

HUGO KA
CANHAM

RIOTOUS DEATHSCAPES



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BUY

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My mother is present throughout this book. As a protagonist, a facilitator suggesting other protagonists, sitting with me when my ideas ran out and unwittingly planting seeds that drove the manuscript. Deep down, this book is about her. In all my prior scholarship, I have not written about home or emaMpondweni. It is fitting that my first foray into this new writing begins at the place of my birth and with my mother. When other university work threatened to stall the writing of this book, Lusikisiki was a refuge that reconnected me to the people who are at the heart of this text. It is where my ancestral spirits fortify me.

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I interviewed a number of villagers for this book. I am grateful to the mostly old people who opened their lives and hearts to me. Their words have shaped this text. I hope to have captured their anguish and their joy. Some died while I was in the process of completing the manuscript. This book is for them but for their descendants too. My neighbors and the villagers whose lives have intersected with mine are in these pages. By focusing on a single place, I wanted to write a book about expansive forms of blackness because the homogenizing narrative jarred with my own experiences of blackness as a village boy. I wanted to provide a portrait of women and queer adolescents as black agents. The people I know as black are old men

who have not gone to school. They are not big men. Adolescents teach me to rethink temporality. The old women of my village have always held me close, and they have allowed me to explore a boundless blackness. Readers will encounter horizontal forms of blackness founded on relation and an insistence that no one history or place on the globe has monopolies on blackness. *Riotous Deathscapes* is about place. The rolling hills. The rocky outcrop. The roaring ocean. The flooding river bend and the graves that dot the riotous black deathscapes. The book is forged in this hardness and beauty. I have used the hardness in the content of the book. I have borrowed the form from the beauty that sutures the hardness. *Riotous Deathscapes* is an incomplete portrait of Mpondo life. I hope that those whose experiences I transcribe here will forgive my lapses and any wayward interpretations.

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO WILLFUL AFRICANS WHO CONTINUE
TO THEORIZE AND LOVE—EMAMPONDWENI AND IN OTHER
BLIGHTED ZONES OF ABANDONMENT.

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River ferry crossing
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TO BE RELEGATED TO THE MARGINS is to be in a state of being perpetually emotionally charged. Feelings coursing near the surface. Catching feelings. Shackled to emotions. In a defensive posture. Touchy. Surly. Chips on our shoulders. Charged in ways that those who are fully human do not have to be. Charged in ways that surprise others. Seeing into the past and future and connecting invisible but sedimented histories of trauma. Over-analyzing. I write this book from the place of catching feelings. From the chip on my prickly body. From the disorientating vortex of repeated catastrophe and joyful paradox that is the black condition. This book is about amaMpondo people of Mpondoland, but it is also about black people who are subjugated throughout the world.

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MPONDO ORIENTATIONS

My mother's life is lived quietly in the former Transkei apartheid homeland, in deep rural Eastern Cape, South Africa. We are generally referred to as the Xhosa people. To be more precise though, we are Mpondo people who speak a derivative of isiXhosa or isiMpondo.¹ In my mother's village of Emfinizweni, electricity arrived in 2006 when she was about sixty-five years old. Piped water is a pipe dream. Her candlelit life has been marked by repeated trauma. In the last few years she has fallen on her back at least eight times. In the first of these falls, in 2011, I was with her. She landed with a thud that fractured three vertebrae in her spine. On this occasion, the two of us were marooned in a flooding valley. At her insistence, I stopped the car that we were traveling in. She was worried that the wheels of the motor vehicle would miss the overflowing and crumbling bridge and we would plunge into the river that had burst its banks. She climbed out of the vehicle and after a few steps in the thick mud, she slipped and fell, landing on her back. The falling rain washed the mud from her face as she lay looking into the weeping sky. Her wet hair clung to her forehead, a forehead whose design inspired my own. Beside myself with fear, I extricated her from the mud. Her mouth froze and her breathing stopped. Desperation struck her eyes. A heart attack, I thought. Leaning into her frozen body, I held her mouth and breathed my panicked breath into her—giving

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her the air that she'd bequeathed to me before my birth. I would later learn that this was the beginning of heightened panic attacks and not a heart attack. I liken this to the Rwandan condition *ihahamuka*—which means without lungs and is common in the wake of trauma such as genocide.² My mother and I did get out of the valley. But faced with roads that jut dangerously out of slippery hills and overflowing riverbanks, my mother lay in bed with a fractured spine for four days over Christmas before the roads cleared sufficiently for us to take her to the hospital. The conditions where people eke out livings in the rural Eastern Cape make black trauma, kaffirization, a quotidian event. My use of the term *kaffirization* is to signal the work of the term beyond the taboo.³ Its use has always been pejorative. I use it here to point to its unhumanizing intent.⁴

In a fall in 2015, my mother was shoved over by a young man wielding a smoking gun at her face. She landed with a thud to her head. She screamed cries that echoed in the distance to signal to my younger brother to escape from the house. Forcing her to the floor, her attacker tramped on her chest, forcing her ribs to yield, until she quieted. Hearing the screams and gunshots, my brother gathered his crutches and stumbled out of the back door, swinging on his single leg. He hid in the garden, and using his mobile phone, he called for help. My mother has screamed for help in agony so many times that her jaws have a way of locking. This is a sign of panic setting into her body. Freezing her. Draining the air from her lungs. Attacking her. Her screams carry memories of her husband, our father, who died young. I was six then, and my brother was a year old. She has been attacked so many times that she sits near windows to scan the road for assailants. Every sound must be accounted for. "What was that?" The remote control resides in the folds of her lap ever ready to mute the television. "Did you hear that?" She no longer watches the news and violent scenes on the television. Violence triggers panic. She flips through the channels to avoid bad news. Her favorite television programs are those whose dialogue she cannot hear. She sits and watches in the darkness late into the night, willing and repelling sleep, waiting for gunshots so that she can hobble away because she can no longer run. She is afraid to fall asleep. The trauma has eaten into her bones and resides in her joints, swelling and crystallizing them with arthritis that makes her body ache and age. Her diminished immune system means that the slightest cold gives way to pneumonia. The large bump on her head has subsided now. Through her snow-white hair, her scalp glistens in pain. She is no longer conscious of pain in her ribs. A pain that would wrack her body with every inward breath she took. Her

diaphragm heaving with the movement of her lungs. Crime is rampant. Unemployment supported by neoliberalism's insistence on separating people from land and self-dependence has alienated the youth and is driving them to attack the vulnerable bodies of the aged and debilitated. Young men prowl for money. Raised in a violent historical arc of political, masculinist force, violence is a familiar and ready tool.

My brother, too, knows trauma intimately after multiple encounters. From the car accident that led to his amputation to the stabbing of his abdomen and head and the multiple robberies. Kaffirization is when the doctor does not recognize that a vein needs suturing and applies plaster of paris instead. When the leg becomes gangrenous and the rural hospital cannot do anything about it because it has almost no medical personnel and inadequate medical supplies. When rural life is so cheap that it goes to hospital to die. When it became apparent that my brother's leg was in danger, an ambulance was miraculously found and after a night and ten hours of driving through the rain and mist, my brother arrived first at Mthatha's Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital where he couldn't be helped and then in Durban where he was dropped off at Nkosi Albert Luthuli Academic Hospital. From one Nobel Peace Prize winner and antiapartheid hero to another.

I found my brother unconscious on a stretcher in the emergency department of the Durban hospital. He was unattended while his leg decomposed, because the doctor wanted his next of kin. I was told, "To save him, we need to amputate the leg." Here I was, faced by the literal non-choice between gangrene and amputation of which James Baldwin (1984) once wrote. The world spun, sweat surged through my pores. My star athlete, twenty-three-year-old little brother whom I had watched learning to crawl and then to walk. And then run like the wind. My brother whom I had cheered as he won all his races at school. I signed the documents and authorized the amputation. Because the gangrene had spread, they cut high. Above the knee. We told him when he regained consciousness. When the phantom pains wracked his body, we coaxed the leg and told it that it was gone. Talking to the (absent) body. Pleading for the brain to catch up to a past that is ongoing. Two years later, the same body and brain had to process stab wounds. Someone waved a car down when they saw him stagger onto the road with his intestines pushing out of his abdomen. In recent years, we have started to worry for his liver, battered by all the drinking. For brutalized young men, drinking alcohol is not a passing relief or rite of passage into adulthood. It is constant because there is no relief for the haunted.

