

URIEL ORLOW

THEATRUM BOTANICUM



EDITED BY
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U R I E L O R L O W

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S H E L A S H E I K H
A N D U R I E L O R L O W

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PREFACE
BEAUTIFUL, BUT DANGEROUS

The seeds of *Theatrum Botanicum* were sown at Kirstenbosch, the South African National Botanical Garden in Cape Town, at the beginning of 2014. On a short research visit to South Africa I visited several archives, including the South African History Archives in Johannesburg and the Mayibuye Archive at the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town, with their overpowering collections that depict the many facets of the freedom struggle that was waged against apartheid from within and outside the borders of South Africa. Archives had been starting points for projects before, but here I could not find a foothold—these stories, it seemed, were not for me to tell. After a meeting with a researcher that happened to take place in the café outside the botanical garden, I decided to visit the gardens themselves. The immense beauty of the place immediately struck me: the view was framed by the imposing Table Mountain, and the abundance of exquisite plants and flowers was breathtaking. As I walked along the paths I noticed that most plant labels were in English and Latin. What does it mean—in a country with eleven official languages (and more unofficial ones besides)—that these names are only available in these two languages? European colonialism in South Africa (and elsewhere) was both preceded and accompanied by expeditions that aimed at charting the territory and classifying its natural resources, in turn paving the way for occupation and exploitation. To be sure, the supposed discovery and subsequent naming and cataloguing of plants—which were of course already known to the indigenous population—disregarded and obliterated existing indigenous plant names and botanical knowledge, imposing the Linnaean system of classification with its particular European rationality and universal ambitions. What does it mean for this epistemic violence to continue today, over twenty years after the official end of apartheid? How were plants involved in the history of colonialism as active participants? What role do they play today?

In previous work I had already started thinking about plants, and animals too, as witnesses of history: the “double” flora of Palestine/Israel as part of *Unmade Film* (2011–2013) and the marine species from the Red Sea migrating into the Mediterranean since the opening of the Suez Canal as part of *The Short and the Long of It* (2010–2012). Here at Kirstenbosch, the entanglement of plants and politics took center stage, standing in stark contrast with the seemingly benign beauty of the place. Botanical gardens are always museums of some kind, but here I became aware of the land

itself as a latent archive of silent histories, with an underground root-network of human-plant connections that extends well beyond Kirstenbosch. On many subsequent stays over the next four years I tried to follow some of these rhizomatically networked multispecies stories, discovering the



entanglement of plants and high-stakes political figures such as Nelson Mandela—both through the garden he and his fellow inmates planted on Robben Island and through “Mandela’s Gold,” the *Strelitzia Reginae* cultivar bred at Kirstenbosch while he was in prison nearby and subsequently named after him (in 1996). I also learned about the contested spiritual, economic, and ideological power of plants, finding, in the National Archives in Pretoria, hundreds of pages on the 1940 case against the indigenous herbalist Mafavuke Ngcobo, which in turn opened up questions (both historical and contemporary) about medicine, healers, and traditional knowledge. Not forgetting my experience at Kirstenbosch, I sought out, listened to, and recorded the names of plants in over a dozen South African languages. Indeed, dialogue and exchange, sharing and collaboration, and enormous hospitality were at the heart of what became, over time, *Theatrum Botanicum*: a project whose own tongue-in-cheek Latin title serves as a reminder of a necessary, critical self-awareness of its own—and my own—rootedness in Europe. South Africa is certainly a focus of much of the work developed during my repeated, months-long visits over a number of years, but from the outset it was clear that the plant-human

Front and back covers of *Plant Invaders: Beautiful, but Dangerous. A Guide to the Identification and Control of Twenty-six Plant Invaders of the Province of the Cape of Good Hope*, edited by C.H. Stirton (Cape Town: Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation of the Cape Provincial Administration, 1980).

entanglements I was interested in were embedded in a colonial and post-colonial arborescence of power relations, whose branches extend far into Europe itself. The (so-called) red geraniums that adorn Swiss chalets and lakesides, and which I know from growing up in Switzerland, are practically considered a national symbol, but they were in fact first introduced from South Africa into European horticulture by the Dutch East India company in the seventeenth century and have since been “naturalized” all over the world. Likewise, European settlers in South Africa introduced many plants—for nostalgic or practical reasons—that have turned out to become problems for the local biodiversity. The subsequent management (or attempts at eradication) of these “beautiful, but dangerous” plants in the name of conservation, both during and since colonial and apartheid rule, is an equally thorny issue. In a place where the politics of land and race are so central, plants were and are of course

never simply neutral and passive botanical objects but have always been actors on the stage of history and politics itself. In fact, the entire colonial project in South Africa started with a vegetable garden and fruit orchard (the Company's Garden), planted in the seventeenth century by Jan van Riebeeck, the founder and first colonial administrator of Cape Town in what then became the Dutch Cape Colony of the Dutch East India Company, to counter the scurvy that left the ships of the Dutch East India Company shorthanded. And the planting of wild almond trees as a hedge to protect the fruit and vegetables from the grazing cattle of the KhoiKhoi can be considered as one of the first acts of violence against the indigenous population. Parts of this organic border are still alive and well in Kirstenbosch today, very real plant ghosts that haunt our present and remind us of unfinished business from the past, creating a botanico-temporal arc that outlasts human generations.

Acknowledging ghosts, attempting to return memory to history, and trying to address injustices in and through the complex web of human-plant stories necessarily also involves fraught issues of representation, or what Linda Alcoff called "the problem of speaking for others"—in this context, both other people and also non-human natures. Throughout the long-term research in South Africa and in the making of *Theatrum Botanicum*, as well as this publication, my aim has been to speak *with* others and somehow share this conversation. And I have been extremely fortunate to find so many thoughtful, challenging, and generous interlocutors and collaborators, as well as contributors to this book, both in South Africa and elsewhere. The work and this book are dedicated to you.

U R I E L O R L O W
A N D S H E L A S H E I K H

I N T R O D U C T I O N

A
P R I S O N E R
I N T H E
G A R D E N

In 1977, in his thirteenth year of incarceration in Robben Island prison, a photograph appeared in the global press of Nelson Mandela, dressed in prison clothing, leaning on a spade. This image, which appears on the dust jacket of this volume, had been taken on April 25, during a visit by local and overseas press organized by the South African Prison Authorities. The image was captioned “A Prisoner Working in the Garden” by the authorities.¹ Shortly thereafter, Mandela and 28 other co-signatories wrote a letter (the first page of which is also reproduced on the dust jacket) addressed to the Single Cells Section of the prison, protesting against the purpose for and manner in which the visit was organized and conducted. In the letter, they complain of the deliberate violation of the prisoners’ right to privacy by taking their photographs without permission, and of the specification by the Minister of Prisons that the visit only occur on the condition that no communication whatsoever take place between the

press and prisoners.²

Beyond this protest against the self-representation denied to them, the letter challenged the manner in which the press visit was organized so as to “white-wash the Prison Department; pacify public criticism of the Department here and abroad; and counteract any adverse publicity that might arise in the future.” Moreover, this representational white-washing was slyly enacted precisely through a form of what one might nowadays call “green-washing”; as the prisoners relate in the letter, “on that particular day, the span from our Section was given the special work of ‘gardening’ instead of pulling out bamboo from the sea as we normally do when we go to work.”³ As such, the image was used to cleanse the reality of the hard labor and lack of rights that the prisoners endured,⁴ and the image of gardening in particular was fully capitalized upon. As the letter attests, prisoners and authorities alike were all too aware of the potential use of this image and of this seemingly leisurely, therapeutic, and apolitical activity.

But if the letter protests the lack of agency granted the prisoners, there is also a flipside to the image. As Mandela wrote in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he had a “lifelong love of gardening and growing vegetables.”⁵ A few years into their 18-year-long incarceration, Mandela and his fellow Rivonia trial inmates had in fact set up a garden in the courtyard of Robben Island prison.⁶ This had started informally with a few tomato seeds given to them by well-meaning prison guards. On their way to the stone quarry where they were forced to do hard labor, the political prisoners collected ostrich droppings as fertilizer. In time they also planted chilies and other vegetables to complement their meager prison diet. Later, as Mandela was writing the manuscript for what became his autobiography, the completed pages would be buried in cocoa tins in the garden to hide them from the prison authorities. As such, the seemingly benign activity of gardening became a highly politicized gesture—that of claiming and cultivating a patch of land and using it subversively to undermine the oppressive regime—and as a consequence the garden itself became entangled in historical events.⁷

1 This image now forms the centerpiece of the Mandela Prison Archive, “a living record of Mandela’s 27 years in prison.” See Nelson Mandela Foundation, *A Prisoner in the Garden: Opening Nelson Mandela’s Prison Archive* (Johannesburg: Nelson Mandela Foundation/Penguin, 2005) and <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/publications/entry/a-prisoner-in-the-garden>.

