CHAPTER 8

"Washed with Sun": Landscaping South Africa's Hinterlands

Pamila Gupta

Prelude

Kazuo Ishiguro once made a statement that "writing is a hinterland between self and other."[1] His observation enables us to consider the concept of the hinterland as an act of writing which is very much in keeping with my theme here—a portrait of two South African hinterland authors. It also points to the productive elasticity of thinking with the hinterland beyond its geographic meaning. Specifically, it serves as a reminder for the way in which the term "hinterland" is always caught between binary structures and cross-pollinations, with the contiguous folding of the urban into

[1] I thank Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon for sharing this turn of phrase by Ishiguro that he heard at Oxford during a Bard College Berlin Osun cross campus course and zoom lecture entitled "Writing Migration and Affective Journeys" on 11 March 2021 to students at Los Andes University in Bogota, Colombia.

P. Gupta (✉)
Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
e-mail: GuptaP@ufs.ac.za

© The Author(s) 2024

P. Gupta et al. (eds.), *Planetary Hinterlands*, Palgrave Studies in Globalization, Culture and Society,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24243-4_8

the rural, and vice versa, the world over, suggesting that that which lies directly behind or between both physical and metaphoric hinterlands is not so easily demarcated.

Part I: Introduction

This chapter takes up Jeremy Foster's evocative description of South Africa's landscape as one "washed with sun" (2008), that of the entwining of natural beauty (light, specifically) with political turmoil, to reflect on the shifting spatial thematics of two contemporary South African non-fiction writers and academics, Rob Nixon and Jacob Dlamini.[2] What happens when we view certain locations described in their respective works (a small desert town vs. a township) through the prism of hinterlands? Does this concept allow us to say something new about human/non-human relations perhaps?[3] With *Dreambirds* (1999), Nixon recalls the small ostrich farming town of Oudtshoorn in the Karoo desert, a place he visited often growing up in nearby Port Elizabeth. With *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Dlamini recounts fond memories of growing up in the township of Katlehong outside Germiston, a 'nested' hinterland to Johannesburg.[4] I was drawn to Nixon and Dlamini precisely because they are both careful readers and writers of place, one where "observation, description, and interpretation," to evoke Jeremy Foster, are mediated through "situated experiences and imaginaries" (2008: 4) to say so much more about that which is felt growing up in South Africa.

In what follows, I want to firstly suggest that hinterland thinking opens up new understandings of those complex spaces caught between rural and urban, such as the towns and townships examined by Nixon and Dlamini.

[2] My chapter develops the South African strand from my keynote delivered (online) on 3 June 2021 at the Hinterlands: A Project in the Rural, Literary and Environmental Humanities workshop, entitled "'Washed with Sun': Hinterland Landscapes of India and South Africa" (Gupta 2021).

[3] I first came across and wrote about the concept of the hinterland in relation to Goa, India (Gupta 2018). Hinterland thinking shaped that work directly and led me to conceptualize a world of heritage and design in the hinterland. See Gupta (2022). Here I develop it further in relation to new work on South Africa.

[4] I find it helpful to position Germiston as a "nested" hinterland to nearby Johannesburg, a term Hanneke Stuit (2021) introduced during her keynote at the Hinterlands: A Project in the Rural, Literary and Environmental Humanities workshop.