We worry about my mother and brother. We coax them to move to the city where safety can be purchased at a price. They refuse. They are attached to place and land, graves, the river, and the hills that encircle my home. They are disoriented when they are away from the place they call home. The hills enfold them, and the rivers imprison, soothe, and protect. As for me, I witness the deaths and regular brutalization from both near and afar. Sometimes I am at home with my mother. At other times I was in cities such as Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg where I have studied and worked. I escaped the fate of most black people that I was raised with because of these movements that have assured a middle-class life of relative safety. I now live in Johannesburg and consider myself to have two homes: one in Johannesburg and one in the village.

Mpondo Orientations

Riotous Deathscapes is the story about the failures of modernity in a place with alternative modes of being that looks to different timescapes and defies death/life binaries. The different chapters suggest that while the incursions of modernity leave devastation in their wake, the Mpondo people make meaningful livings of survivance in the black deathscapes that mark this place. *Riotous Deathscapes* crafts a Mpondo theory. This theory is conceived in the confluence of the natural world and the jostle of oral narratives against officially sanctioned histories. Its components are a constellation of death, life, the ocean, hills, rivers, graves, and spirits. The theory therefore moves against anthropocentric struggles that invest in the human taxonomy of the Chain of Being. Amidst the multiple dyings in Mpondoland are a defiant people whose timescapes root them in a temporality that rubs against colonial time. What emerges is a livingness that points to blackness and indigenous life precariously unmoored from modernity. We witness a hopelessness that does not surrender to helplessness. This is an ethic of black indigenous people. It is a refusal to languish in a state of victimhood but instead craft rampant dying as a way of living. *Riotous Deathscapes* suggests ways of attending differently to black life on the margins. It offers ways of looking askance as a methodology for black studies from the African continent in conversation with those in the black diaspora. To attend askance is to attend queerly, not in the tradition of Western queer studies but in a queerly African way of looking. To be queerly African is to fail at being a self-contained and actualized modern subject.⁵ It is to be in

relation to multiple others, to eschew the linearity of settler time, and to refuse social formations that are made for Man.⁶ To live queerly is to stay in struggle without seeking escape and transcendence. It is to be both black and indigenous, always porous to possibilities of being remade over time. It is to live in the tributary and confluence of varying crosscurrents that signal relation. Oceanic, spiritual, climatic, death, life, erotic, queer. It is to be attentive to emergent geographies of gendered, sexual, transnational, and racial identities that arise in the wake of rupture. *Riotous Deathscapes* charts a course of black life in vast deathscapes. It is a portrait of life among the dead.

This book offers a theory-method of being that I term *Mpondo theory*. The theory is distilled through a meditation and portrait of black life lived in the rural reserve. My transcription shows how people live in the world and in the body. In turn, I examine how the body is enfolded within the natural world, the spiritual, and systemic realms. I engage in a transcription of this theory to provide a portrait of parts of this life by historicizing it in deep time to demonstrate how amaMpondo have weathered colonialism, apartheid, and neoliberal toxins.⁷ *Riotous Deathscapes* shows how Mpondo theory both predates these historical incursions and responds to the unhumaning of capitalism and antiblackness while emanating a poetics of relation. Although the theory predates capitalism and offers possibilities beyond it, I see it as conveying a vernacular theory of being in a capitalist world. *Riotous Deathscapes* is a practice of the black public humanities as it traces histories that exist in largely undocumented form. It relies on sources that exist outside of organization and formality. While Bhekizizwe Peterson (2019) describes the black public humanities as knowledges that exist in alternative spaces such as community theater, unions and associations, local savings schemes, mothers' church unions, community radio and newspapers—all of which exist beyond the university and formal archives—I widen this to include inscriptive practices such as orality, the natural environment, ritual, family and community storytelling, and other acts of active remembering and imagining that enable intergenerational sociality and resistance. Similar to Aboriginal practices, I center features of landscape in meaning making.⁸ This orthography is not an attempt to make Mpondo people legible to the world as a native informant.⁹ Since Mpondo culture is enfolded in opacity, it would be impossible to make it fully legible. Instead, *Riotous Deathscapes* offers a portrait of rural forms of black life that widen current traditions of black, indigenous, queer, and African studies. This meditation offers alternative modes of theorizing refusal

and freedom in the midst of overdetermined dying. It offers possibilities for similarly located people seeking freedom in different chronotopes.

Riotous Deathscapes begins by explicating Mpondo theory and its navigational tool—*ukwakumkanya*. It then situates Mpondoland as the focus of this text through a portrait of the cartographies of emaMpondweni. The text's understanding of temporality is then drawn out in a discussion on timescapes. I then move on to illustrate how this theory is embedded within and informed by a number of cognate fields of thought such as black studies, indigenous studies, queer studies, and debilitation studies. Throughout, I signal some key interlocutors in the black world. The introduction concludes with a chapter outline of the five chapters that constitute *Riotous Deathscapes*.

Mpondo Theory

A way of seeing, knowing, being, and living with and against sedimented devastation. Mpondo theory is *Riotous Deathscapes*' contribution to knitting together black and indigenous studies. To explicate this theory, I begin with a key concept that drives this theorization: *ukwakumkanya*. This concept works as a trinity: it is a feature of Mpondo theory, a practice of the theory, and a scholarly method adopted in this book. As a scholarly method and practice of Mpondo theory, *ukwakumkanya* enables the book to stage a meditation and portrait of black life in the rural margins. In what follows, I begin by sketching the coordinates of Mpondo theory through the practice of *ukwakumkanya*.

I lift my hand and shield my eyes. In isiMpondo, the language that I first spoke as a child, this action is *ukwakumkanya*.¹⁰ Creating a shadow in order to illuminate. Shielding one's eyes in order to see far. The paradox of creating light by blocking the sun's glare. *Ukwakumkanya* is to block out distractions and draw into sharp relief. To throw shade or create a shadow over the face. It enables tunnel vision in order to focus the gaze. *Ukwakumkanya* is to pause. To double take by looking again. Re-figure. Eyes shielded and momentarily closed, one can look into the past. *Ukwakumkanya* is to shield one's eyes in order to attend differently and to consider from another vantage point. This way of looking can also be performative, a pretense not to see. To look blankly or past someone. Looking this way allows us to feign surprise but also to express real surprise. This is a way of looking selectively by adopting a register that enables one to attend anew. By

blocking out what one does not want to see, this is a very deliberate way of looking. It manages and orders excess. It invites multiple gazes, which could include direct, oblique, repeated, and stalled looks. It can be a look of refusal expressed through looking askance, looking away, and blocking out. *Ukwakumkanya* is to imbue the black subject with self-knowledge and interiority. It is to look from a place of consciousness of one's place in the world. From the existential fact of the body and the accompanying attributions we have been compelled to learn about being-black-in-the-world (Manganyi 2019). *Ukwakumkanya* is to attend from a place of survival that is coded in the body and intergenerational knowledges. It is an archive that radiates from a deep history. It is a perspective from which to gaze at the world thus bringing it into sharp relief. To look this way is to center the subject position of the looker. If we imagine a deep temporality within which our ancestors are embedded agents, we can imagine that our *ukwakumkanya* is discursively related to theirs and our ways of attending can radiate backward. It is to recognize black indigenous wisdom borne by ancestors and elders. Before us then is a deep history of attending while being grounded in this place. Standing on a jagged rock high above the seething ocean of Mpondoland, how many ships did our ancestors see? What does this way of looking tell us about our history, and how are we figured differently by self-seeing beyond colonial and state-sanctioned narratives? How does rooting oneself on the seashore or black shoals discursively link our history to a global history of oceanic existence that builds anticolonial praxis and is indigenously ordered away from the sovereign claims of the nation-state?¹¹ What do we see when we look away from the colonial and neoliberal state and instead create *ukwakumkanya*? But seeing is not limited to sight. It is to attend with all sensorial registers. One can scan the sky to divine an approaching storm in the gathering clouds, but with eyes shielded, one might smell the storm approach in the air. *Ukwakumkanya* is to pause and attend through the frequency of the sensorial. Through the method of *ukwakumkanya*, Mpondo theory is a multisensorial experience of life and the world. It displaces imperial emphasis on the visual.