2 In their view, the minister acted with “impropriety” insofar as “total strangers are now in possession of photographs and films of ourselves.” In the letter, the prisoners protest against not being allowed to take and send their own photographs to their own families.

3 More recently, the term “green-washing” has been used to describe the process by which a given organization, company, or institution’s products or policies are made to appear ecologically friendly, precisely through the use of the PR or marketing image, often masking their true ecological costs. However, this is nothing new and can be applied to environmental movements more broadly throughout history.

For instance, the “green imperialism” described by Richard Grove can be read through this lens. See Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). In the words of Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, Grove’s history of ecological thought demonstrates that “the environmental sciences that tell us that we can no longer afford to ignore our human impact on the globe are an ironic by-product of a global consciousness derived from a history of imperial exploitation of nature.” Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, “Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth,” in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, 3–39 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12. See also the discussion of the paradoxes of conservation in the South African context in Bettina Malcomess, “appear and they...” in this volume, 187–95.

4 The co-signatories note the fact that they had not been given the status of political prisoners: “We are fully aware that the Department desires to protect a favourable image to the world of its policies [sic]. We can think of no better way of doing so than by abolishing all forms of racial discrimination in the administration by keeping abreast of enlightened penal reforms, by granting us the status of political prisoners.”

5 Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Abacus, 2013 [1995]), 41.

6 The Rivonia trial, which took place between October 9, 1963 and June 12, 1964, led to the imprisonment of Mandela and others. Mandela spent 18 of 27 years of imprisonment on Robben Island.

7 As Mandela writes: “A garden was one of the few things in prison that one could control. To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a small taste of freedom.” Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 583–92.

8 See Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-92): 5-32; and Astrida Neimanis, "No Representation without Colonisation? (Or, Nature Represents Itself)," *Somatechnics* 5, no. 2 (2015): 135-53.

9 See W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

10 See Nomusa Makhubu, "Strange and Bitter Crop: Visualizing Eco-racism in South Africa" in this volume, 277-84, esp. 81-82.

11 On the politics of botanical illustration in the English context, see Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "NonWest by North: Marianne North and William Colenso's Responses to Plantlife and the Classification of Economic Botany," in "The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions," special issue edited by Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, *Third Text* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2018).

The story of the Robben Island garden is the subject of *Grey, Green, Gold* (part of which is also included on the cover of this volume), an installation and lecture performance that is one of many elements of *Theatrum Botanicum* (2015-2018), a body of artistic works by Uriel Orlow that looks to the botanical world as a stage for politics. At its core, the project seeks to demonstrate processes of botanical cultivation, modification, and representation as means of oppression, discrimination, and dispossession—and, conversely, as tools for resistance, sustainability, and self-determination. (This dual movement is well demonstrated in the narrative above.) The larger context for this is that of colonialism (in its historical forms enacted by European powers, as well as manifestations of neocolonialism that take place globally today) and the lasting legacies of the institutionalized system of apartheid in South Africa. *Theatrum Botanicum* consists of ten discrete yet related works in film, sound, photography, and installation that highlight "botanical nationalism," "flower diplomacy," and plant migration; the role and legacies of the imperial classification and naming of plants; bioprospecting (the discovery and commercialization of new products based on biological—here vegetal—resources); and biopiracy (the commercial exploitation of natural genetic material, for instance that of plants, and placing restrictions on its future use, particularly through patents). Across the various works, plants and landscapes are treated not simply as the backdrop against which political events take place, but as the medium through which colonial violence (historical and contemporary; material, economic, and epistemological) is often enacted. Furthermore, against the age-old Western division between "nature" and "culture," in which nature is constructed as a site of passivity, the vegetal world is recognized as potentially active in shaping history. Central here is the question of representation (as the political matter of who—among humans and nonhumans—gets to speak, and in whose name),⁸ as well as aesthetic or pictorial representation (as we already saw in the instrumentalization of Mandela's image). In both the shaping of landscapes and their representation, the image does not simply re-present an existing reality but often creates certain imaginaries, which in turn bring material realities into being.⁹ Such is the case in South Africa, where nineteenth-century landscape paintings produced a fictional "empty land," an abundant nature seemingly devoid of culture that was there to be claimed and cultivated.¹⁰ Likewise, rather than being a mere form of innocent "illustration," botanical art can be read as part and parcel of the organization of nature and its "useful" elements.¹¹



John Parkinson,
Theatrum Botanicum
(1640). Source:
Wellcome Images/
Wikimedia
Commons.

A notable example of botanical illustration is John Parkinson's monumental herbal lexicon, *Theatrum Botanicum*, published in 1640, after which this project is ironically named. The tome

was one of the most complete and beautifully presented English treatises on plants and their use of its time, and was published during the transition of herbalism to botany, almost a hundred years ahead of Carl Linnaeus' famed *Systemae Naturae* of 1735.¹² Parkinson's title alludes to the natural world as a stage upon which humans act. But the title also leaves room for the actors in this theater to be interpreted as the "botanicum": for plants as actors on the stage of history.¹³ In Orlow's counter-signature of the original title, both theatricality and performativity are key. For a start, many works in the *Theatrum Botanicum* corpus are based on collaborations with actors or other performers. As in Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, the performative—and indeed a highlighting of the constructedness of the performance—is often foregrounded with various modes of re-enactment accompanied by "the-making-of" footage (see the films *The Crown Against Mafavuke* and *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke*). Performativity and theatricality also act as a corrective to the archive; restaging a court case from 1940 against a traditional herbalist (in *The Crown Against Mafavuke*) or performing into found footage from the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of the South African National Botanical Garden at Kirstenbosch in 1963 (in *The Fairest Heritage*) is a way to question the archive itself and imagine alternative histories. The experimental documentary *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* (Zulu, translatable as "Mafavuke's Tribunal") employs didactic and pedagogical techniques from Brecht's *Lehrstücke* and pre-enacts a people's tribunal that asks for a different future engagement with traditional knowledge, in particular surrounding medicinal plants, and benefit-sharing in the face of biopiracy.¹⁴ (The film draws inspiration from Abderrahmane Sissako's 2006 film, *Bamako*, in which a symbolic trial of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund is staged in a compound in Bamako, Mali.)¹⁵ Considering the vegetal world as an active agent of history, these staged re- and pre-enactments offer space for discussions of alternative, non-proprietary, and non-anthropocentric relations to non-human, vegetal life. The initial research for *Theatrum Botanicum* began in 2014 with Orlow's first visit to South Africa, followed by several months-long stays over the following three years.¹⁶ The first version of *Grey, Green, Gold* was commissioned by Bénédicte le Pimpec and Isaline Vuille for the 2015 exhibition *darker and darker grows the landscape* at Le Commun/BAC in Geneva and was also included in Orlow's survey show *Made/Unmade* at Castello di Rivoli, Turin, that same year. The overall project, however, was commissioned by The Showroom in London, where its first iteration premiered in October 2016. *Theatrum Botanicum* has since been expanded with new works and presented in further solo exhibitions, including Corner College in Zurich (2017), Parc Saint Leger Centre d'Art Contemporain France, PAV Parco Arte Vivente in Turin (2017–2018), and Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen (2018), as well as international group exhibitions and biennials, notably Koyo Kouoh's EVA International, "Still (the) Barbarians" in Limerick in 2016, and Christine Tohmé's Sharjah Biennial 13, "Tamawuj," in 2017.¹⁷ At The Showroom in London, the exhibition was preceded by a year of research into local medicinal plant use, which fed into a medicinal plant garden developed in collaboration with gardener Carole Wright and local residents from different communities and migratory backgrounds.

12 Parkinson (1566/7–1650) is regarded as the last of the great English herbalists. *Theatrum Botanicum*, his second published work, contained entries for some 3,800 plants, many of them never before described in print. For more information on Parkinson, see <http://www.kingscollections.org/exhibitions/specialcollections/fruits-of-the-earth-plants-in-the-service-of-mankind/from-herbal-to-botany/john-parkinson>.

13 For a discussion of nature as agent of history in the context of climate change, colonialism, and the Anthropocene (the geological era in which humans act as a main determinant of the environment of the planet), see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197–222.

14 The *Lehrstücke* are a radical and experimental form of modernist theater first developed by Bertolt Brecht and his collaborators from the 1920s to the late 1930s. The *Lehrstücke* stem from Brecht's epic theater techniques but as a core principle explore the possibilities of learning through acting and playing roles.