The pairing of these two male writers (white and black, and of different generations), as each other's hinterland in a sense, allows us to say something expansive about these earthy (and artificial, in the case of townships) geographies: as pivot points that hew deep pockets of globalization; as sites of capitalist extraction (Neel 2018); and lastly, as places for dreaming is my assertion here, hence my development of the term "hinterscapes" toward the end of the chapter. This is where hinterlands (as other) have an indelible role in landscaping childhood memories in the becoming of political identity. Secondly, I argue that we must understand the farm town and township as politically operating within the same time/space configuration of apartheid South Africa. Here, I reflect on the visual, plant and animal, sensorial and sonic in these representations of two distinctive hinterlands. Thirdly, I want to suggest that hinterland thinking helps us to see better the practice of writing itself as caught between (a reflective) self and other. Whereas Nixon and Dlamini write from landscaped memories of South Africa, but now reside in the US, I write from my own landscaped memories of the US (specifically the American suburbs of Washington, DC, a very different hinterland of extraction and dreaming both), and now reside in South Africa. In other words, it is self and other, male and female, South Africa and the US that we three writers are all involved in, a form of "entanglement" in Sarah Nuttall's understanding (2009) that helps to engage South Africa's ever-changing hinterland landscape from various perspectives. In this landscape "washed with sun," I read the authors' (past) works refracted through the lens of "the now" of present South Africa (Nuttall 2009: 20). Lastly, I dwell inside a photograph I took on a recent pandemic road trip through South Africa's arid landscape in December 2020 to conclude my chapter and contemplate the productive role of hinterland art alongside writing, while returning to the concept of the hinterland, and its potential usages, connections, and framings.

Part II: Landscaping South Africa—of Farm Towns and Townships

> I wondered what there was about the South African landscape that affected people who came in contact with it and (possibly) transformed those who lived in it permanently. (Foster 2008, 6)

I always miss the distinct light and lighting of South Africa when I am away; it is what compels me to return. I have increasingly become interested in writing about South Africa's landscape, a place that I have called home for the last 17 years. In some ways, Jeremy Foster's work helped me think about what I have felt, lived, experienced. It was fortuitous perhaps then that when I came across his work on the socio-nature of South Africa's landscapes, as entwining natural beauty with political turmoil, I had lived long enough in South Africa to be able to grasp what he was trying to articulate. I liked the idea of grounding my theory from, and in, the South (following Jean and John Comaroff 2012) while applying his evocative term and climatic ode "washed with sun" (the title of his 2008 book) to the idea of hinterlands, and two specific hinterland formations relevant to South African history, to see what it opens up analytically. For me, the idea of "washed with sun" references exactly the tension of politics and aesthetics inherent to the South African landscape (and perhaps all landscapes), including the role of affect, of atmospheres and elements (or rather the elemental), seasonal grammars of climate and nature, light and color in defining place. Equally important in conceptualizing hinterlands as landscapes is that of human, sensorial, plant, and animal relations, something that has been left out of Foster's analysis but that I want to include here.

One particularly lyrical passage of his caught my breath. He writes:

> Traveling around South Africa when I was growing up, I noticed that certain districts displayed a distinct quality, and how in some instances, this took on an animistic quality best described as a "mood." … Seemingly inhering in the experiential and… phenomenological qualities of the landscape, it resembled the character found in human individuals—infinitely nuanced and hard to describe, yet always distinctive. As with people, so with these naively given sections of geography, some seemed to welcome one into the aura while others made one feel profoundly uncomfortable. (Foster 2008, 6)

In following sections, I will use Foster's framing of "washed with sun" to revisit the white ostrich farm town[5] and the black township that Nixon and Dlamini have powerfully written about in their memoirs, that

[5] Stuit's (2020) discussion of the overdetermined symbolic space of the farm in South Africa is useful for thinking about the farm town, which services the farm and functions always in relation to the farm's rurality.

thematically are of self and place. I want to explore what happens when we refract these two locations through the prism of the hinterland, and see them as "washed with sun," in the hope that they will offer a potential way of thinking with and writing about hinterlands in relation to South Africa's changing geographies of rural and urban. This is also always a political project, one of refining our sensibilities and rhythms of place and time, past, present and future, and giving equal agency to human and non-human (including land, plant, animal) actors and relations.