These focused looks, tarrying gazes, perked ears, attentive nose, touches, and attempts to perceive differently are the driving motifs of this text. To center looking in relation is to adopt a phenomenological orientation to the world. *Ukwakumkanya* is the mnemonic map. It serves as a memory aid and assists us to retain and retrieve memory. In this text, the hill, ocean, river, spirit world, and grave are maps to Mpondo history. I invite the reader to join me in lifting their hand to create a shelter above their eyes and to attend

with me through the illuminating shadow. The place about which I write has a riotous landscape of rolling hills, tempestuous oceans, plunging gorges, meandering streams, disappeared graves, and flooding rivers. *Ukwakumkanya* is a grounded way of attending from these sites.

Ukwakumkanya enables a view that is in solidarity with diasporic blackness but that is grounded in place. This is to suggest that Mpondo theory is related to but distinct from blackness in the diaspora. By attending from here, we tarry in an untypical location that is not forged in the transatlantic slave trade. This way of attending is not a counter gaze. Rather, it is a way of looking that enlarges and decenters black studies from overdetermined ways of knowing.¹² In *The Practice of Diaspora*, Brent Hayes Edwards (2009) uses the term *décalage* to describe precisely these kinds of fault lines:

This black diasporic *décalage* among African Americans and Africans, then, is not simply geographical distance, nor is it simply difference in evolution or consciousness; instead it is a different kind of interface that might not be susceptible to expression in the oppositional terminology of the “vanguard” and the “backward.” In other words, *décalage* is the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water. It is a changing core of difference; it is the work of “differences within unity,” an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed. (Edwards 2009, 14)

This is central for my own thoughts in figuring Mpondo theory in relation to a global black studies. Mpondo theory is true to this location, but it is a part of something more than here. It similarly enlarges indigenous studies by figuring African indigeneity as sutured to blackness—in one body. It expands black queer studies by grounding antinormative being in African locales and using more capacious lenses to attend to how we queer and are queered.

If I were to diagrammatically represent Mpondo theory based on the foregoing, I’d begin by shielding the eyes to capture a quizzical look that is both oriented to the future and historically focused.¹³ The diagram would convey *ukwakumkanya*’s simultaneous vision across sensorial registers. The looker’s feet would be firmly rooted on the ground to signal the present but also to stake a claim to place—not of ownership but of belonging here. The place is the natural world of Mpondoland. The views from these shifting spaces are the praxis that constitute the assemblage of Mpondo theory. But the theory also escapes total legibility. It is uncontainable, riotous, and does not invite nor entertain any desire to be fully grasped in one hand.

Like the ocean, meandering river, hill, graves, and spirit world, it is never fully knowable even to those who practice it as a way of life. It is not unlike Tiffany Lethabo King's (2019) shoal—the surfacing of the ocean floor close to the shoreline, whose unpredictability exceeds total mappability and full knowability.¹⁴ Mpondo theory is akin to John Paul Ricco's description of an affective occurrence that is a formative force but is less than an event whose function is traceable as neither cause nor effect. Ricco contends that this affective occurrence “is in this sense inappropriable: incapable of being claimed and owned or made one's own—but it might also be what cannot be expropriated, stolen, or taken away from you” (2019, 22). At its nub, Mpondo theory suggests an opacity and a meditative posture of neutral affect that refuses commensurability precisely because *ukwakumkanya* is about a mode of relation that resists reader's mastery of the theory. The commitment to “contingency, conjuncture, and extemporizing” suggests a posture that is averse to the will-to-possess, to systematizing and mastery (Ricco 2019, 24). This works alongside Édouard Glissant's (1997) duty to errantry—an insistence on the poetics of relation that do not commit to rootedness, possession, origins, or totalitarianism. *Ukwakumkanya* finds resonance in Glissant's poetics of relation as these ways of being are forged in relation to self and the other rather than in forms of dominance and supremacy—for example, in how the Mpondo responded to Khoekhoe neighbors fleeing settler genocide and white and enslaved Asian and African shipwreck survivors who were castaway on the Mpondo coast. Because the Mpondo people have themselves not mastered *ukwakumkanya* since it comes to them like a mother tongue—and they hold it contingently—it cannot be appropriated. Readers of this book may relate to it, but they are not likely to master it because it is not possible to absorb the subjective and ontological interiority of the margins. Instead, my invitation is for readers to inhabit the world that *Riotous Deathscapes* portrays in order to explore possibilities for how we might reconsider modes of living in abandoned zones.

Following the navigational tool *ukwakumkanya*, a second defining feature of Mpondo theory is the place from which we attend. It is rooted in the past through the centering of ancestral knowledges and continuities between the living, the death bound, and the dead. This relation to the dead is signaled in *ukwakumkanya*'s ability to look back while simultaneously looking forward. As the coronavirus advanced on the rural countryside in May 2020, the concept of *ukwakumkanya* recurred in my daily telephonic conversations with my mother. She told me that old folk like

her were focusing their gaze with dread on what would be illuminated. For her, *ukwakumkanya* gave a foreboding historical vision. She described how she occupied her sleeplessness with counting the people who'd died during the wreckage wrought by the AIDS pandemic across our villages. Here, her way of attending to the specter of the coronavirus evoked dying and the ancestral. As a way of attending, dreams are also a form of *ukwakumkanya*. Dreams can fill one with a sense of foreboding, uncertainty, or wonder based on what one sees, smells, hears, touches, or tastes. Dreams link us to futures and pasts. *Ukwakumkanya* provides us with a simultaneously grounded and abstract concept of timespace which Vincente Diaz described as "a product of social and cultural formulation and reckoning" (2011, 27). What we attend to therefore is always discursively located. A gaze from the village is a form of grounded theorizing that reckons with what has gone before, what we are living through, and what awaits us.

The theoretical preoccupation of Mpondo theory primarily responds to dual pressures that Mpondo people struggle with. The first is the long history of colonial and apartheid subjugation and how its entanglement with neoliberal capitalist cultures has had devastating effects on this community. The second pressure is how neoliberal capitalist cultures are variously implicated in the many forms of dying and death detailed in this book. Mpondo theory both precedes these pressures and responds to them. The book is organized around a demonstration of the operation of this trilogy—colonial/neoliberal capitalist cultures, dyings and death, and riotous resurgence.¹⁵ *Riotous Deathscapes* therefore articulates a cosmological, lived, and embodied form of theorization into a matrix of meaning-making that spans death and life. It is a theory of being in relation to persons, ancestors, the natural world, life, and death. Mpondo theory has a complicated set of relations to individual capitalist notions of ownership. It favors shared and environmentally conscious use of the land and ocean's resources characterized by moderation.¹⁶ In practice, it demonstrates a collision between different epistemic legacies of individual ownership and communal sharing. This theory responds to capitalist extraction with a defiant declaration that embraces both living and dying to maintain relations to land. The regularity of death and suffering means that Mpondo people have normalized dying into their way of life. This theory begins with death because in the Mpondo life cycle dying precedes living. Since the ancestors that provide meaning for how we live are already dead, the source of knowledge and life is death. To take the dead seriously is to be attentive to the ghostly elements of social life. Avery Gordon (1997) asserts that a confrontation with ghostly elements

requires a major reorientation in relation to how we make and conceive of knowledge. Because the land and water are central to how people die, live, and order their lives, my theorizing is grounded in the sociality enabled by the environment, spirits or supernatural, and embodiment. Reflecting on indigenous people on Turtle Island and their forms of theorization, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson contends that “As political orders, our bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits produce theory and knowledge on a daily basis without conforming to the conventions of the academy” (2017, 31). Because theory has come to be imagined as belonging to particular bodies and places, this is an unconventional way to think of it. However, with this text I continue a tradition of insisting that theory is present even among the unhumaned.¹⁷