Regarding the artistic gesture of engaging with juridical forums, Sven Lütticken writes about the juridical reasons for having an aesthetic component, "insofar as it both frames and helps to remake and reshape the world. The law not only frames what already exists; it sculpts into being." Lütticken charts various examples of contemporary art practices that seek to intervene in the law and, in particular, to re-imagine legal assemblies. Such works reveal the contradictions in existing juridical frameworks, especially where these concern non-human objects and life forms that have been subject to legal dispute or tracing the complexities and "fictions" of legal personhood, for instance of non-human animals, plants, or ecosystems, and the corporations that threaten these rights. Sven Lütticken, "Legal Forms, Value-Forms, Forms of Resistance," in *Hearings: A Reader, publication accompanying the Contour Biennale 8, "Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium"* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 61.

15 Regarding *Bamako*, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 609–26, esp. 618–23. In *Bamako*, in which the plaintiffs testify to the injustice and blindness of global neoliberal and developmental policies, it is perhaps not arbitrary that the key figure demonstrating the inadequacies of a conventional juridical framework is that of the traditional healer, who, instead of offering testimony in a standard format, instead sings, and moreover does so in a local dialect that most present on the film set did not understand.

16 See Uriel Orlow, "Preface: Beautiful, but Dangerous" in this volume, 21–23.

17 See the Exhibition History section in this volume, 340.

18 In October 2016, we organized and chaired a symposium, entitled “*Theatrum Botanicum* and Other Forms of Knowledge,” at The Showroom. Speakers included Sita Balani, Jason Irving, and Philippe Zourgane.

19 On the relations and divergences between post-colonial and decolonial studies (the latter also known as “the modernity/coloniality school”), see Gurmindar K Bhambra, “Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues,” *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 2 (2014): 115–21.

Regarding “epistemologies of the south,” the work of Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos is notable here. See, for instance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses, “Introduction: Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference,” in *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (London: Verso, 2008), xix–lxii; and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

20 See Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepanta* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 240–70; and Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

The garden, comprising 50 medicinal plants labeled in the different languages participants knew them in, was also the basis of several workshops on the use of plants to make tinctures and ointments and eventually fed into a set of accompanying herbal medicine manuals documenting the communal knowledge produced through this process. Unlike the authoritative and universalist aims at the heart of many medicinal plant manuals from Parkinson’s *Theatrum Botanicum* to today, here the focus was on the sharing of stories connected to plant use, celebrating a variety of names and uses in different languages and cultures, and thus producing communal, locally anchored knowledge.

The present *Theatrum Botanicum* publication emerges from the artistic project and related workshops and symposia.¹⁸ Continuing the collaborative and plurivocal spirit integral to the project since its inception, the volume contains ten independent but interrelated essays by established and emerging authors that either speak directly to the artworks or follow lines of inquiry alongside them. Since one of the underlying intentions of this volume is to make accessible a coherent body of ideas from across distinct discourses, the essays necessarily originate from different disciplinary perspectives, including, but not limited to: postcolonial cultural studies; art criticism and art history; natural history, botany (including ethnobotany and economic botany) and conservation; postcolonial science and technology studies; biomedicine; jurisprudence and critical legal studies; and critical race studies.

On the one hand, the *Theatrum Botanicum* project and publication emerge from and engage with the relationships between plants and politics from the dual vantage points of South Africa and Europe, demonstrating that the context of the former maintains its own specificity and yet can never be divorced from the legacies of European colonialism (particularly in the form of imperial science and systems of representation and classification), not to mention the cultural and material exchange within the African continent and across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. On the other, while the authors commissioned are by and large working in either the European or South African context, many of the key issues that the *Theatrum Botanicum* works explore are global in scope. Thus, the *Theatrum Botanicum* publication is to be read as part of a growing conversation around colonialism and the politics of nature that traverses postcolonial and decolonial studies, as well as “southern epistemologies.”¹⁹ Underlining much of this work (as well as the work of ecofeminism and the post-humanities) is the contestation of easy colonial dichotomies between nature/culture, female/male, active/passive, subject/object, indigenous/invasive, tradition/progress, and so on, around each of which silent scare quotes are ever-necessary. Such binaries underpin what has been named (particularly in the context of the Americas) the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being—in other words, the continued forms of colonialism, after the end of formal colonialism, that permeate contemporary social, cultural, political, and epistemological orders—or the “modernity/coloniality” matrix that signals the darker, constitutive underside of Western modernity.²⁰ As decolonial feminist Maria Lugones points out, the modernity/coloniality relation must be understood as fundamentally shaped by race,

gender, and sexuality,²¹ and postcolonial and feminist studies of science show how the production of such categories went hand in hand with the categorization of different forms of life and knowledge, including botanical taxonomy and bioprospecting.²²

With regards to “nature” and “natural resources,” coloniality wrapped these up in a complex system of Western cosmology, which “manufactured an epistemological system that legitimized its uses of ‘nature’ to generate massive quantities of ‘produce’.”²³ It is in this context that the contemporary phenomenon of biopiracy (addressed by *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke*) and its precedents in colonial bioprospecting—itsself premised upon a “monoculture of knowledge” that for Vandana Shiva underwrites binomial botanical taxonomy and intellectual property rights systems—are to be understood.²⁴ In the South African context, a plethora of work has been carried out around the expropriation, commercialization, and protection of “indigenous knowledge,” which is addressed in relation to “knowledge diversity” and “‘indigenous knowledge-science’ wars.”²⁵ Such work benefits from postcolonial science and technology studies,²⁶ as well as Santos et al.’s call for the replacement of the “monoculture of scientific knowledge” by an “ecology of knowledges” that would grant an “equality of opportunities” to “the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes.”²⁷

With regard to race, the issues set out in what follows are to be read against the broader backdrop of current work (both activist and scholarly) around “environmental racism” or “eco-racism”—the production of “sacrificial,” racialized populations worldwide who are disproportionately exposed to environmental violence and racialized environmental politics.²⁸ While such conversations are hastily picking up traction in Europe and North America in particular, in the context of environmental debate in South Africa, as Lesley Green wrote in 2014, “the right to speak for nature is profoundly racialized, since voices raised in the protection of nature have an uneasy time escaping the scripts of race and racism.”²⁹ The wager that Green poses is whether, in the South African context, one might move beyond the usual line of argumentation about the naturalization of race as a social construct and instead draw from decolonial Latin American discourses on nature (themselves drawing from Amerindian thought), as well as posthumanist thinking, in order to articulate an environmentality without recourse to categories of subject and object. Undoing our conception of nature as an object to be acted upon and cultivated by agential humans and instead thinking through “naturecultures” and “more-than-human” collaborations would be a first step towards this.³⁰ As shown in what follows, both the South African botanical garden and wider landscapes can be read as social and political spaces actively shaped by such “multispecies” relationships, and spaces in which, according to Melanie Boehi, “multiple epistemologies and ontologies can take root that enable the development of more just and sustainable relationships among and between humans and non-humans.”³¹

This publication is made up of two intertwining books, each with its own table of contents. One documents the works of *Theatrum Botanicum*, including the scripts for the theatrical films. Whereas Orlow’s project transposes

21 María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186–209.

22 See Jason Irving, “Decentering European Medicine: The Colonial Context of the Early History of Botany and Medicinal Plants,” in this volume, 129–36; and Sita Balani, “From Botany to Community: A Legacy of Classification,” also in this volume, 229–35.

23 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 13.

24 Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 9. Cited in DeLoughrey and Handley, “Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth,” 21.

25 See, for instance, Lesley Green, “Beyond South Africa’s ‘Indigenous Knowledge-Science’ Wars,” *South African Journal of Science* 108, no. 7–8 (2012); Thokazani Xaba, “Marginalized Medical Practice: The Marginalization and Transformation of Indigenous Medicines in South Africa” in *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 317–51; and Geri

Augusto, “Context, Co-presence and Compossibilities: Bioprospecting between Endogenous Knowledge and Science in South Africa,” *International Journal of Biotechnology* 4, no. 2 (2002). See the general bibliography in this volume for numerous further references.

26 See Sandra Harding, ed., *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

27 Santos et al., “Introduction: Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference,” xx.

28 See Françoise Vergès, “Racial Capitalocene: Is the Anthropocene Racial?” Verso Blog, 30 August 2017, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>; and Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

29 Lesley Green, “Ecology, Race and the Making of Environmental Publics in South Africa: A Dialogue with *Silent Spring* in South Africa,” *Resilience* 1, no. 2 (June 2014).

30 Regarding “naturecultures,” see Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

On the “more-than-human,” see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “More-than-Human Sociality: A Call for Critical Description,” in *Anthropology and Nature*, ed. Kirsten Hastrup (New York: Routledge, 2013): 27–42. In terms of the presence in politics of other-than-human actors, see Marisol de la Cadena’s conception of “earth-beings,” in Marisol de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond ‘Politics,’” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 334–63.