Rob Nixon: of prickly pears and aloes, feathers and fantasies

> The stretch of South Africa where I grew up boasts a century-old tradition of ostrich ranching. The giant birds were as integral to my boyhood landscape as hogs to any Iowa child or lambs to a Welsh one. I grew up on the edge of the Karoo, a huge scrub desert whose name derives from a San or Bushman word meaning Big Thirst … In this desert world, the ostrich has been an object of reverie for generations, a glamorous creature inspiring elaborate dreams. (Nixon 1999, 5)

In my reading of Nixon's South African memoir *Dream Birds: The Strange History of the Ostrich in Fashion, Food, and Fortune* (1999), I draw upon his childhood memories of frequent family trips to Oudtshoorn, a westerly drive from Port Elizabeth, where he grew up. He writes how these car rides were a "a major boyhood adventure," for there was "something about the place" that was "full of giant beards, feathers and fantasies of Parisian fashion and cabaret" (1999, 6–7). Here, I want to think through his description of an earlier apartheid time and space as washed with the sun and bright blue sky of the Karoo desert, and involving succulents such as prickly pears and aloes, alongside ostriches and Nixon's own fertile imagination. I interpret his text through the lens of the hinterland to first show how white settler colonial towns located directly inward from the South African coastal shoreline like Oudtshoorn operated historically as pockets of pivot globalizations, as producing in this case a thriving industry of ostrich ranching that supplied Europe between the late 1800s and early 1900s with trendsetting fashions.

Specifically, Nixon's memoir showcases how "far" hinterland (Neel 2018, 17–18) farm towns like Oudtshoorn (characteristically rural and sites of capitalist extraction) became unexpected "promised lands," sites that historically absorbed fleeing migrants, in this case Eastern European

Jews who had beached on South Africa's shores, escaping the pogroms of Lithuania. It is yet another form of "entanglement" (Nuttall 2009) wherein a peripheral European trauma feeds into the fashions of its metropolitan centers by way of a refuge offered by South Africa's hinterlands for this Jewish diaspora. It was this group of hopeful immigrants who made small fortunes as ostrich barons, alongside other barons of Afrikaner, English, and Scottish descent, all living in "feather palaces" built from the proceeds of the plumes, which "mixed the wildest excesses of Ottoman, Victorian, Greek and Gothic architecture" (Nixon 1999, 5). Here, Nixon supplies the astonishing figure that by 1913, 1 million ostriches were being bred for the business, becoming "ounce by ounce, more precious than gold" (1999, 5). He recalls how "this Jerusalem of Africa became my imaginative oasis, allowing me a whiff of mystery through the coquetry of feathers" (1999, 6).

As well, the Oudtshoorn that Nixon writes about shows the potential of framing historic hinterlands as contemporary "failed cities," following Neel's numerous examples from the US Rust Belt (2018, 114); that is, small towns tied to one particular industry that sometimes aspire for too much and cannot get rid of their rural ties (in this case, Oudtshoorn's association with ostrich ranching), thus losing out in an attempt to become urban centers, and quietly receding into oblivion, their rich histories often forgotten. As Nixon recounts: "South Africa's hinterland abounded in such towns" (1999, 6). In other words, Nixon's elegiac writings on this once "global epicenter of everything ostrich" (1999, 5) help revive certain hinterland places within South Africa's landscaped memory, as contemporary hollowed places that are not given ample "space on the side of the road," along similar lines to the work of Kathleen Stewart (1996) on the now abandoned coal mining small towns of West Virginia. They tend to be left out of the South African narrative (or get reduced to one-stop tourist towns that rely solely on representing their glorified pasts as heritage) in the socio-cultural focus on the strictly urban or strictly rural, that which is on the road itself.[6]

Next, I rely on Nixon's writings to showcase human/non-human relations as abounding in the hinterland, as integral to defining and writing

[6] Here, I am playing with Stewart's powerfully dense and textured passages on forgotten West Virginia cultural poetics in an "Other" America (1996). As well, I am counter-positioning Stewart's "space on the side of the road" with the significance of the "road" as discussed in Stuit's keynote (2021).

about South Africa's landscape as "washed with sun." The hinterland is a site where politics and beauty are messy, and where the land, people, and animals—as residents and neighbors—are entwined to the extent that people are anthropomorphized by that which is non-human, and vice versa. At one point, Nixon writes: "because the Karoo was so brutally exposed, self-revelation could be costly. I noticed that not just with the creatures, but with the people too. They didn't talk much, were slow to open up. To draw attention to yourself was to ask for trouble, even the plants knew that" (1999, 54). Perhaps here we can think of these desert succulents, including their characteristic hardiness, resilience, and instinct to survive as equally knowing, agentive, and reflective beings as the humans that co-inhabited the harsh landscape.