By centering *ukwakumkanya*, I amplify the lives of my protagonists and treat their truth claims with the gravity of theorists.¹⁸ I rely on stories, allusions, traces, and residue that I read off surfaces. I am preoccupied with how one accounts for a history that is undocumented in the written form. How does one write when oral and cosmic archives are primary forms of being and where writing is not a customary archival form? Given the marginality and unimportance of Mpondoland and her people to the colonial project, even the colonial archive is unproductive for this project. The archive fails. There are liberating dividends from a failed colonial archive. There is a freedom and license to stick more closely to the voices of the people and the surfaces of this place. I therefore turn to collective memory scripted on bodies, in the lay of the land, in the hum of the ocean, in the familiar sight of young people’s despair, in the mounds of earth that cover bodies felled by AIDS and state-sponsored neoliberal violence, and in abandoned schoolgirls’ dreams. My method of the black public humanities works in tandem with Hartman’s (2008) concept of critical fabulation—a labor that seeks to paint as full a picture as possible of the lives of black enslaved people and other black undesirables.

The form adopted in this text is conscious of Rinaldo Walcott’s 2020 Twitter provocation that a core feature of black studies is an abiding commitment to form. This commitment is based on the recognition that traditional disciplines are unable to engage the fullness of black life. Black studies is an alternative space necessitated by the fact that the disciplines have been complicit in the unhumaning of black life. A subversion of disciplinary academic form is central to this break from the disciplines. I embrace this injunction and adopt forms that enable a fuller trace of the contours of Mpondo sociality. Throughout the text, I try to surface

what the chosen form reveals about black indigenous life and how the text battles against disciplinary strictures. For *Riotous Deathscapes*, deformative praxis is an investment in coproducing knowledges with Mpondo protagonists. As an insider and coprotagonist who self-references, it is not possible for me to engage with questions of sampling. I make choices as a member of the community involved in coproducing a portrait of villagers. I am not unaffected by the stories that assemble this text. Another expression of deformation is the claim to theorization with the explicit naming of Mpondo theory. This waywardness is a form of marking this work so that it is not conceived of only as data but as theory. As a deformative gesture, this work is not invested in seeking a place at the table of theory.

Instead, Mpondo theory is an emplaced way of responding that draws on black and indigenous ways of being and resisting. It is wary of the generalizing universal eye. The theory intersects with other forms of indigenous theorization. It however centers the features around which Mpondo ways of dying and living occur. Mpondo responses to being unhumaned may cohere with or diverge from similar communities elsewhere on the continent and in the Global South. By focusing on Mpondoland, I gesture to how globalization and neoliberalism have coopted indigenous ideas such as ubuntu.¹⁹ *Riotous Deathscapes* thinks from a place that registers a radically different kind of precarity and (im)possibility. The national and global imaginaries cannot account for Mpondo theory precisely because it is a substantially more difficult geographical and mental place from which to think. While my focus is emaMpondweni, I anticipate that the African village across the continent grapples with survival in the aftermath of slavery, colonial and neoliberal devastation, and ongoing neglect. In response, villagers work against the production of forgetful subjects and insist themselves into history.

To theorize from the African village, I lean on Frantz Fanon's (1967) sociogeny to argue that all cultures are lived locally rather than universally.²⁰ Sea-level theorization deepens particularity but offers something beyond the particular. Sociogeny works against canonical narratives. This text is about meeting people where they live. The fact that I am part of them and part of elsewhere inflects this meeting. In many ways, then, I am simultaneously self-writing while also writing my coprotagonists. This writing takes seriously the idea that the problems I narrate are socially produced and not inherently a part of the people and the place and therefore unchanging. Sociogeny enables multiple histories that are grounded in community. Since truth is a process of endless recovery and revision (Marriott 2011), this

project is attentive to the new truths that are possible and the leaps that villagers take out of an overdetermined history. To see blackness as unstuck from canonical history is to embrace a certain buoyancy from which reimagining can occur. To be in community with the spiritual world is to disrupt teleology, and to resist development is to be out of time with neoliberalism. When villagers resist Western civilization as the only version of the future, they make room for different ontological possibilities. What openings exist and how do leaps through openings potentially take us out of the imprisoning black history of colonialism? The text is attentive to the leaps and ways in which we take flight. Throughout *Riotous Deathscapes*, the co-protagonists, the stories they tell, and the historical figures and events with which I engage point to a fugitive orientation to the world. Read sociogenetically, then, the black state of being in the village is an art of studied refusal with moments of capitulation. Tina Marie Campt (2019) asserts that the practice of refusal is to reject the conditions of the status quo as livable. In her conception, negation is generative for its potentialities of how we might live otherwise. The practice of refusal draws on a black history of fugitive and rebellious existence. Throughout the text we observe different ways in which amaMpondo say no and embrace waywardness in a demonstration of Fred Moten's (2018) conception of fugitivity as an ongoing desire to escape. If desire is a driving impulse for life, the Fanonian leaps in the break produce alternative socialities where ancestors walk among us and where choices are framed more broadly than life and death. In *Riotous Deathscapes*, sociality is death defying. It is driven by an imaginary that takes us to spaces and possibilities beyond death—to what else happened.²¹

Mpondo theory proposes another way of articulating the *being* of being black. Rather than mounting an argument for why we are deserving of being human on the terms of Sylvia Wynter's *Man*, Mpondo theory offers a decentered view of being. Decentered from whiteness and constitutive of the natural, animal, spiritual, and ancestral worlds. In this conception, the beingness of being black and indigenous is not about recuperating the human, dominion, elevation, reason, possessing an essence, or reestablishing an alternative center. It is neither posthuman nor entirely animalist.²² In this project, I explore what is liberated when we conceive of being as elastic, reciprocal, and unbounded. It is exactly the consignment of the Mpondo to the status of the unhuman that enables this yearning to be both in and outside of the human—to be boundless. Mpondo theory is invested in the indigenous, natural environment and the ancestral. As a people who have remained on our motherland, we are not alienated since our beingness

derives from being in place. Our order of consciousness is based on our specific social reality fortified by *ukwakumkanya*. Mpondo theory therefore assembles black being as an orientation that is less about precision but more oceanic. Located but in motion.²³ This portrait of Mpondo life suggests that it is unenclosed.

Cartographies of Mpondo Spatiality

If indigenous spatiality is unbounded and dynamic, mapping has the effect of binding space and rendering it static in ways that enable capitalist claims to privatization. Mpondoland has largely evaded the colonial, apartheid, and postapartheid cartographers' lenses. Almost all cartographies of South Africa move from a great level of detail to a general inexactness with significant gaps on the maps when Mpondoland appears. Indeed, as colonial cartographers were more interested in "the manufactured image of complete knowledge" rather "than gaining the actual knowledge itself," its illegibility became an important subaltern attribute for the Transkei (Braun 2008, 2). The lack of interest in the area and its supposed unknowability means that a sea-level theory—a planetary perspective from below—is how the territory is mentally mapped by its inhabitants, outside of any formal processes.²⁴ AmaMpondo have always known our world. Oral accounts as well as my own experience clearly demonstrate that we know one hill from another. The pathways of our rivers, the secrets of their depths, and ritual histories are intimate parts of who we are. The ocean's shoals tell us our history in the ebb and flow of the tides. The valleys and spaces between our villages are stories of our lineages that speak to how we relate. Our graves are relational zones with our ancestors.

