' (Garrard 39). Davide finds only fear in the river in the darkness, instead choosing to imagine it in the daylight ('the paw prints of animals that came to quench their thirst or use the trees for shade, the footmarks of children who came to swim and write down their names on the mud, using twigs and their little fingers' (Touré 78). Davide also makes a detailed account of the natural world while he experiences an impromptu sexual encounter with a stranger in Gqeberha:

They were held suspended just below my buttocks as he took me in his mouth. I diverted my eyes, fixating instead on the protea bushes that surrounded us. All was a blur of pink, orange, white and green. I stretched out my hand and held a protea, fondling and rubbing my thumb over its flower. The sky was wispy with white clouds and the sun radiated white and brilliant from a distance... a sign that warned hikers of criminals gleamed vividly yellow and the river coursed its way through the park with sounds trebly, inconstant and inconsistent. (Touré 136)

Davide's noting of the river as 'trebly, inconstant and inconsistent' (ibid) juxtaposes with the way he describes the river he flees to following his rape by Gray. Here, the river in its natural form is omnipotent, encapsulating and terrifying - a reminder of Davide's precarious human existence. The writer also humanises the river, describing its 'unseen hands' (ibid), echoing his earlier powerlessness at the hands of Gray. His experience of a river later in the novel, in the urban setting of Gqeberha, is radically different. Here, Davide sees nature as disrupted, as out of place, lacking its usual rhythm. In his encounter with the river following his experience of sexual assault, the river threatens to consume and drown him; in contrast, in this urban space, it is weak, disturbed from its natural rhythms.

It is evident that both *Inxeba* and, to a lesser degree, *Piggy Boy's Blues* focus on predominantly male conceptions of queer ecologies: they revolve around relationships,

sexual and non-sexual, between men. *Men of the South* by Zukiswa Wanner and *When a Man Cries* by Siphiwo Mahala also deal with crises in South African masculinity, and how Black South African men navigate the complex matrix of tradition, family and queer sexualities. While women are present in both *Inxeba* and (more so) in *Piggy Boy's Blues*, they ultimately do not play major roles in how key events unfurl. Greg Garrard argues for a critique of male-focused pastoral discourse: 'Without fundamental change, androcentric conceptions of pastoral are doomed to shuttle endlessly between the regressive and aggressive poles of an essentially adolescent masculine symbolic order' (Garrard 37). The final section in this chapter partially seeks to counter these androcentric and cisgender sources by reflecting on women-led, non-binary and trans approaches to river justice.

River Justice in the Eastern Cape

The final section of this chapter considers rivers in the Eastern Cape and their relationship to ongoing social justice. The Coyi (or Kowie) River runs through a vast area of the rural Eastern Cape, the hills and forests of which form the backdrop of *Inxeba*. The central and eastern areas of the province are the traditional homes of the Xhosa people. The expansion of the Dutch Cape Colony eastwards from its core metropole of Cape Town in the late 18th century signalled several decades of rapid settler expansion, first by the Dutch and later by the British settlers. Jacklyn Cock recognises that the 'hydrocolonisation' of the river Kowie, which extended from source to mouth, was fundamental to the colonisation of the region and the subsequent inequality and impoverishment it left in its wake. One example of this is the two centuries of alterations to the river's estuary, marked by the settlement of the harbour town of Port Alfred and the later development of a private marina development.