Lastly, I cite one passage from Nixon that says so much more about South Africa from the perspective of a young boy on the cusp of knowing, who intuits something is wrong with the place he calls home, a "place of tarnished magic and an as yet unspecified unease" (1999, 7):

> At night, before I drifted into sleep, I had migration dreams in which I turned into a bird. But the birds around me were dreaming of turning into bushes, and the chameleons of turning into twigs. The plants too, were dreaming downwards, living enviously among stones. Looking at all the life forms all around me, I became fascinated by disguise. Trusting your eyes didn't do you much good in a place where camouflage went this deep. So long before I understood South Africa's stony politics, the Karoo taught me that things weren't always what they seemed. (1999, 55)

It is significant that the downward mobility and survival instinct to camouflage and become Other (on the part of animals, plants, and humans equally, a form of natural selection) that Nixon was surrounded by and dreamt of in the Karoo desert would become the site of his political consciousness, his way of situating South Africa's "stony" landscape and politics, and himself as a bird about to migrate in direct contrast to the flightless and cumbersome ostrich who is stuck (much like apartheid), and (as the saying and myth goes) has no choice but to bury its stubborn head in the deep sands of South Africa. Perhaps *Dreambirds* is a hinterland story foretold (of extraction and dreaming, both), one that would coalesce itself much later into Nixon's academic writings, including those focused on the "slow violence" of environmental degradation and its dire consequences the world over (2011). In a recent reflective return to the beaches of his

South African childhood (2021), Nixon writes: "That tidal scene—and others like it—turned me into a reader who parses literature and landscapes for who is present, who is missing, for the forced removals, physical and imaginative, from the permitted view; a reader alive to who precisely (in the cropped photo, the selective story, the seemingly seamless landscape) has been driven off the beach" (2021). It is in this passage that Nixon presages as his hinterland Jacob Dlamini, to whom I now turn.

Jacob Dlamini: of fragments and flowers, rats and radio waves

> What follows are fragments, shards of memory through which I examine indirectly what it means to be nostalgic for a past generally considered to have been a dark chapter in South Africa's history. I use fragments drawn randomly from the past to look at my childhood in Katlehong as a lived experience. (Dlamini 2009, 22)

Here, I want to contrast Nixon's experience of growing up white in South Africa with that of Dlamini, growing up black in South Africa, one generation later than Nixon and on the cusp of its liberation. I will suggest that in his memoir *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Dlamini frames township life in Katlehong in important ways that free it from the all-encompassing burden of apartheid, as something else, as having a history, as enabling a life fully lived, as shaping his own reflective grown-up political self. He writes that his book is best understood as a "gathering of fragments of memory, souvenirs of the imagination" rather than as a memoir or cultural biography of Katlehong, even as it contains elements of both (Dlamini 2009, 62). He asserts that though he grew up under apartheid's shadow, life was so much more than that. This is an important point that shows townships as having moments of beauty and political turmoil side by side, and as "washed with [the] sun" of everyday life, of children playing together, of a thriving intergenerational community, and of traveling to nearby Germiston, which historically was a pivot point in South Africa's story of globalization and included a well-established large black urban community dating back to the early 1900s (Dlamini 2009, 62).