How do we capture this complexity in a modern cartography whose audience is always external to the area and whose goal is abstraction? If, as Joel Wainwright and Joe Bryan suggest, "mapping indigenous lands involves locating indigenous peoples within . . . a grid of intelligibility" (2009, 155), we may have to ask what the value of a mapping exercise is. How might a work of cartographic abstraction reproduce unequal power relations by erasing complicated interests and historic sets of relations? To continue a line of questioning posed by Wainwright and Bryan (2009, 156), "what are the possibilities, and limits, of this particular effort to calculate the incalculable, to demarcate the indemarcatable"? Given this incommensurability of indigenous mapping and impossibility of capturing the



MAP 1.1 Sketch map of Pondoland. Courtesy of African Studies Map Collection as well as BC880 Godfrey and Monica Wilson Papers, UCT Libraries.

unmappable, in this project I settle for the recognition of the mental maps that villagers possess about their own land and histories.²⁵ This resonates with King's (2019) and Glissant's (1997) reminder that nonreducibility is a core part of black thought and black life. Mpondo mental maps honor black indigenous thought because they are constituted of actual knowledge that is uninterested in complete knowledge.²⁶

Colonial maps described the Eastern Cape territory as Kaffraria. This term can be loosely understood as the place of “kaffirs.” The word had wide and everyday usage in South African history and was used to mark particular groups as subhuman. The Mpondo people counted among those indexed as another variation of fauna. To recognize people and spaces that have long been misrecognized, I refer to the territory as Mpondoland or emaMpondweni.²⁷ This territory was one of the last independent areas to be annexed into South Africa. When the annexation occurred in 1894, it was with the condition that the land would remain under the control of the people of Mpondoland (Millar 1908). Lusikisiki is the place from which I think this project, but *Riotous Deathscapes* is about the entire territory of Mpondoland. Together with Mbizana, Flagstaff, and Ntabankulu, Lusikisiki is part of Eastern Mpondoland. To the west is the adjacent Western Mpondoland, made up of Libode, Ngqeleni, and Port St. Johns (Hendricks and Peires 2011). Eastern and Western Mpondoland are collectively known

as Mpondoland or emaMpondweni.²⁸ Map I.1 visually represents the spatial location of emaMpondweni. Inhabitants speak isiMpondo and practice customs particular to the region.

In Nguni languages, *pondo* means horn, or it suggests the head. *Mpondo* signifies the plural for horns. Cattle are prized in Nguni culture. George McCall Theal (1886) observed that horned cattle are the principal form of wealth among the Mpondo. But cattle are more than wealth. They are relational animals in significant practices like those of marriage and death. They hint at the rupture of the human and point to a malleability that denotes this form of blackness as simultaneously human, subhuman, and superhuman. Sylvia Tamale (2020, 87) observes that the “epistemic relationship between Indigenous people and nature manifests through their spirituality, clan totems, taboos, ancestral myths, rituals, fables.” To be Mpondo is figuratively to be the horns of an animal. The binaries and dualisms of anthropocentrism are exploded by indigenous epistemologies.

Present-day Mpondoland can be read through municipal data sources. According to Statistics South Africa (2020), the Ingquza Hill Local Municipality, made up of Flagstaff and Lusikisiki and bordering the Indian Ocean on the Wild Coast, has a population of approximately 300,000 inhabitants, with nearly 43 percent under the age of fifteen. Only 6 percent of the population is over the age of sixty-five. There are eighty-nine males for every hundred females. Women head 63 percent of the region's households. Approximately 70 percent of the population is unemployed; 2.4 percent of the population has completed school, and only 1.4 percent of the population has post-school education. One percent has access to piped water inside their dwelling. From single digits ten years prior, 85 percent of households now have electricity (Statistics South Africa 2020). The province receives the highest social welfare support as 40.3 percent of all grants are administered in the Eastern Cape (Statistics South Africa 2020). Whereas in the past Mpondoland was a labor reserve for the country's mines, with declining mining reserves, mechanization, and the emergence of more diverse labor sources, migrant labor—which offered more secure employment—has drastically declined. Xola A. Ngonini (2007) reports that 200,000 jobs were shed by the mining sector in the first decade of democracy.

I enter this location with questions that illuminate the contours and interests of this project. What happens when the social order changes or breaks down? Are there connections between the growth of the social welfare system in rural areas and the (im)possibilities of young women? To think about these questions, I hone in on Lusikisiki, my birthplace and home. Like

Zolani Ngwane (2003) writes about his Transkei village of Cancele by foregrounding the rural homes of migrants instead of the urban centers where they work, I too foreground the rural as the nub of analysis. A postapocalyptic backwater, this place was always a wasteland. It was treated as a reserve for excess bodies. To say something is a reserve is to identify it as off-center, as waiting, queer, and lacking in the essence of the center. A labor reserve is a place of surplus people where there is no work for sustaining life within a capitalist economy. I point to how the logics of segregation and apartheid created spaces of redundancy. In a way, those in urban areas could be both conscripted and abandoned by the capitalist labor economy, but those in the rural homelands were precluded from even entering into that contradictory possibility of racial capitalism.²⁹ By focusing on the rural, I pursue a different path from that taken by Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) and Xavier Livermon (2020), whose work focused on Johannesburg as the center of theorization. My insistence on figuring rural black precarity is to question modern African subjectivity that tends to assume the character of the urban. Instead, I point to what we lose when the city comes to overrepresent what being-black-in-the-world looks like.³⁰ Here, then, I seek to move sideways by shifting away from the givens about racial capitalism and changing the cartography while still engaging with the long and ongoing effects of colonial modernity and capitalism. I lean on black and indigenous studies to think about place. This locates black and indigenous studies as unsettled and fugitive epistemologies. *Riotous Deathscapes* is a way of returning to the remnants of the colonial apocalyptic explosion and working in the debris. As a mode of sitting with sorrow in the moments of quiet, it might also be understood as a way of living with awfulness.

Multitudinous Timescapes: Cylindrical Epiphenomenal Temporality

Placing Mpondo theory in time requires that we set aside modern temporality and coevalness with settler communities. In place of modern temporality, Mpondo theory demands a longer timescape that is intimately tied to the environment-person interface. Mpondo theory offers cylindrical epiphenomenal temporality. I am indebted to Yvette Abrahams (2000) for her concept of cylindrical time, and I work with Michelle Wright's (2015) formulation of epiphenomenal temporality. Briefly stated, these terms suggest a time that is always occurring in the present. The past, future,

and present coexist productively. This recalls indigenous temporalities as sketched by Simpson (2017). To accede to modern time is to accept colonial historization, which redraws the maps, parcels out the land to settler communities, removes people, and retells histories of discovery, founding, and conquest. It reduces black and indigenous groups to the defeated and inherently inferior. To accept colonial time is therefore to flatten complexity and accept myths of nation states. Mpondo theory fills out the nuance and problematizes modern temporality. It offers an alternative way of thinking of and assessing black and indigenous being-in-time while pushing against modern capitalist time (Simpson 2017). What does it mean to center black and indigenous time in thinking about marginal communities? What do we see when the point of reference is not colonial time? *Riotous Deathscapes* offers a temporal frame located in natural and ancestral worlds and the interplay of official histories and oral histories. It reads present events and lives in relation to timescales that defy colonial time. New insights for reading black and indigenous life are illuminated by stretching extant frames of reference. In this conception, temporality refuses stasis and latches on to the movement of social actors.

The risk for black studies, and indeed for black life, is that we can imagine black studies in the Global North diaspora as occupying a current timescale, while black life in Africa can be consigned as stuck in the past and as unworthy of scholarly interest. Johannes Fabian (2014) has critiqued the hidden assumptions of anthropology's study of the other as a denial of coevalness. He terms this *allochronism* to describe being out of tune with modern time. Keguro Macharia (2020, 571) meditates on African "belatedness" to intimate modernity and contends that the ground and place onto which he writes is "around sutures of difficult coevalness, seeking something that might be called freedom." To be an African writer, then, is to wrestle with a "difficult coevalness." The fallacy of peoples who lag behind perpetuates a colonial logic that may see black studies in the diaspora as theorizing while continental blackness may be viewed as constituting anthropological data and as incapable of theorization. Mpondo theory claims different timescapes that point to multiple temporal zones and challenge universal conceptions of time. To point to multiplicity is not to reinforce the fallacy of modern time set up against primitive temporality. Instead of binary time, we coexist within multitudinous timescapes.