31 See Melanie Boehi, “Multispecies Histories of South African Imperial Formations in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden” in the present volume, 81–87; and Melanie Boehi, “A South African Social Garden: People, Plants and Multispecies Histories in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden,” PhD dissertation, University of Basel, 2018, <https://edoc.unibas.ch/59963>.

³² See Carlos Correa, "Access to Knowledge: The Case of Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge," in *Access to Knowledge in the Age of Intellectual Property*, edited by Gaëlle Krikorian and Amy Kapczynski (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 237–52; Jeffrey Atteberry, "Information/Knowledge in the Global Society of Control: A2K Theory and the Postcolonial Commons," in *Access to Knowledge in the Age of Intellectual Property*, ed. Gaëlle Krikorian and Amy Kapczynski (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 329–53; Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, eds., *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); and Alain Pottage and Brad Sherman, *Figures of Invention: A History of Modern Patent Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

and alters the logic of Parkinson's herbal into various mediums, this section in turn translates the works back onto the printed page. The second book, interwoven with the first, acts as a compendium of brief, commissioned essays that aims to offer an accessible snapshot of the complex and multifaceted issues that inform the artworks. A third section at the end of the volume is comprised of further documentation. This includes summaries and credits for each of the individual works within the *Theatrum Botanicum* corpus, as well as the exhibition history of the project and its installation in different contexts. This section also includes work by other artists invited to be part of the inaugural exhibition at The Showroom in London as an acknowledgement of the wider community tackling related questions about plants, politics, colonialism, and eco-racism at that moment, with specific focus on the African continent. Furthermore, an expansive bibliography that extends beyond the sources referenced in the ten essays is included. While the themes covered across *Theatrum Botanicum* are part of a global discourse that is intensifying rapidly, and while there exist numerous studies on imperial science and the role of botany and conservation within colonialism, the general bibliography is prefaced by an annotated bibliography that offers brief summaries of ten sources that focus specifically on South Africa, in the hope that this publication might engage with and foreground a rich local debate. In addition, since *Theatrum Botanicum* tackles questions of "access to knowledge" and "open access" information, both the present introduction and the extended bibliography are available to download free of charge, as a shareable resource, from Orlow's website at www.urielorlow.net/publications.32

The ten commissioned essays begin with JASON IRVING'S "BOTANICAL GARDENS, COLONIAL HISTORIES AND BIOPROSPECTING: NAMING AND CLASSIFYING THE PLANTS OF THE WORLD," which shows how the European colonial project provided the basis for the development of the science of botany, based upon agreed principles of naming and classifying plants. While the seeds of the *Theatrum Botanicum* project germinated at the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Cape Town, it seems necessary to first rewind and begin in Europe in order to contextualize the emergence of colonial botanical gardens worldwide—including those in South Africa—and the taxonomical and valuation systems that came to supplant local systems of knowledge. Indeed, the modern scientific botanic garden, which began in sixteenth-century Italy, was key to the broader project of economic botany, which served as a vital tool for colonial expansion. As Irving shows, just as territories and features of the landscapes and geographies were named after important European men as a record of seizing control, so too were plants. While the principles of taxonomic description and the resulting standardized scientific system of plant names make claims to objectivity and universality, this system historically arose out of the context of colonial power relations, a fact still inscribed in scientific plant names today. As a result, a myriad of local names—reflecting regional taxonomies situated in a wider understanding of the world—have been lost, ignored, or relegated to a lower place in the hierarchy of knowledge.

Having contextualized the epistemic and classificatory basis of European botany, the legacies of which are traced throughout this volume, we return to Cape Town. In “MULTISPECIES HISTORIES OF SOUTH AFRICAN IMPERIAL FORMATIONS IN THE KIRSTENBOSCH NATIONAL BOTANICAL GARDEN,” MELANIE BOEHI considers the history of the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, which was founded in 1913 by Henry Harold Pearson, a botanist from Cambridge University, and continues to play a key role in disparate national imaginaries in South Africa. The Kirstenbosch garden is notable in its own right because, unlike European colonial botanical gardens (described in Irving’s chapter) where plant specimens from around the world were cultivated, Kirstenbosch was the first botanical garden devoted to promoting, conserving, and displaying a particular country’s indigenous flora. Kirstenbosch, Boehi shows, is an inherently social and political space: a site of human-vegetal (or “multispecies”) activities that have evolved as part of larger political developments within the South African state. Boehi’s essay explores how the collecting, ordering, and displaying of plants have shaped ideas and imaginations about nation, citizenship, and belonging (in other words, the relationship between “nature” and “nation”)—and how in turn plants have actively participated in and bear witness to the events they live through. Indeed, Kirstenbosch has long functioned as a site of imperial formation in South Africa, helping to foster “botanical nationalism” in a number of ways. For example, on the international stage of flower shows, plants were used in the second half of the twentieth century in state image campaigns, which can be described as acts of botanical or flower diplomacy.

Key to several of the works in *Theatrum Botanicum*—in particular the films *The Crown Against Mafavuke*, *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke (Mafavuke’s Tribunal)*, and *Muthi*—is the medicinal use of plants and competing medicinal traditions: in this case, between “European” medicine and “South African” healing traditions. JASON IRVING’S “DECENTERING EUROPEAN MEDICINE: THE COLONIAL CONTEXT OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF BOTANY AND MEDICINAL PLANTS” deconstructs the concept of a distinctly European *materia medica*. Drawing on recent postcolonial and feminist studies of the history of science, and indeed a “pluralistic” approach to science that acknowledges the agency of colonized subjects, Irving’s essay addresses the relationship between science and empire, and between knowledge and power, troubling the commonly assumed divide between science and tradition. Furthermore, these supposed dichotomies produced knowledge that was both racialized and gendered. Irving examines the links between the *materia medica* and earlier practices of bioprospecting for medicinal plant knowledge, from which we can trace a genealogy to present-day biopiracy (the patenting and commercial exploitation of genetic material, for instance of plants, without permission or a benefit-sharing agreement with local, original knowledge-holders), as explored in *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke*. The essay explores the role of medicinal plant discovery in the development of science from the eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, and shows that the search for new medicines was both a motivation for exploration and a tool to

facilitate European expansion that relied on imperial networks of trade and knowledge across the world. This development was facilitated by the medicinal plant garden (the physic garden), and structured by relations of colonialism, slavery, and patriarchy—as such, the theft of local knowledge and intellectual property was justified.

KAREN FLINT'S "COMPOUNDING TRADITIONS: FROM 'UNTRADITIONAL' HEALERS TO MODERN BIOPROSPECTORS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S MEDICINAL PLANTS" looks at the 1940 court case against traditional healer Mafavuke Ngcobo, which is restaged in Orlow's *The Crown Against Mafavuke* and brings into focus many of the concerns that people raise over indigenous medicinal plants today. As Flint shows, the trial was premised upon European law's understanding of the distinction between science and tradition. While Irving's essay renders unstable this distinction from the perspective of European medicine, Flint poses the question of what exactly is "traditional" about traditional medicine. Are traditions not fluid, subject to change? Does the use of a medicinal plant for similar or different reasons mean appropriation? And what about innovation? Who can and should profit from the preparation and selling of medicinal plants? As Flint shows, Mafavuke was ultimately punished for his experimentation and use of "white" technology—in other words, for challenging the notion of "traditional" as static and unchanging. She also looks at the history of traditional medicine and the ways that colonialism engendered confrontations as well as transfers of indigenous medicinal plant knowledge between Africans and Europeans. As noted both by Irving and Flint, this eventually led to its commodification, with little acknowledgement of (let alone financial compensation for) those who first tested and utilized them—a practice that continues with today's bioprospecting by multi-national pharmaceuticals. Tracing a history of the exchange of medicinal knowledge before, during, and after colonialism in South Africa, Flint charts the anti-colonial potential of healers, both historically and, at least suggestively, in a contemporary context. From the late-nineteenth century onwards, healers used experimentation and improvisation to circumvent laws that restricted their practice. In the present day, attempts have been made to protect "indigenous" knowledge of medicinal plants from its cannibalization by multinationals that—through a contemporary form of biocolonialism in which genetic materials and traditional knowledge become the new "terra nullius"—seek to patent and financially capitalize upon it.