Just as I reframed the ostrich farm town as a "far" hinterland following Neel in the previous section, I do the same with the township, thinking about its location behind and beside city life, a form we could call a "near" hinterland, part of the "foothills descending from the summit of the

megacity" and suburban in character and feel (Neel 2018, 18). Dlamini's recounting of a childhood spent under apartheid is an experience and a recalling that is neither a "lament" nor a "diatribe" against the state that placed his family there: "that is to say, one should never take the standard description of townships as poor to mean that township life was poor" (2009, 63). His is an important intervention that suggests the need to re-examine the place of townships within South Africa's apartheid landscape, not as simply blurred into the urban or forgotten by the wayside (or in the between) in the search for black rural authenticity, but rather as a distinct landscape unto itself. Hinterland thinking empowers us to do so, and to think expansively. In other words, Katlehong, meaning "place of success" in *Sesotho* (Moiloa 2019, 35),[7] is multiple sites: a black peri-urban center with close ties to nearby historically white and black Germiston (Dlamini 2009, 62); a suburban hinterland (including its associated "aspirant qualities" and "politics of resistance") (Neel 2018, 19) to equally close white Johannesburg; an apartheid geography, in theory a "scientific" township (2009, 43) where racial capitalism carved spaces to dump black people, and restrict access to white spaces; and finally, a microcosm of larger South Africa, past and present. It is all these qualities that help situate the township as a site of extraction and dreaming both, particularly for one of its native sons.

In one powerful passage, Dlamini asserts the importance of making the black township the sole subject and object of his memoir. There is no scurrying away from the township's awkward past as an artificial space; rather, he takes it head on, forcing the reader to contend with his childhood *in that place in that tim*e which most South Africans would rather forget as still existing, given its apartheid birth:

> If we fought to make all of South Africa a home to all South Africans, where then do townships belong? Are they in a different country? Do townships not occupy the same space-time configuration as the rest of South Africa? This book will have succeeded if it helps the reader come to a new sense of townships and their place in the historical, political and cultural geography of South Africa. It is only by understanding that geography that we can understand why blacks would remember their past under apartheid with fondness. There is no other way. (2009, 163)

[7] I would not have learned of these smaller important details save for *Nice* (issue no 3, 2019) dedicated to Katlehong. Thanks to Melanie Boehi, who thoughtfully kept aside for me a copy of this magazine and art journal.

First, Dlamini gives Katlehong its proper due as a living breathing black space with its own specific history, one that its residents grew up learning about and taking pride in. It is a place enabled by its "multiple connections to elsewhere" (Dlamini 2009, 62) and shared qualities (with other townships) of "sociability, hybridity and everyday informality" (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, 13). In other words, the hinterland of his growing up was a very real demarcated area on a map, carved out by apartheid officials on "dolomitic ground" that is part of Johannesburg's East Rand troubled mining topography (Moiloa 2019, 37).

Second, Dlamini gives agency to Katlehong's residents (human, plant, and animal, equally) in shaping the contours of this hinterland landscape, one that includes vibrant neighborhoods and small acts of care with attention to aesthetic beauty and pride in ownership. He writes:

> I have only to think back to the township streets on which I grew up. Where an outsider might have noticed nothing but dreary uniformity, I would have seen that some houses regularly wore fresh paint while others did not, that some gardens boasted marigolds, red roses and euphorbias while others did not. I would have seen, too that while most houses in our street had only Kikuyu grass, one neighbor in particular had the kind of grass some people insisted was similar to that laid at Wimbledon. (Dlamini 2009, 121)

It is attention to such details as freshly painted houses and colorful flower beds that recast Katlehong's "washed with sun" light and enliven the township life of Dlamini's childhood. Even the much-reviled rat is pointed out as having a defining role in the community. This sometime symbol of apartheid was also the object of numerous pest control campaign for some, a family pet for another resident, while for still others (including Dlamini), it was the target for practicing the popular sport of rat hunting (2009, 68). In other words, Dlamini grew up in a place filled with friends, family, flowers, and rats that included rich social gatherings, a place forged and defined by "bonds of reciprocity and mutual obligations" (2009, 13) between human, land, plant, and animal.

Third, Dlamini inserts the important role of the sensory and sonic in our understanding of the township as a hinterland landscape, including the way radio shaped his own political formation. It is less about "relay[ing] the auditory experience of listening to the radio" than about highlighting its greater than subaltern role in subverting the government's propaganda, including its ability to awaken "a political consciousness that saw me adopt

a politics at odds with the political gradualism and religious conservatism of my mother" (Dlamini 2009, 22); it directly shaped Dlamini's own black sense of self.