When we figure marginal actors of history at the center, new vistas are made possible. *Riotous Deathscapes* maps a pathway for coming to new horizons of black life. Mpondo theory is born in relation to thinking with

indigenous scholars who insist on claiming timescapes that bend and push against colonial imposition of temporality. In placing temporality and the land at the center of theory and practice, I follow Glen Sean Coulthard, who challenges Marxian theorization for prioritizing labor and individual rights before land. Coulthard (2014, 13) contends that “Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms—and less around our emergent status as ‘rightless proletarians.’” Similarly, land as a system of reciprocal relations is seminal to Mpondo existence, struggles, and self-theorization. There are productive synergies between indigenous studies and black life if one considers blackness as expansive rather than closed.

Writing Mpondoland into the Epistemological Horizons of Black Studies

Since Mpondo theory is also a theory of blackness, it follows that this is an important category of analysis. I locate *Riotous Deathscapes* firmly in the tradition of black studies. I am attracted to thinking together with others who value black life by taking seriously Christina Sharpe’s provocation that doing the work of black studies in the wake of white supremacy requires us to “tend to, care for, comfort, and defend the dead, the dying, and those living lives consigned, in aftermath of legal chattel slavery, to death that is always imminent and immanent” (2014, 60). To this I add those who live with the residue of colonization, the scorched earth of apartheid, and debilitating neoliberalism. I am drawn to black studies that lean in, care for and tend to black precarity. There is a variety of black studies. One strand insists that we recognize the pleasure of black life and not flatten everything into undifferentiated suffering. And there is another that sees the witnessing of black suffering and death as an ethical imperative for black studies. I am not a proponent of being totally engulfed by despair. I arrive at this orientation because the coprotagonists of this text have taken me here. They live with devastation but they relish life. I am simultaneously invested in the hold and in what Sharpe conceives of as exceeding the hold (Terrefe and Sharpe 2016). After all, everywhere I see black suffering, I am

struck by laughter. Sometimes mocking and guttural, but also light, mirthful, and explosive. Is the explosion of laughter not the sound of freedom? To exceed the hold is to be attentive to other things beyond succumbing to death (King 2019). It is to imagine what else occurred at this site of death. It is also to recognize the inseparable relation among black pleasure, suffering, and beauty (Camp 2019). I am drawn to black studies scholars who are oriented toward tending and caring for blackness. I am attracted by their poetic cadence, their readiness to shift when blackness moves, and their commitment to a capacious blackness beyond North America.

This work is not written into a void. To think of black life from here is to embrace N. Chabani Manganyi's challenge first made in 1973 when he contended that the "most important contribution on the black experience will come from Africa" (2019, 1). Here, Manganyi was thinking about the repressive and codified conditions of apartheid. In some ways, he believed that, as a black majority country, South Africa was a modern laboratory for how black experience could be studied as it unfolded to overcome oppression. Steve Biko (2004) made a similar claim when he noted that South Africa had the possibility of showing the world a more human face. Victoria Collis-Buthlezi (2017, 14) makes a case for black studies in South Africa thus: "Moving forward need not require disowning blackness, rather it must entail reckoning with the phenomenology of blackness that renders us in a new epiphenomenal time that does not traffic in the past of black political exclusion, but contends with the present of a democratic dispensation and a cultural and economic order that continues to shape black experience as disparate and unequal."³¹ *Riotous Deathscapes* takes up this challenge by adopting a black studies with an epiphenomenal temporality that collapses time to make meaning of black people's ongoing present. However, while black studies in South Africa would necessarily have marked the particularities sketched by Manganyi and Biko, this book resists a parochial black studies that sees South Africa as exceptional. This is to suggest that African black studies from this location resonates with black life across sub-Saharan Africa. While I do not want this work to be parochially South African, I recognize that blackness is experienced differently across the continent.³² In addition, since South Africa has the largest white settler community in Africa, racialized experiences and consciousness are more sharply pronounced here than elsewhere on the continent. Indeed, Africans from elsewhere on the continent who have lived in South Africa observe that they became black in South Africa.³³

I do not portray amaMpondo as existing in prelapsarian space. Mpondoland is not untouched by history, modernity, incursions of world systems, and the other. Even in its seclusion, I show that its rugged coastline has not insulated it from shipwreck castaways. The abandonment of Mpondoland should be read within Elizabeth Povinelli's framework of *Economies of Abandonment* (2011). She argues that late liberalism is designed to defeat and distribute significance and abandonments in the service of hierarchies of value. She contends that "the nature of social events contribute to the ways that life and death, endurance and exhaustion, and hope and harm are distributed in late liberalism"—and we should be attentive to "how this distribution is made ethically and politically sensible and compelling" (132). Following this and David Harvey's (2018) conception of organized abandonment, it becomes normal and ethically defensible to coexist with blighted spaces whose existence is unremarkable and whose struggles are exhausting and chronic. As a former labor reserve, Mpondoland has been the supplier of labor to the country's mining centers over several generations. As a place of migrancy, Mpondoland may be naturally unspoiled, but it has not been insulated from the toxicity of neoliberalism. Movement and relations with multiple elsewhere mean that we do not escape racialization. As Pierre (2012) deftly illustrates, race is always present in the post-slavery and postcolonial world. It may not always announce itself like it does in the urban cityscapes of South Africa or in the contemporary United States. The global nature of white supremacy presents a total atmosphere that is present everywhere. I am interested in drawing out the contours of white supremacy and how the multiple manifestations of racecraft permeate and are made in the distant place of Mpondoland—a spacetime that is not hermetically sealed but that negotiates a complex autonomy. Both Mahmood Mamdani (2003) and Hannah Arendt (1975) demonstrated that South Africa was foundational to the making of race as a category in modern society through imperialism where the bureaucracy of the rule of law functioned through race. Tim Keegan's (1997) historiography of Cape Town has shown how the foundational moments of colonial settlement, enslavement, and racialization were simultaneously taking place in the Cape Colony as they were in the Americas. Here, the coequality of these locations is apparent. Similarly, by pointing to Cedric Robinson's (2000) notion of racial capitalism, Robin Kelley (2017) demonstrates how racialization has always coexisted with capital accumulation in the colonies, empire, and the New World. Robinson developed the term from its original explanation of

South Africa's apartheid economy as a means of "understanding the *general* history of modern capitalism" (Kelley 2017). Racial capitalism was therefore central to the establishment of modern South Africa. Consequently, it is impossible for Mpondoland to escape the effects of racialization.

In this project, I bring an African village into view of what black studies can look like when we think and theorize blackness from places structured by economies of abandonment. I am inspired by Hartman's (2008) quest to understand African American life and histories of slavery from both sides of the Atlantic. Knowledge about black life on the African continent is framed as African studies and postcolonial studies. Under this umbrella, everything goes. The utility of these frameworks is that they enable complexity. African studies addresses everything from health, welfare, political economy, food security, history, politics, sexuality, and the poetics of being African. However, African philosopher Paulin Hountondji (2009) has argued that the agenda of African studies has been determined by forces external to the continent. Nevertheless, postcolonial studies provides a verdant analysis of life after the demise of colonialism.³⁴ The generality evades capture and refuses the reduction of being African to race and racialization. But we lose something of the particularity of the black condition that informs our complex African identities. For me, what is lost is both our relation to diasporic blackness and the racialized particularity and varieties of black life on the continent. In this conception, being African should not transcend blackness. The two are not mutually exclusive and could productively be seen as both potentially making and unmaking each other. Black studies would be enriched by a careful engagement with African life. This is part of the project of *Riotous Deathscapes*. What does black studies, being-black-in-the-world, look like from an African village when read in relation to blackness in the diaspora?