Flint's chapter demonstrates the epistemic violence and Eurocentric blindness at the heart of laws that sought to fix, control, and profit from practices of "tradition." More recently, as she recounts, laws have been passed on bioprospecting and bio-trading that seek to deter future injustices of biopiracy. Whether such a goal will be achieved is yet to be seen; however, what is notable is the intention to correct historical wrongs. These laws, however, are themselves highly controversial since they still rely on a Western legal framework of patents and copyright, thus installing the state as a gate-keeper (and law-enforcer) of traditional, communally held knowledge that in fact is anchored in pre-national structures and

governed by cultural laws—which are not only practical but also spiritual. It is in this context that the film *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* is to be read. In the absence of a fully adequate national and international legal framework in which to offer redress for the theft of local knowledge—not to mention the dispossession of land and natural resources more broadly—and prevent further piracy, the experimental film depicts a forum that is itself experimental and takes its authority from a collective: that of the people’s tribunal, as distinct from the normal jurisdiction of the legal court, with its traditional format of accuser and accused, victim and perpetrator. Here, the tribunal form can be read in the spirit of decolonization insofar as its primary aims are education (both about biopiracy and the limitations of the various mechanisms to prevent it) and, as different characters put it, “[formulating] our own positions and demands” and “[having] the agency to act directly.” Furthermore, as the fictional contemporary-day Mafavuke character states, the aim is to “work together”—a statement that is particularly resonant given the legacies of the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission.

Despite the potential opened up in the space of the people’s tribunal, questions of jurisdiction and legal redress, not to mention accountability, loom large. In “A JURISPRUDENCE OF RESPONSIBILITY,” KARIN VAN MARLE begins by invoking the epistemic violence that underwrote the 1940 case against Mafavuke. Fast-forwarding to the 1962 Treason Trial of Nelson Mandela, van Marle recalls his famous “Black man in a white man’s court” speech, resonances of which can be heard in Orlow’s restaging of Mafavuke’s trial, in which the accused states: “Here I am, judged by white men who are telling me what I can and cannot do.” Juxtaposing 1940 and 1962 with the present day fictional tribunal, van Marle argues that despite the formal end of historical apartheid, the legacy of colonialism endures. She addresses this primarily through the epistemological and ontological tensions between Western and African conceptions of law and the limits of any institutional process—whether a court, tribunal, or commission—to both listen and respond fully to injustice. In other words, the limits of a jurisprudence of responsibility (with responsibility understood as the capacity to respond, or at least attempt to do so adequately). Addressing the haunting question of how jurisprudence might itself respond to centuries of epistemic and ontological violence, van Marle first explores the limitations of jurisprudence—as law’s epistemology and ethics—through the work of poet and journalist Antjie Krog, who reported on the unfolding of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Drawing both from Krog’s reflections on the commission and her creative writing, van Marle affirms experimental aesthetic practice—poetry, the visual arts, and, we might add, theatrical works—as a space for developing law’s conscience. Through Krog’s writing, the law’s inability to comprehend alternative modes of being in and understanding the world (alternative “rationalities”) is revealed. Van Marle turns to the notion of *Ubuntu*, a category in the thought of the Bantu-speaking people—which is central to African jurisprudence and through which the issues raised in *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* around indigenous, ancestral knowledge might be read—and calls for epistemological and

ontological diversity, as well as “co-responsibility” within jurisprudence. This is all the more necessary in terms of post-1944 land reform, the crucial context against which any discussion of reparative justice—above all concerning traditional plant knowledge and the relationship between spatial and epistemic (in)justice—must take place.

Drawing from Krog’s writings, van Marle highlights the inability of existing epistemological frameworks to *translate* certain testimonies. On the one hand, translation—as a form of responsibility and comprehensibility—may be called for in the public realm of truth commissions and legal forums, and above all in the quest for “truth-making”; on the other hand, in different contexts, *untranslatability*—as a form of refusal or silence—might be called upon as a strategy of resistance. (As one of the characters in *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* puts it regarding traditional knowledge, “People keep back secrets. Who would trust the government to look after their secrets?”) In the context of engaging with historical archives and the taxonomic logics upon which these are often premised, this resistance might in fact take the form of acknowledging a certain powerlessness, or the inability to fully articulate “a” given narrative. This is at the core of BETTINA MALCOMESS’ performative contribution “APPEAR AND THEY...”, a partly fictional series of fragments that, like many of the works in *Theatrum Botanicum*, intervenes in, fictionalizes, and re-stages the archive—in this case an obscure field naturalist society operating in Johannesburg in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries whose primarily Anglophone members hunted and researched plant and insect specimens. This archival retrieval is combined with a reading of William Beinart’s seminal writings on the rise of conservation in South Africa, prompting a reflection upon the violence and alibis of conservation (what others such as Richard Grove have named “green imperialism”). Steeped in colonial history, this practice often functions more along the lines of exploitation and commodification, and as such, questions arise about how to navigate archives that are essentially premised upon the subjugation and exclusion of certain forms of life, knowledge, and representation. Malcomess’s response is to cut in and out of the archive, “collaging” it in order to introduce a multiplicity of voices, as well as silences—that which cannot be said, that which is in-articulable. While her two key characters, “A” and “G.S.M.,” are respectively identified as “a researcher and writer” and “a historian,” ambiguity is intentionally mobilized throughout. This is especially the case with regards to the third, silent character, “S,” who creates a certain lacuna in the text, personifying the aporias of archival research and the demand for truth-formation as a function of language.

While Malcomess’ contribution can be framed as part of a discussion around and performance of decolonization within contemporary South Africa—particularly in educational, arts, and archival institutions—SITA BALANI’s chapter, “FROM BOTANY TO COMMUNITY: A LEGACY OF CLASSIFICATION,” shows that the effects of the classificatory drive of botanical taxonomy are still felt not only in formerly colonized territories, but also at the “heart” of Empire, albeit in perhaps less obvious manners. Balani brings us to recent decades in British politics and the quagmires of multiculturalism, a debate that has resurfaced all

the more markedly in the context of Brexit and the collective denial over the legacy of Britain's colonial history—a remnant that is being vehemently tackled in particular by student-led initiatives to revisit colonial history, its epistemological underpinnings, and the gaps in dominant narratives. At a moment in which younger generations of British academics and activists are engaging with a previous generation of anti-racist, postcolonial scholars, we might recall the role of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa as, in the words of Paul Gilroy, “central to the moral conscience of the whole world”—Britain included. Balani's chapter focuses on an event that took place in the same decade as the official end of apartheid in 1994: the campaign of terror unleashed by 24-year-old David Copeland, who in April 1999 set off three home-made nail bombs in London in the space of two weeks. “The Nailbomber,” as Copeland came to be known, specifically targeted Black, Bangladeshi, and gay communities, viewing these groups as discrete yet nonetheless interrelated within a national-sexual-racial nexus. Balani traces the manner in which the public reception of the attacks operated through the very same triad, suggesting that this logic in fact has its roots in imperial science, including botany and its classificatory system inherited from Carl Linnaeus's taxonomy. Balani traces the emergence of botany as vital to imperial science and a European “taxonomic imagination.” Like Irving, who reads imperial scientific knowledge as both sexualized and gendered in his chapter on European medicine, Balani charts Linnaeus' sexual classification of plants, showing how they became counterparts to human bodies, particularly with respect to reproduction. This subsequently led to the essentialization of human sexuality as an organizing principle in the eighteenth century. Balani argues that the logic underpinning Linnaeus' taxonomy persists in ideas surrounding identity, and that categories of race, gender, and class co-emerged and became legible in a process of analogy through imperial science. This race-gender-class triad in turn reappears in contemporary discourses around community, with the idea of separate but comparable communities as the prism through which the Nailbomber attacks were carried out and subsequently interpreted. Just as colonial policy sought to contain fissures within supposed racial and sexual groupings through excessively militarized masculinity, Copeland's response to the multicultural reality of London was one of rejecting ambiguity and attempting to re-instate the false separations of taxonomy through violence.

Unlike other chapters that either operate in parallel to or cut across various individual works within the *Theatrum Botanicum* corpus, KHADIJA VON ZINNENBURG CARROLL's chapter, “THEATRUM BOTANICUM: RESITUATIONS TO NATURE'S GHOSTS,” addresses the project directly. Von Zinnenburg Carroll begins by reconceptualizing the corpus that is *Theatrum Botanicum* through the very logic of botanical taxonomy, notably Carl Linnaeus' Latin-based binomial system—the very same system that, in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, sparked the initial impulse of the project. Unlike Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* herbal, which contains within it different types of medicinal plants, this body of artworks including, at least implicitly, the present volume—is ironically placed under the very taxonomical and linguistic system that it seeks to bring to the fore and undermine in yet another

strategy of archival re-staging: the species is theater, its genus is botany. But this is not botany as theater; rather, *Theatrum Botanicum* is “a theater in which botany is among a cast of colonial protagonists.” And, as in *Hamlet* (the 1937 South African re-staging of which, in Wulf Sachs’s *Black Hamlet*, is evoked by Malcomess), this theater is littered with ghosts. In von Zinnenburg Carroll’s reading, the works across *Theatrum Botanicum* at once seek to retrieve or respond to the silenced voices of specters and also to countersign them: for instance, in *The Crown Against Mafavuke*, the script remains close to the original court transcript, and yet the genders and ethnicities of characters are switched, drawing attention to the artifice of the original identity categories that functioned to silence or misrepresent so many in the first place. If van Marle’s essay is about the responsibility of jurisprudence and its capacity for redress, von Zinnenburg Carroll frames this through cultural restitution. In her reading, restitution is not simply about the repatriation of material objects, but “extends to the epistemic violence that takes the *known* from the world” and turns it into intellectual property. Restitution understood this way would encompass the “cultural, collective way of living” that one of the characters in *Imbizo Ka Mafavuke* speaks of as in need of protection.