Dlamini goes on to suggest that radio functioned as an important media and medium for a growing political consciousness amongst many black South African township residents. In a telling passage that says so much about the human capacity to endure, he writes:

> In a political time and space that was coded in racial terms, with severe limits imposed on black mobility, black people could move through radio in ways that the apartheid state could not curtail … Sure, apartheid censors could limit what one listened to, they could try to dictate what made the news. But they could not determine how the listening public received the propaganda. They could not tell blacks how to listen. (Dlamini 2009, 31–32)

Dlamini's writings are a political project, one that forces us to look at townships (including their past, present, and future iterations) more closely as "near" hinterlands, both "of the city and not of the city" (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, 13), rather than wish these artificial geographies away, a token of South Africa's disturbing past that is best forgotten. He writes: "I take it as a given that township natives can and do have fond memories of the places in which they were born and grew up" (Dlamini 2009, 152). This early work on township life by Dlamini would provide a productive frame for later writings on Kruger National Park (*Safari Nation*), revealing its "hidden history" (2020, 3) as another hinterland space in formation, and in relation to both its animal and human inhabitants, who resided, worked, and sometimes crossed through its difficult landscape in an attempt to improve their livelihoods.

Perhaps we can go one step further and reflect for a moment on all South Africa's native sons, both black and white, by way of its "washed with sun" effect. Thus, just as the Nixon's ability to traverse the South African landscape and political consciousness was enabled by the car and family drives to Oudtshoorn, Dlamini's was empowered by small neighborly acts of care and moments of beauty alongside traveling radio waves to Katlehong. As well, we could set up a parallel between "far" and "near" hinterlands, comparing the Karoo, the ostrich, and the camouflage of Nixon's desert world to the one of social gatherings, colorful flower beds, rats, and the radio that filled out Dlamini's township lifestyle.

Part III: Entangled Hinterscapes

> Growing up in South Africa, connections between landscape and identity always seemed, quite simply given. My own fascination with the country's landscape long predated any reflexive understanding of the political and cultural values that courses through them, and this understanding does not capture the texture and depth of the connection. (Foster 2008, 5)

Both Dlamini and Nixon are wrestling with the South African landscapes of their childhood; both are hinting at hinterlands, using boyhood reflections on growing up as the basis for writing about self and other, and about the indelible markers of landscape and identity in the complex entanglement of politics and aesthetics, extraction and dreaming. Interestingly, each focuses on one beloved object: for Nixon, it is the ostrich, and for Dlamini, it is the radio; each becomes a personalized focal point and medium for political consciousness amidst the hinterland's "washed with sun" affect. This is a point that very much reverberates with the writings of Foster, interestingly a South African who has also ended up in the US writing from that vantage point on the interiority of self and with a focus on the landscape of his South African childhood. Perhaps that is why I chose his writings as a framing mechanism, for they echo what I am trying to grasp by juxtaposing Nixon's and Dlamini's powerful and lyrical impressionistic passages on South Africa's complex hinterlands. In other words, I would argue this is exactly what Nixon and Dlamini are grappling with through the act of writing—description, memory, childhood consciousness of political wrongness, and interpretation as a form of looking back upon one's life, its moments of introspection, of interiority. The two authors are each other's hinterland in some sense. The framing of self by each makes clear and without doubt the present absence of the other, not only in terms of South Africa's apartheid-ridden political landscape, including racial and generational differences, but also with regard to the specter of racial capitalism and how it functioned differently in the far and near hinterlands showcased here.

And here I must insert my own ways of seeing South Africa's landscapes into a larger understanding of what I am calling its "hinterscapes."[8] As

[8] Here I am relying on Arjun Appadurai's (1991) idea of the five "scapes" or flows of globalization—ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes—to develop that of "hinterscapes" as complex spaces caught between urban and rural, and deeply imbedded in capitalism and dreaming both.