Though attuned to various forms of invisibilization, this text is primarily about seeing, listening, and generally attending to each other.³⁵ To complain of invisibilization is to discount African interlocutors and readers and to valorize recognition of the Global North. To write black studies from Africa is therefore to recognize African scholars and readers while also being in dialogue with a global black studies tradition. Kopano Ratele (2019) charges Africans to prioritize looking from here by not seeing African lives through the lenses of scholars looking at us from out there. I take up this challenge of attending from here, but since I am invested in a global black studies and a way of being in relation to blackness everywhere, through *ukwakumkanya*, my orientation is grounded here but in relation to

the diaspora. Another way of saying this is to claim an investment in a black gaze—in the encounter of black thinking across space. Macharia (2016, 186) articulates this observation by signaling “the dissonant intimacies that emerge” as black people create shared ground. This commitment entails particular demands that include acknowledging that African writers exist and that those like N. Chabani Manganyi and Sylvia Tamale have, over time, theorized the black condition. It is also to acknowledge that this text is not written into a diasporic void because Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant, Hortense Spillers, and Saidiya Hartman exceed the contemporary moment of black studies. This lineage of black studies is fecund ground for this project for how, through the practice of *ukwakumkanya*, it helps me to grapple with global and grounded forms of antiblackness, black coevalness, the limits of the human for being-black-in-the-world, and the possibilities of boundless forms of blackness.

Looking Again through Indigenous Studies

Africans are simultaneously black and indigenous. Indigenous studies elsewhere in the world considers native peoples as distinct from settler communities and displaced peoples. My intervention is therefore to unteether indigeneity beyond its current theoretical imaginaries and to suture it with blackness. To think blackness from here is to take account of the complexity and dialogic relations of African lives. I draw on a rich body of work by indigenous theorists, including Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Billy-Ray Belcourt, Glen Coulthard, Michael Marker, and Vincente M. Diaz, in order to surface the temporal and violence defying indigenous wisdoms of indigenous people. To center wisdom is to make epistemic claims that foreground indigenous theorizations of temporality, myth, and cosmology. It is to breach colonial epistemes. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) example of placing Maori women at the heart of critiques of Western paradigms of knowledge is an important example for *Riotous Deathscapes*. In addition to genocidal hauntings, Gerald Vizenor (2010) insists that we recognize survivance as a core part of indigenous being. I read survivance alongside McKittrick's (2015) black livingness in order to suture indigenous and being-black-in-the-world. From Marker (2003, 362), I learn to assume an authoritative voice when he insists on pushing against the white anthropologist paradigm that disbelieves indigenous voices as “ramblings of the uncivilized mind.” Instead, I attend to how black indigenous people narrate in

ways that make sense to them. As one of them, I self-narrate in the double register of black indigenous storytelling that I entangle with scholarly discourse.³⁶ Billy-Ray Belcourt (2015) helps me to think about the placeness of indigenous truth claims and to relocate the decolonized animal in indigenous cosmologies.

I seek an ethical meeting place for black and indigenous studies. Theorist Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) is exemplary for this project's attempt toward bringing black studies into conversation with indigenous studies. She models a keenness to know more than just about one's own death—a drive to touch the grooves, entwining textures and seams of our collective dying and our multiplicity. Her approach coincides with my own theory-method of *ukwakumkanya*. She contends that to think of our common violences “requires a way of sensing that allows moving in and out of blurred and sharpened vision, acute and dulled senses of smell.” Using the idea of black shoals in the shallow end of the ocean, King offers a way of pausing, slowing down—shoaling in order to reconsider and interrupt Western critical epistemologies, and then to think of black studies in relation to indigenous or native studies. King describes the black shoals as “a site where Black studies connects land and water. It presents an analytical and geographical site where Black studies attempts to engage Native studies on ethical terms.” Thinking about the Northern Hemisphere, King suggests that slavery and indigenous genocide have no edges—they wash into each other. I refashion this to consider the meeting places of African colonialism and its indigenous genocide in relation to survivance in conditions of conquest in the Southern Hemisphere. I interrupt continental common sense by reconsidering relation.

To think about indigenous lives in Africa, I ask: if black people in Africa are simultaneously black and indigenous, how can we craft a black studies that takes both blackness and indigeneity seriously?³⁷ From this position, indigenous and black studies are potentially mutually coconstitutive. To separate these fields is to bifurcate identities of relation that are inseparable in this context. Even if we were to think of groups such as the Khoekhoe, San, and Bantu as different, they are people whose pasts, fates and ways of dying are intimately connected on Africa's black shoals. Historian T. J. Tallie (2019) points to how settler colonizers in the Natal colony of the 1850s sought to apply a logic of indigenous genocide that was being applied in other settler colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Tallie's intervention is handy for highlighting the coevalness of settler genocidal strategies for those marked as indigenous. To read the

black people of Africa as simultaneously indigenous and black is to parse out the ways in which they were targets of indigenous genocidal strategies going on elsewhere on the globe, and racist dispossession, segregation and slavery that fixed on black people. I however depart from Tallie by insisting on the blackness of indigenous African people. I have a third objective that is necessitated by the heterogenous and frontier character of the Eastern Cape as constituted by the San, Khoekhoe, the diverse majority Bantu inhabitants, and early white settlers. The necessity for more expansive forms of blackness and indigeneity is therefore particularly important.

By insisting on ways of attending that are rooted in place—*ukwakumkanya*—*Riotous Deathscapes* conceives of boundless forms of blackness and indigeneity in order to refuse colonial strictures. Creating a fissure between oppressed communities of Khoekhoe, San, and Bantu peoples is to enable a colonial incursion to dictate our ethic of care and witnessing in the present and the future. My understanding of this impossible demarcation is captured by Mohamed Adhikari's (2010, 22) assertion that the San, Khoekhoe, and Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists interacted with each other in "complex ways which ranged from coexistence, inter-marriage and social absorption, through clientship and provision of shamanic services such as rainmaking and healing, to armed conflict." Conceiving of black people as indigenous is to suggest that black studies and indigenous studies on the continent have to be necessarily different from those in the diaspora where black people are not indigenous. My project is less about claims to first-nation status and essential or pure identities. Instead, I am committed to bearing witness to how they weather this unhumaning and what emerges from it.

The tenacious and mournful hold that amaMpondo have on the land of their ancestors can be seen as a practice of Mpondo theory that recalls other ancestral losses. This requires us to see the Mpondo as not only a parochial people of the Eastern Cape but as a community in relation to black indigenous others who became incorporated into the community. Mpondo theory eschews notions of pure identities and embraces porosity. As a "minor" tribe ensconced between the culturally dominant amaZulu to the north and amaXhosa to the south, amaMpondo are not blinded by parochial ideas of grandeur that come from fetishized purity. They refuse to accede their birthright and they anchor themselves in an identity forged between various Bantu, indigenous, and castaway groups through the long history of this place.

Queerly Black

Modernity and its neoliberal offshoots produce queer Africans.³⁸ This is to say that as refractions of Man and as colonial subjects, marginal forms of blackness will always be waywardly deformed. As I have argued, to blur blackness and indigeneity is already a queer way to be black. In this text, queer means same-sex intimacy and relation, but it also exceeds this. A queer orientation is to be positioned improperly in relation to dominant social codes. It could be conceived of as a turning away from certain social relations and orienting oneself anew in ways that might disrupt these relations. For Sara Ahmed (2006), a queer orientation to the world represents a failure to be proper.³⁹ This conception provides a pathway for me to apply pressure on the ways in which black rural people fail at being proper. I am attentive to the promise of what emerges from these failures. To be queerly African is to move against coherence and singularities.⁴⁰ I take up Ahmed's provocation that we examine queer phenomenology. This is to say, I am attuned to how subjecthood is constituted relative to others. To be oriented away from singularities. T. J. Tallie (2019, 7) makes a similarly compelling case for queering colonial Natal by conceiving of native resistance—moving against colonial order—as queer. He contends: "The customs, practices, and potentially the very bodies of indigenous peoples can become queer despite remaining ostensibly heterosexual in their orientation and practice, as their very existence constantly undermines the desired order." Tallie's concept of *ukuphazama iNatali* is productive for helping us conceive of queerness as embracing multiplicity and exploring spaces beyond sexual orientation and the folds between binaries of resistance and normative orders.⁴¹ However, indigenous scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt (2016a) reminds us that queer same-sex-loving people can easily be exiled and forced into the negative space surrounding *real* indigenous or black people. For Belcourt, "These queernesses exist outside the traditional and the identitarian borders of indigeneity, ones that the past cannot make sense of because they emerge in the most unexpected places." Therefore, while I want queer to be capacious, I ground it to consider the differently queered so that queer Mpondo people become thinkable beings and do not remain as ghostly traces and aberrations of black indigeneity. This is to say that I want the deathscape to be the dreamscape of queer love too—to bring queerness into the fold of blackness.