Prompted by Orlow’s installation *Grey, Green, Gold*, which visualizes the garden in the Robben Island prison with which we began, von Zinnenburg Carroll juxtaposes the spaces—both material and psychic—of the prison and the garden. In the prison, as related in his own words, Mandela and his fellow ANC inmates found a small escape. And yet, as we saw above, the image of the comfort of gardening was violently appropriated by the imaginary perpetuated by the apartheid propaganda machine. Where the image of Mandela was mobilized in order to create an impression of the apartheid system’s leniency on this figure famous for his struggle against state-sanctioned racism, NOMUSA MAKHUBU’s essay, “STRANGE AND BITTER CROP: VISUALIZING ECO-RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICA,” begins with the general, simplistic assumption—yet another imaginary perpetuated by dominant visual cultures—that gardens are a “white” thing. Recalling her own life in the black township of Sebokeng, Makhubu relates the improvisatory gardening practices that offered an ironic escape from a world that saw the townships as “brown” dust bowls. These townships, Makhubu reminds us, were home to people whose “ecologically implicated but exploited” labor built and cared for the “green” of public and private (white, and thus supposedly neutral) gardens. Just as the seemingly apolitical space of the garden was mobilized in the circulation of Mandela’s image, Makhubu charts how in South African visual arts, a focus on gardens and flowers is generally seen as the past-time of wealthy white painters who can afford the luxury of engaging with the garden’s purity—quite unlike the sole imagined representational subject of black artists, deemed to be the suffering of human figures in highly politicized, urban spaces. Here Makhubu offers a stark corrective both to the imagery of “eco-racism” and the writing of art history: while black South African artists engaging with landscape are few and far between, Makhubu assembles numerous figures from the 1960s onwards—for instance, Gladys Mgudlandlu,

Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Athi Patra-Ruga, and Khaya Witbooi—whose practices, often far ahead of their time, engage with gardens and landscapes differently, beyond the mere depiction and/or conquering of nature.

Makhubu's essay is an important intervention both into art history within South Africa and, more broadly, the global art circuit's current fascination with artists dealing with both botany and environmental politics. While postcolonial studies, critical race studies, environmental studies, and art history have only recently begun to genuinely converse in order to address eco-racism and its visualizations, Makhubu responds to figures whose practices pre-date the contemporary fervor (necessary as it is) for this topic. In a similar move, in her essay "WAKING DORMANT SEEDS: ARTISTIC AND CURATORIAL INTERVENTIONS IN PLANTS AND POLITICS," CLELIA COUSSONNET traces the relatively recent trend in global curatorial circuits towards showcasing practices that recognize the entanglement of plants and power relations, or what might be termed "botanical imperialism." She pays particular attention to artists from around the world whose practice has long addressed the relationships between colonialism and cultivation. Starting from her own 2016 curatorial project, *Botany under influence* at apexart in New York, Coussonnet draws on the larger context of the complex relations between botany and politics. She responds, as do many of the other authors in this volume, to the common perception of the vegetal world and its related systems of knowledge as devoid of agency, and to the occlusion of strategies of resistance on the part of those whose relations to land and environments has been, and continues to be, subjugated by colonial structures of domination and expropriation. Bringing together works by Alberto Baraya, Pia Rönicke, Mónica de Miranda, Otobong Nkanga, Cooking Sections, Maria Thereza Alves, Kapwani Kiwanga, and many others, Coussonnet provides a wider context for *Theatrum Botanicum* by considering different artistic strategies for deconstructing the invisible power relations that shape geopolitics—and for producing multispecies, entangled narratives about history and politics through the prism of botany.

Augusto, Geri. "Knowledge free and 'unfree': Epistemic Tensions in Plant Knowledge at the Cape in the 17th and 18th Centuries." *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 136–82

This article utilizes indigenous medicinal plants of the Cape region to explore the gamut of epistemologies in contested, dynamic tension in the early Cape Colony: that of the frontiersman, the Khoikhoi, the Sonqua or Sankwe, and the slave. Drawing on a transdisciplinary set of literatures, the article puts Africana studies, the study of indigenous knowledge systems, and social studies of science and technology in wider conversation with each other, and argues for the adoption of an epistemic openness, methodologies that "braid" seemingly separate strands of social history and differing knowledge practices, and cross-border collaboration among scholars of African and African diasporic knowledges. The findings suggest new ways to view the "multiplexity" of early indigenous southern African botanical, therapeutic, and ecological knowledges, as well as the necessity for rethinking both the construction of colonial sciences and contemporary concerns about indigenous knowledge, biosciences, and their twenty-first-century interaction.

Beardsley, John. ed. *Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016.

This edited collection is based upon the proceedings from a 2013 multidisciplinary conference at Harvard University that sought to correct the lack of garden history in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the longest occupied and least studied landscapes on earth. While scholarship has been attentive to images of nature made by the region's explorers and settlers and to colonial-era landscapes—public parks and game preserves, botanical gardens, and urban plans—surprisingly little attention has been paid to spaces created by and for Africans themselves, from the precolonial era to the present. This book is a contribution to the small but growing effort to address this oversight. Its essays explore what we know of precolonial and later indigenous-designed landscapes, how they were understood in the colonial era, and how they are being recuperated today for nation-building, identity formation, and cultural affirmation. Across the essays, Western assumptions regarding "landscapes" and "gardens" are contested, and landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa is shown to take more ephemeral forms, constructed through social experience and ritual practice. Contributors engage with critical issues in preservation, from the conflicts between cultural heritage and biodiversity protection to the competition between local and international heritage agendas.

Beinart, William. *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Beinart's *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa* explores the history of conservationist ideas in South Africa, focusing mainly on the livestock farming districts of the semi-arid Karoo and the neighboring eastern Cape grasslands, conquered and occupied by white settlers before the middle of the nineteenth century. Beinart charts the central preoccupations of South African conservationists at the time, faced with the transformation of natural pastures by livestock, soil erosion, and dwindling water supplies, tracing debates about environmental degradation in successive eras of South African history. The book offers a reinterpretation of South Africa's economic development, and of aspects of the Cape colonial and South African states. It expands the understanding of English-speaking South Africans and their role both as farmers and as protagonists of conservationist ideas. The book is also a contribution to the history of science, exploring the ways in which new scientific knowledge shaped environmental understanding and formed a significant element in settler intellectual life. Many of those who pursued conservationist ideas were influenced by new scientific perceptions in fields such as botany, geology, forestry, veterinary science, zoology, and water management. The book's argument is that the development of these and related fields constitute a major but neglected element in the history of knowledge and intellectual life in South Africa. At another level, it is a collective biography, highlighting individuals—little known in the historiography—who made key contributions to the understanding of environmental change in the country. The book concludes by analyzing conservationist interventions in the African areas, and discussing evidence for a stabilization of environmental conditions over the longer term.

Beyond this, the book contributes to a broader history of conservationist ideas and the quest to understand the origins of modern Western environmentalism. Those who worked at the Cape were influenced by global developments, and new concepts of nature framed their concerns. However, we know that experiences at the peripheries of empire made a considerable impact on the evolution of Western conservationism and, in this sense, the Cape was a significant small stream in a wider current of thought. Cape society generated its own vernacular understandings, partly from indigenous people, and its own local anxieties, as farmers and officials struggled to come to terms with the difficult terrain. As such, the book moves between a comparative framework and a focus on local specificity.

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 627–51.

This article by renowned scholars of colonialism in South Africa, Jean and John Comaroff, examines the predicament of the postcolonial nation-state through the prism of environmental catastrophe. When are plant "invaders" likely to become an urgent political issue? And, when they do, what might they reveal of the shifting relations among citizenship, community, and national sovereignty under neo-liberal conditions? Pursuing these questions in the "new" South Africa, the authors posit three key features of postcolonial politics in the era of global capitalism: the reconfiguration of the subject-citizen, the crisis of sovereign borders, and the depoliticization of politics. They argue that under such conditions, aliens—both plants and people—come to embody core contradictions of boundedness and belonging. And alien-nature provides a language for voicing new forms of discrimination within a culture of "post-racism" and civil rights.