Jacklyn Cock provides an account of how the colonisation of the Coyi and its environs configures in the contemporary space of the rural and littoral Eastern Cape in the final chapter of her book *Connecting with Nature and Justice through Rivers*. Cock describes the dualistic injustice of colonialism on the physical and social fabric of the region:

Recording the story of the Kowie river involves acknowledging the legacy and continuation of deep injustice; the violent conquest of the indigenous population whose descendants continue to live in poverty and deprivation, on the one hand, and the silting and pollution of a river and the destruction of a wetland, on the other.
(Cock 127)

Jacklyn Cock also provides an important ecological analysis of the threatened hydrologies of the Eastern Cape. Cock's analysis ultimately emphasises the crucial connection between environmental and social justice, which she says river systems epitomise. She argues that environmental justice must organise 'around concrete issues in the everyday experience of poor people, especially their exposure to toxic pollution and lack of access to critical resources' (Cock 143) - as a key source of water, rivers are central to this discussion around pollution and access to resources. Cock also highlights how rivers and gender-justice are deeply entwined:

All over the world women predominate in struggles for environmental justice. This preponderance is not essentialist; it is not based on any natural affinity that women

have with nature. The explanation lies in the gendered division of labour, which allocates caring work to women. A central feature of caring is the production and preparation of food and, in doing this work, women are positioned to promote a new narrative of our relationship to nature. (Cock 137)

While writers such as Jacklyn Cock and Wangari Maathai advocate for the role of women in the environmental justice movement, Cleo Wolffe Hazard calls for the inclusion of queer and trans people in the movement. Hazard (working in the context of the United States) also emphasises the link between rivers and social justice - in particular, the rights of queer and trans people. Hazard embodies the 'underflow' as methodology for a departure from hetero-cisgender discourse which recognises ways that extractivism can be resisted. This detection of a new site for environmental discourse operates in a similar way to Tiffany Lethabo King's conception of the 'shoal', by using an aspect of hydrological formations as a site to counter Western discourse. Hazard also draws comparison between the dynamism of 'trans people's experience of transfiguring (their) bodies and social relations' (Hazard 24) with the unceasing unpredictability and adaptability of rivers and their ecosystems.

Both Jacklyn Cock and Cleo Wolffe Hazard emphasise rivers as alive and agential, rather than passive bodies ripe for human alteration. Colonial thought often viewed rivers as entities that needed to be 'tamed', which resulted in widespread damming and irrigation projects in countries including South Africa. Cock references the legal scholar Christopher D. Stone who advocated for rivers to be conferred legal 'standing' in a court of law - 'rivers, trees and other "objects" of nature do have rights and that these should be protected by granting legal standing to guardians of these voiceless entities of nature, much as the rights of children are protected by legal guardians designated for this purpose' (Cock 139). Cock also highlights the recent decision by the Uttarakhand High Court in India to declare the Ganga and Yamuna rivers as 'living entities', 'bestowing on them the same legal rights as a person' (ibid), due to their ecological but also religious significance. An estimated 80 per cent of South Africa's rivers are threatened by manmade pollutants (with 30 per cent now in a critical condition (Cock 131). These rivers not only serve communities, but also have deep cultural and spiritual significance in indigenous cosmologies, including those of the Xhosa and Zulu people. A personification of rivers into 'living entities', as seen in countries such as India and New Zealand, will preserve rivers such as the Kowie for future generations' physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Conclusion

Inxeba, perhaps one of the most controversial bodies of work to emerge from South African cultural production in recent years, embeds a queer narrative within the Xhosa ritual of ulwaluko, against the backdrop of the mountains and rivers of the rural Eastern Cape. The film is an androcentric narrative that ultimately centres on the power dynamic between three men; Xolani, Vija and Kwanda. The natural world is agential in carving out the narrative: Vija and Xolani find temporary sanctuary in and around a waterfall, where they are able to express their desire for one another. The interaction with the white farmer, a short but insightful scene in the film, connects *Inxeba* to wider discourse around land and river justice, which Jacklyn Cock explores in her study *Writing the Ancestral River: A biography of the Kowie*. Cleo Wolffe Hazard positions river justice as inherently queer in their revelatory text *Underflows: Queer Trans Ecologies and River Justice*. The scene in *Inxeba* where Vija takes

a goat from the white farmers, which is then slaughtered by Kwanda in a surprising expression of strength, acts as an assemblage of a colonial and ecological grief. In Nakhane Toure's *Piggy Boy's Blues*, the rivers of the Eastern Cape also take precedent in the narrative of Davide, who temporarily relocates from Johannesburg to the small town of Alice. Rivers are implicated in many of Davide's sexual experiences, including his rape by Gray, and an impromptu sexual encounter in Gqeberha. There is a marked difference between the positionality of the river in the rural setting (where the river is humanised, but also frightening and powerful), and the urban setting, where it is presented as disrupted and un-natural.