Foster writes: "one cannot argue that landscape representation is grounded in the specifics of lived experience and cultural specificity without acknowledging one's own" (2008, 5). It is my own childhood, of growing up in an American non-place suburban hinterland of Washington, DC (which could almost be anywhere in the US) that Neel interprets so perfectly—and where the connotation of "middle class white prosperity" is not a misnomer (2018, 18). It is etched in my mind as the site of my own political formation, a form of "wokeness" that slowly grew in the face of nondescript bland suburban nothingness and being surrounded with not enough difference, while very much feeling my own as the daughter of Indian immigrants caught up in the American dream(scape). It is my wondrous relationship to South Africa's other-worldly landscape, its attendant beauty and natural light awash with politics that have shaped my own writing and grasping of this place I now call home. Here I return to a form of entanglement as Sarah Nuttall describes it: "Entanglement, as I use the term here, is intended … to draw into our analyses critical attention to those sites and spaces in which what was once thought of as separate—identities, spaces, and histories—come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways" (2009, 20).

Perhaps it is a worthy point of reflection to mention that while both Nixon and Dlamini have moved to the US (and, interestingly, are disciplinary neighbors at Princeton University) for their professional careers, this is a journey in the opposite direction to my own, wherein I grew up and studied in the US but have chosen to live in South Africa as an academic and writer. South Africa's "washed with sun" affect endures, including its distinct light, blue open skies, plants—here my much-loved protea flower comes to mind—and its wide animal repertoires, including not only ostriches and rats. Meanwhile, the remnants of South Africa's fading ostrich industry are still seen in the brightly colored feather dusters for sale on the roadside in and around Johannesburg's white Northern suburbs, while its black townships endure as suburban hinterlands to city life, both Joburg and Germiston. The tensions between a purported post-apartheid racial inclusivity and endemic apartheid are still palpably there in both sites, even as the joys and difficulties, beauty, light, and political turmoil of everyday sociality continue with remarkable resilience. It is the small farm towns (like Oudtshoorn) and townships (like Katlehong or K1 as it is now popularly called [Moiloa 2019, 35]) scattered across South Africa's hinterscape that very much occupy a difficult present of extraction and abandonment, but also care. Here, I lay bare my politics in asserting that they

can only be seen this way, against the idea of the hinterlands of South Africa today as simply "emptying" out that Jonny Steinberg writes about, or as interchanges for the rural in the move to the urban (2007, 325). Rather, thinking from the hinterland is a collective effort, one that stands in for a larger political project (built on promise and failure both) but that also recognizes these spaces as specific historical places unto themselves.

Part IV: By way of Conclusion, photographing an upside-down mannequin

> It still seems that the South African landscape somehow communicates in an unusually direct and wordless way. (Foster 2008, 6)

I would like to end my reflections here by turning to a photograph taken on the roadside—to give it ample space following Stewart (1996)—in December 2020. It was the first time that my family left Johannesburg for elsewhere during the global pandemic and we chose driving as the way to get to our destination of Cape Town. It was on our return journey home after stops in the city center and the locked down eerily empty beaches of Plettenberg Bay that we came across this upside-down anatomically female mannequin plonked down a minor road off the main N2 highway, its location very much in South Africa's hinterland heartland (Fig. 8.1).[9] The photographed scene left an impression on me that lingered, as capturing my experience and "mood" (to return to Foster 2008, 6) of the "washed with sun" South African landscape, including the arid colors of the desert, rusts and browns, the deep blue sky, and the bespoke earthy cracked dryness which foretells a future of repeated Anthropogenic water shortages and periods of drought. Was the mannequin perhaps "dreaming downwards" in a way reminiscent of Rob Nixon's Karoo desert world? (1999, 55). Her figuration somehow gestured to me as summing up the moment, the feel of pandemic life, as topsy-turvy, as comical relief, even as some might interpret the image as excluding blackness from within hinterland studies or as poking fun at poor rural whites.