What might "natural" disasters tell us about the ecology of nationhood? Or about the contemporary predicament of the postcolonial nation-state? How might the flash of environmental catastrophe illuminate the meaning of borders and the tortured politics of belonging? How might nature remake the nation under neoliberal conditions? When and why, to be more specific, do plants, especially foreign plants, become urgent affairs of state? And what might they disclose of the shifting relations among citizenship, community, and national integrity in an era of global capitalism? Pursuing these questions in South Africa, the authors run up against two faces of "naturalization" in the politics of the post-colony: one refers to the assimilation of alien persons, signs, and practices into the received order of things; the other, to the deployment of nature as alibi, as a fertile allegory for making people and objects strange, thus to forge critical new social and political distinctions.

Foster, Laura. "Re-inventing Hoodia: Patent Law, Epistemic Citizenship, and the Making of Difference in South Africa." PhD dissertation, University of California, 2012, <https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt2z0012rf/qt2z0012rf.pdf?t=nrukto>.

This PhD dissertation examines the patenting of biological materials derived from Indigenous San peoples' knowledge of *Hoodia gordonii* in Southern Africa. Contributing to feminist science studies, transnational feminisms, and feminist socio-legal studies, the research asks how differences of gender, race, and indigeneity shape and are shaped by struggles over patent ownership, access and benefit-sharing, and commercial bioprospecting. In particular, it conducts an ethnographic account of how *Hoodia gordonii* circulates and changes meaning through colonial botanical sciences, patent law rules, ethno-pharmaceutical research, and benefit-sharing. This produces understandings of how *Hoodia gordonii* and Indigenous San peoples' knowledge and identity are co-produced, while new modes of citizenship are emerging.

The dissertation argues that Hoodia patent law struggles produce difference and inequality, while engendering potential pathways for Indigenous San economic and political recognition, through two inter-related processes. The first is through the oscillation of elastic nature/culture binaries as Hoodia (and San identities) are re-invented through various discursive formations. The nature/culture binary is an important conceptual analytic. Feminist scholars have shown how women, people of color, and indigenous peoples have historically been constructed as closer to nature and thus excluded from culture. This project shows how individuals and groups making claims for rights (e.g., patent ownership, benefit-sharing contracts, and bioprospecting permits) deploy, disrupt, and/or refigure nature/culture binaries through narratives of indigeneity, race, and gender. The second process is through the emergence of new expressions of what Foster calls "epistemic citizenship." This refers to the ways in which privileges and responsibilities are being granted in unequal ways based upon whose knowledge matters most to neoliberal economies. To be sure, citizenship has always been linked to knowledge and power. Yet, this research contends that lines of inclusion and exclusion within the nation-state are being drawn in new ways through the expanding regulation and control of knowledge.

Ives, Sarah. *Steeped in Heritage: The Racial Politics of South African Rooibos Tea*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017

South African rooibos tea is a commodity of contrasts. Renowned for its healing properties, the rooibos plant grows in a region defined by the violence of poverty, dispossession, and racism. And while rooibos is hailed as an ecologically indigenous commodity, it is farmed by people who struggle to express “authentic” belonging to the land: Afrikaners, who espouse a “white” African indigeneity, and “coloreds,” who are characterized either as the mixed-race progeny of “extinct” Bushmen or as possessing a false identity, indigenous to nowhere. In *Steeped in Heritage*, Sarah Ives explores how these groups advance alternate claims of indigeneity based on the cultural ownership of an indigenous plant. This heritage-based struggle over rooibos shows how communities negotiate landscapes marked by racial dispossession within an ecosystem imperiled by climate change and precarious social relations in the postapartheid era. Beyond this, the book is not just about rooibos but also about how people claim their belonging in relation to an uncertain political, economic, and ecological future. By exploring the ironies and surprises that surround the plant/commodity, *Steeped in Heritage* looks at how people envision themselves as attached to places and how those attachments play out in fierce contestations over nature, race, and heritage in a land where climatic shifts are pushing the indigenous ecosystem southward. How do residents grapple with their “precarious” identities, and how do they articulate their own concepts of what it means to be indigenous when their uncertain claims to belonging in place merge with the uncertainty of the rootedness of place itself? Ives shows how residents’ relations with rooibos as a commodity, as an indigenous plant, and even as an extension of the self, help to answer these questions.

Jayawardane, M. Neelika. “Impenetrable Bodies/Disappearing Bodies: Fat American Celebrities, Lean Indigenous People, and Multinational Pharmaceuticals in the Battle to Claim *Hoodia gordonii*.” *Popular Communication* 9, no. 2 (April 2011): 79–98.

In the centuries following the first European colonial ventures in Southern Africa, *Hoodia gordonii* made a remarkable journey: from an imperative portion of sustaining indigenous life to an apartheid-era warfare tactic to magic-bullet cure for obesity in the West. The nineteenth century’s imperial drive to document, classify, and collect samples of living species meant that literally thousands of plant species that were already well-recognized as medicinally, spiritually, ritually, or otherwise invaluable in daily life of many indigenous communities came under the scrutiny of colonial desires. The legacy of this imperial history then attracted the attention of the world’s super-consuming nation—the United States—a nation that excels at absorbing information, goods, resources, and labor from any place in the world, and incorporating them into its own mythology of multiplicity and possibility.

Products claiming to contain *Hoodia gordonii* have, over the past couple of decades, flooded the American marketplace; advertisements for dozens of brands promise to convert millions of ordinary American bodies into leaner, more desirable bodies. Jayawardane shows how *Hoodia*’s mythic status is achieved because the narrative surrounding the Southern African succulent touches something deep in the American psyche: marketing strategies connect themselves with the powerful desire to return, at least symbolically and temporarily, to prelapsarian, Edenic locations, where magical consumables promising to erase the malaises of postindustrial societies still exist in museumized perpetuity. *Hoodia* promises to safeguard the consumer and make the body and psyche “impenetrable” to the daily warfare within the consumer state.

The article charts how the unimposing succulent that the San of Southern Africa have used to relieve thirst and suppress appetite in times of food shortages and drought or to aid them in long hunts in the desert promised to solve the ultimate evidence of overabundance. In the context of growing bioprospecting and biopiracy, Jayawardane demonstrates that indigenous peoples were rarely compensated for knowledge that holds commercial value. While manufacturers of so-called “*Hoodia*” products made a killing, the collective of people now known as the San, who won a hard-fought battle to benefit from the sale of their indigenous knowledge, saw next to nothing.

Rassool, Ciraj, and Leslie Witz. “The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa.” *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (1993): 447–68.

In all considerations of South African history, Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch navigator and colonial administrator who founded Cape Town in what became the Dutch Cape Colony of the Dutch East India Company, looms large. Perspectives supportive of the political project of white domination created and perpetuated this icon as the bearer of civilization to the sub-continent and its source of history. Opponents of racial oppression have portrayed van Riebeeck as public (history) enemy number one of the South African national past. Van Riebeeck remains the figure around which South Africa’s history is made and contested.

This article shows that this has not always been the case. Indeed, up until the 1950s, van Riebeeck appeared only in passing in school history texts, and the day of his landing at the Cape was barely commemorated. After the 1950s, however, van Riebeeck took center stage in South Africa’s public history. This was not the result of an Afrikaner Nationalist conspiracy but rather arose out of an attempt to create a settler nationalist ideology. The means to achieve this was a massive celebration throughout the country of the 300th anniversary of van Riebeeck’s landing. Just as the van Riebeeck tercentenary afforded the white ruling bloc an opportunity to construct an ideological hegemony, it was grasped by the Non-European Unity Movement and the African National Congress to launch political campaigns. Through the public mediums of the resistance press and the mass meeting, these organizations presented a counter-history of South Africa. These oppositional forms were an integral part of the making of the festival and the van Riebeeck icon. In the conflict which played itself out in 1952 there was a remarkable consensus about the meaning of van Riebeeck’s landing in 1652. The narrative constructed, both by those seeking to establish apartheid and those who sought to challenge it, represented van Riebeeck as the spirit of apartheid and the originator of white domination. The ideological frenzy in the center of Cape Town in 1952 resurrected van Riebeeck from obscurity and historical amnesia to become the lead actor on South Africa’s public history stage.

Van Sittert, Lance. "Making the Cape Floral Kingdom: The Discovery and Defence of Indigenous Flora at the Cape ca. 1890–1939." *Landscape Research* 28, no. 1 (2003): 113–29.