Conclusion

This research report has documented the presence of queer ecologies in a vast array of texts, films and works of visual art from across South Africa. Operating at the nexus of environmental studies and queer studies, I have undertaken a survey of both explicitly queer sources, as well as cast a 'queering lens' on sources that relate to South Africa's maritime and terrestrial environments. The first chapter of this research report looks to the Cape as a site that provides a dearth of literature, film and artistic expressions of queer ecologies. As the first European settlement in South Africa, Cape Town played a vital role as a colonial port city, with its subsequent histories of enslavement, migration, trade and globalisation. It is in this context that the 2013 film *Proteus* roots itself, across the carceral geographies of Robben Island and the Castle of Good Hope in the 18th century. The primary narrative, the romantic and sexual relationship between a Dutch and Khoikhoi man, is embellished with a sub-narrative of the European classification of native flora. The film positions the natural world as a point of contention between indigenous people and settlers, and sets up provocations around the 'natural' and the 'unnatural', the metropole and the colony, and the terrestrial and the aquatic. The alteration of the Cape's natural environment is a constant stream that runs through all the sources in this chapter - from abalone poaching and whaling in Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* through to the alteration of Table Mountain's hydrological features in K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*.

The work of contemporary South African artists also sculpt many expressions of queer ecologies. Zanele Muholi, in their practice as a visual activist, creates a shifting and travelling ecology - a queer community, that accompanies them as they document their experience as a Black non-binary person in South Africa and further afield. This thesis gravitated towards two of their works; *Kwanele, Parktown, 2016* and *Bhekisisa, Sakoui Beach (Mayotte), 2016*, for how they express environmental concerns. In these photographic works, Muholi's deployment of the 'oppositional gaze' operates as a device to implicate the global north in the climate catastrophe already unravelling in the global south. Muholi's explicitly queer 'visual activism' ties justice for queer people in South Africa to climate justice in the nation through their photographs.

Inxeba highlights how the natural landscape is inevitably tied with notions of masculinity. The mountain and the river configure deeply in the film, shaping the narrative and eroding the character's senses of self, sexuality and belonging in the rural Eastern Cape. The

infringement of white farmers on to the sacred, ritual landscapes and waterscapes of the Xhosa people visualised in the film expresses the complex matrix of masculinity, sexuality and race that Black men grapple with in contemporary South Africa. Kwanda, a personification of the contemporary globalised South African urban space, 'disrupts' a traditional Xhosa coming-of-age ceremony (ulwaluko), in the Eastern Cape. His arrival in the rural Eastern Cape provokes a crisis of identity in the protagonist Xolani, revealing a complex web of contested masculine identities against natural ecologies and hydrologies that are also deeply contested. In the film, hydrological formations carve and shape the narrative, becoming a symbol at once of ecological grief, tensions over land and the supposed tension between contemporary queer and traditional African identities. Meanwhile, Nakhane Toure's *Piggy Boy's Blues* embeds queer sexuality into the Eastern Cape (and into a Xhosa family lineage), through the character of Davide, who temporarily relocates from Johannesburg to the town of Alice. These two sources reveal the tendency of pastoral and ecological discourse to focus on the experience of cisgender men - although Zanele Muholi's practice, Nkunzi Nkabinde Zandile's text *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life As A Lesbian Sangoma* and Cleo Wolfe Hazard's *Underflows* do the work of countering this androcentric trend.

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