I interpreted this photograph differently in the midst of a remarkable year filled with tragedy and surrounded by death. It felt like perhaps South

[9] Stuit's keynote (2021) with its focus on the "road" in relation to hinterland thinking is an important intervention that helped me think about roadways and maps in relation to South Africa's landscape.

Fig. 8.1 Image taken by Pamila Gupta

Africa's hinterlands could be places of insight for neglected sites ready for critique and relational comparison[10]; for reading self and other; for seeing deeply historic human, land, plant, and animal, and sensorial connections and entanglements; and for gathering spots for a range of source materials that includes non-fiction writing, photography, and other mediums as forms of the expressive. Such experimental hinterlands awash with intense

[10] Here I take up Esther Peeren's invaluable insights on the rural as a site of neglected sustained critique, urging us to do the same with "hinterland" (2019).

sun, light, and color may offer a way forward to hope for more inclusive futures, and a source of humor to think from and with, across not only South Africa but the world.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1991. Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology. In *Recapturing Anthropology*, ed. Richard Fox, 191–210. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research.

Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. 2012. *Theory from the South, Or How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*. London: Routledge.

Dlamini, Jacob. 2009. *Native Nostalgia*. Johannesburg: Jacana Press.

———. 2020. *Safari Nation: A Social History of the Kruger National Park*. Johannesburg: Jacana Press.

Foster, Jeremy. 2008. *Washed with Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Gupta, Pamila. 2018. Village Delhi. In *South and North: Contemporary Urban Orientations*, ed. Kerry Bystrom, Ashleigh Harris, and Andrew J. Webber, 103–123. New York: Routledge.

———. 2021. *'Washed with Sun': Hinterland Landscapes of India and South Africa*. Keynote Lecture. 3 June 2021. Hinterlands: A Project in the Literary, Rural and Environmental Humanities. Online workshop. Johannesburg/Amsterdam: WiSER/ASCA. https://video.uva.nl/media/Hinterlands%3A%20A%20Project%20in%20the%20Rural%2C%20Literary%20and%20Environmental%20Humanities/0_n602q92i.

———. 2022. *Heritage and Design: 10 Portraits from Goa, India*. Elements Series on Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moiloa, Malafetsane (Text), Flurina Rothenberger, Sibusiso Ndlandla, and Sikhumbuzo Mavimebela (Photographs). 2019. Katlehong: The Place of Success. *NICE* 3: 34–43.

Neel, Phil A. 2018. *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*. London: Reaktion Books.

Nixon, Rob. 1999. *Dreambirds: The Strange History of the Ostrich in Fashion, Food, and Fortune*. London: Picador.

———. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. 2021. *Barrier Beach—On Nature and Segregation from South Africa to Yosemite*. Blue Mountain Center—Commons: A Gathering of Stories & Culture. https://commons.bluemountaincenter.org/barrier-beach-on-nature-and-segregation-from-south-africa-to-yosemite/.

Nuttall, Sarah. 2009. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. Wits University Press.

Nuttall, Sarah, and Achille Mbembe, eds. 2008. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Peeren, Esther. 2019. *Critique and the Return of the Rural*. Position Paper. Terra Critica. http://terracritica.net/publications/.

Steinberg, Jonny. 2007. *Notes from A Fractured Country*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Stewart, Kathleen. 1996. *A Space on the Side of the Road*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stuit, Hanneke. 2020. The Ruin of the Rural Idyll: Reconfiguring the Image of the Farm in *Homeland* and *Five Fingers for Marseilles*. *Social Dynamics* 46 (3): 561–579.

———. 2021. *Road, Town, and Mountain: Localising the Hinterland*. Keynote Lecture. 3 June 2021. Hinterlands: A Project in the Literary, Rural and Environmental Humanities. Online workshop. Johannesburg/Amsterdam: WiSER/ASCA. https://video.uva.nl/media/Hinterlands%3A%20A%20Project%20in%20the%20Rural%2C%20Literary%20and%20Environmental%20Humanities/0_n602q92i.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.