In this article, Lance van Sittert explores the "floral nativism" of the "Cape Floral Kingdom." The colonial elite in the south-western Cape were historically aficionados of exotic flora and disdainful of the region's indigenous vegetation. This changed rapidly in the half century after 1890, with the indigenization of botanical science and the emergence of a distinctive Cape botany, practiced and patronized by the Cape Town patriciate. The botanists' re-imagining of the indigenous flora as the "Cape Floral Kingdom," an ancient and endangered flora without equal anywhere in the world, served ideological and practical purposes for their sponsors. Floral nativism provided both a sense of identity for an emerging white settler nationalism and a justification for evicting the underclass from the commons and their conversion into a preserve for patrician leisure and contemplation. The political realignments of Union, however, left the Cape Town patriciate isolated, forcing them to seek a broader popular audience among the urban middle classes of the region and the United Kingdom. By the eve of the Second World War, identification with the indigenous Cape flora had become a mark of class, ethnic, and regional identity for the old imperial urban, English-speaking middle class marooned in a new nation state governed by rural, Afrikaans republicanism.

Xaba, Thokozani. "Marginalized Medical Practice: The Marginalization and Transformation of Indigenous Medicines in South Africa." In *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 317–51. London and New York: Verso, 2007.

The collision of African political, economic, social, religious, and cultural practices with modern civilization has had an overwhelming and lasting impact on Africans. Within a short period of time, Africans were transformed from peasants living on the produce of the land and their cattle to being forcibly incorporated into a universalistic, mono-economic, and mono-cultural world economic system. Together with such economic changes, their lives went through political, social, and cultural transformations through which their cultural, social, economic, and political practices and institutions were suppressed and marginalized.

In this chapter, Xaba addresses the socio-cultural impact of the marginalization of African medical practices, arguing that modern development, which is intolerant of competing points of view, sought to change or supplant indigenous medical beliefs and practices with modern ones. Consequently, Africans find themselves constantly destabilized, while the benefits derived from the holistic approach and the egalitarian nature of indigenous medicines are not being realized. Instead, Africans are subjected to modern practices, among which are the invasive techniques of "scientific" medicines.

The chapter also argues that, while some proponents of modern civilization believed in and practiced it like a religion, their dogmatism blinding them to the value of indigenous practices, others were motivated by economic competition, which spurred them to remove any form of competition emanating from indigenous practices. Among the historical bastions of development were political institutions represented by the state, the religious institutions represented by missionaries, and the medical and pharmaceutical institutions representing "scientific" medicine. But the marginalization of the medical practices of Africans also faced resistance, which took the form of people either refusing to be converted to Christianity, or tampering with the Christian message by inserting African religious and cultural practices. Such practices included the use of indigenous medical services.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Theatrum Botanicum would not have been possible without the support, generosity, dialogue, and hospitality of so many. Uriel Orlow would like to express his gratitude to everyone and extend special thanks to:

May Adadol Ingawanij, Bridget Baker, Melanie Boehi, Francis Burger, Mkhuluwe Cele, Benjamin Cook, María Palacios Cruz, Elisabetta Fabrizi, Karen Flint, Russell Galt, Joseph Gaylard, Nomathole Pumla Gaylard, Avery Gordon, Russel Hlongwane, Margherita Huntley, Mikhail Karikis, Sifiso Khanyile, Dorothee Kreutzfeld, Andreas Lechthaler, Peter Makarube, Bettina Malcomess, Lindiwe Matshikiza, Molemo Moiloa, Palesa Mopeli, Gcobisa Ndzimande, Alice Notten, João Orecchia, Kate Parker, Emily Pethick, Julia Raynham, Eva Rowson, Masimba Sasa, Samora Sekhukhune, Shela Sheikh, Eve Smith, Cherry Smyth, Anne Tallentire, Bradley van Sitters, Sahn Venter, Nikhil Vetukattil, Amy Watson, Pule Welch, Neal White, Carole Wright, Phakamani Xaba, Andrea Luka Zimmerman, and Tim Zulauf

Commissioning and Curatorial

Marcella Beccaria, Enrico Bonanate, Maren Brauner, Emily Butler, Giovanni Carmine, Maria Thalia Carras, Mika Conradie, Bridget Crone, Sveva d'Antonio, Ekaterina Degot, Kadiatou Diallo, Jamie Eastman, Corrado Gugliotta, Yuko Hasegawa, Olga Hatzidakis, Russel Hlongwane, Tereza Jindrová, Koyo Kouoh, Marie-Anne McQuay, Giulia Mengozzi, Catherine Pavlovic, Emily Pethick, Bénédicte le Pimpec, Marco Scotini, Dimitrina Sevova, Louise Shelley, Christine Tohmé, Isaline Vuille, Amy Watson, and others

Public Events

Sita Balani, Melanie Boehi, T.J. Demos, Jason T.W. Irving, Shela Sheikh, Philippe Zourgane

Exhibition Architecture

Andreas Lechthaler

Financial Support

Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN), Arts Council England, Pro Helvetia – Swiss Arts Council, University of Westminster, Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Parc Saint Léger – Centre d'art contemporain

Institutional Support

The Showroom, London; Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, Cape Town; The Nelson Mandela Foundation, Johannesburg; Visual Arts Network South Africa (VANSA); Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Umbria

This book is published to mark the completion of Uriel Orlow's body of work *Theatrum Botanicum* and its exhibition at:

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The Showroom is supported by
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Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen is kindly supported by
Stadt St.Gallen, Kulturförderung Kanton St.Gallen, Swisslos, and Raiffeisen
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The exhibition was additionally supported by
Stiftung Erna und Curt Burgauer, Georges and Jenny Bloch Stiftung, and Ernst Göhner Stiftung
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PAV is kindly supported by
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Via Giordano Bruno, 31
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PUBLICATION

URIEL ORLOW THEATRUM BOTANICUM

Editors:
Shela Sheikh and Uriel Orlow
Published by
Sternberg Press Caroline Schneider Karl-Marx-Allee 78 D-10243 Berlin www.sternberg-press.com

ISBN:
978-3-95679-415-5

Copyeditor:
Jeffrey Malecki
Proofreader:
Olivia Fairweather
Design:
In the shade of a tree (Samuel Bonnet, Sophie Demay, and Maël Fournier-Comte)
Typeset in:
IM Fell English Pro, IM Fell French Canon, and Founders Grotesk
Papers:
Cairn Eco White, Munken Lynx Rough, and Burano Light Gold
Printed by:
Unicum, Tilburg

© 2018 Uriel Orlow, the editors, the authors, Sternberg Press

This publication is supported by:
Arts Council England; Henry Moore Foundation; The Showroom, London; University of Westminster; Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen; Parc Saint Léger – Centre d'art contemporain; Parco Arte Vivente (PAV), Turin; and Corner College Zürich

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Other exhibition images:
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Production stills
Imbizo Ka Mafavuke:
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The editors would like to thank Emily Pethick and the team at The Showroom for their continuing support of and care for *Theatrum Botanicum* throughout the different phases of research, conception, fundraising, production, and this publication; all the authors for their generous engagement with the project in direct and indirect ways; Sophie Demay and Maël Fournier-Comte for their care and intuition with the graphic design and production; and Jeffrey Malecki for his sensitive and rigorous copyediting. We are also grateful to Corinne Silva for her invitation to organize the panel discussion on "Photography, Colonialism and the Politics of Planting" in the context of her *Garden State* exhibition at The Mosaic Rooms, London, in 2015, which catalyzed a lasting conversation around the themes addressed in this volume.

THEATRUM BOTANICUM

URIEL ORLOW
THEATRUM BOTANICUM

Edited by Shela Sheikh and Uriel Orlow
Published by Sternberg Press

Theatrum Botanicum (2015–2018) is a project by artist Uriel Orlow comprising film, sound, photographic, and installation works that look to the botanical world as a stage for politics. Working from the dual vantage points of South Africa and Europe, the project considers plants as both witnesses to, and dynamic agents in, history. It links nature and humans, rural and cosmopolitan medicine, tradition and modernity across different geographies, histories, and systems of knowledge — exploring the variety of curative, spiritual, and economic powers of plants. The project addresses “botanical nationalism” and “flower diplomacy” during apartheid; plant migration; the role and legacies of the imperial classification and naming of plants; bioprospecting and biopiracy; and the garden planted by Nelson Mandela and his fellow inmates at Robben Island prison.

This publication is made up of two intertwining books: one documents the works of *Theatrum Botanicum*, including the scripts for two films; the second is a compendium of brief, commissioned essays that aims to offer an accessible snapshot of the complex and multifaceted issues that inform and are raised by the artworks. The independent but inter-related essays, which either speak directly to the artworks or follow lines of inquiry alongside them, cover perspectives from postcolonial cultural studies; art criticism and art history; natural history, botany (including ethnobotany and economic botany), and conservation; jurisprudence and critical legal studies; and critical race studies.

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9 783956 794155