Like this book is invested in a global black studies, it is committed to a black queer studies that is African but that resonates with blackness

everywhere. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2008, 212) conceives of a transnational black queer studies thus: "When black becomes only African American, black queer theory becomes insular; as the crosscurrents between Atlantic and Caribbean, Atlantic and Mediterranean, Atlantic and Indian Ocean are richest in marine life, so they will be richest in depth of theorizing." It is the crossings, inbetweenity, and relationality that *Riotous Deathscapes* is most attentive to. I am attracted to queer as resistance and indifference to normative orders that seek to colonize and control. It is praxis as committed and informed action. For Tinsley, queer is a disruption of violence and it insists on loving that which is supposed to be loathed by "forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths" (199). To insist on love and relation even in the face of death is a queer act that brings blackness into view in new ways.⁴² In the practice of *ukwakumkanya*, to be queerly black is to look away from impending death and to embrace feeling.

Learning from Musangi (2018), I think with my coprotagonists and fold our boundless identities into one another in ways that expand and complicate how we are figured.⁴³ My more capacious use of queer takes its inspiration from Keguro Macharia's (2019) injunction that black queer studies in Africa attends more obliquely and tunes into traces, touchings, and openings. Significantly, my approach is informed by misgivings about the costs of tethering Mpondo theory too tightly to conventional queer framings. I seek to carefully delineate the queerness of Mpondo theory, to ensure its audibility and legibility on its terms, not on overdetermined terms of current debates in queer studies. The particularity with which *Riotous Deathscapes* relates to black queer studies nourishes both Mpondo theory and black queer studies. I suggest that an overdetermined use of queer as legible forms of sexual categories would impoverish Mpondo theory without expanding black queer theory and instead merely confirming its current parameters.

Debilitation in Mpondoland

The histories of colonization, enslavement, and genocide mean that there are spaces where race has determined the course of life, and many of us consequently live deeply racialized lives. Scholars of intersectionality have however cautioned that race never operates alone and that to invisibilize other identity categories is to misrecognize the constitutive nature of

being and the complexity with which we live. As in the preceding queering of Mpondo life, I see the critical disability lens as part of the critical race feminist theory that underpins the analysis of the protagonists' narratives and histories that I tell. However, following Jasbir Puar (2017), I read disability as braided with debilitation within a geopolitical zone of slow death that marks particular bodies for rapid wearing down within registers that include and exceed legible disabilities. This expansive recasting of disability signifies its ongoingness in registers "not prone to capture by a consciousness organized by archives of memorable impact" (Puar 2017, 11). Here, disability should not be seen as a nuance or magnifier of race, class, gender, or sexuality. Rather, it is constitutive of the totality of the experience of being and nonbeing of the black subject whose stories occupy these pages. In this respect, I heed the caution advanced by Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear (2010, 128) when they say that disability should not fall foul of the analytic tactic of scholars who "through their unconscious non-analysis of disability as it intersects with race, class, and gender oppression" evacuate the constitutive role of disability. Instead, I adopt an intercategorical approach that sees identity categories not as additive but as socially and historically constituted.⁴⁴ I attempt to think of identity categories cognizant of Anjali Arondekar's (2005) caution that we should not import North American-centric ideas of identity when thinking about lives lived beyond the United States. In this regard, sexuality, disability, and other markers of difference should not always be measured against race as a stable register of oppression. In her words, "Buried, in such 'linkages,' is the very mathematical paradox of parallelism that forecloses any true intersection, even as it invites lines of common origin and travel" (240). To think of race, sexuality, gender, and debilitation as contextually and historically situated is to give primacy to place as a practice of *ukwakumkanya*, without closing off the possibilities of movement and connections between geopolitical locales. A pressure point for my analysis is to understand what it means to be constituted of multiplicity. Are the multiplicities represented by dosages of melanin, in one's gender and the fluid configurations of sexuality, in the capacity to feel pleasure as exquisitely as pain, in the limitations imposed by disability and debilitating contexts, in the freedom of the unending hills and the body compelled to dance like it has only ever known love? There is something simultaneously dangerous and buoyant in this capacity for expansiveness. It means that we absorb a lot of the world's cruelty. The effects of brutality and inequality scar our bodies and are debilitating. But our joy is expansive precisely because our

multiplicity presents infinite possibilities for pleasure and the malleability of queerness that comes from being at odds with the world's norms.

Black Deathscapes

This introductory chapter is an attempt to trace what I have called deathscapes. Since death is ubiquitous *emaMpondweni* and we bury most our dead in unmarked graves within the parameter of the homestead, I imagine that the unruly landscape is littered with the dead. Elizabeth Teather (2001, 185) defines deathscapes as “the material expression in the landscape of practices relating to death.”⁴⁵ My orientation to deathscapes is most aligned to Terence Heng (2018) as I am interested in absent presence—how the dead hover among us in the landscape, in our psyches and rituals. To attend to the dead, I lean on *ukwakumkanya* as method—to attend to matter across life forms and worlds. This enables us to hear ancestors, enter spirit worlds, and commune with animal life. Conceptually and methodologically, *ukwakumkanya* is an openness to be moved by the vibrational charge from the grave. It is central to reading the deathscape.

In chapter 4, I stand on a hill high above my home village and take stock of the dead. Many of them were young and died during the AIDS-dying epoch.⁴⁶ But many others died of treatable illnesses in a place where the state is an absentee landlord. In this rogue place where the underresourced hospital dispenses paracetamol for trauma, AIDS, headaches, and cancer, we die easily and endlessly. We are laid in the land that bears the bones of our ancestors. Our spirits hover, our ghosts haunt relentlessly. There are more ancestors than there are people alive. Here death has found a home. We have acclimated to living among the dead. In naming this text *Riotous Deathscapes*, I practice *ukwakumkanya* by pausing on the conceptual scale of the deathscape. A number of questions fill this pause. What does a deathscape look like? What is evoked? What do deathscapes say about the dead and the living? What does it mean to live on a deathscape? What does McKittrick's (2016) black livingness look like when thought of from this conceptual plane? What crosscurrents exist between the dead and the living? What does the gravesite offer as a theoretical site of being? What does the deathscape convey to us about those living among the remains of the dead? If keening from a place of fungibility is a form of sociality at the graveside, what can we learn from black screams? In applying pressure on conceptual deathscapes, my intervention is to see them as tethered to land

and psyche and therefore as present wherever black life is. I see deathscapes as the cartography of the earth but also as levitating spaces in our psyches. As unbounded capsules of memory that we carry with us. I am seized with bringing various concepts that drive this text into a collision with deathscapes and then observing what emerges. To pair deathscapes with riots is to point to the leap in the breach. Throughout this introductory chapter, I have accounted for the ways in which black life remains buoyant even as we die. This commitment to the countless ways in which we die and live is the driving impulse of *Riotous Deathscapes*. My conception of riotous is based on Fanon and Coulthard's insistence on self-affirmation as a prerequisite for enacting freedom.⁴⁷ In places that the state has turned away from, self-affirmative cultural practices keep the possibility of freedom alive.

Audience and Aesthetics

Riotous Deathscapes has two publics. The first is less likely to read the book in the short term. However, like slave narratives were not immediately legible to enslaved people, their grandchildren valued them generations later. For me, this public is constituted by the rural protagonists of the book and marginalized people elsewhere. At the level of the register, the book is in conversation with them through its cadence, rhythm, and poetics. The register is a way of thinking at the edge of theory and lyric. It is a language. This project invites the reader to experience and read the text through the lens of *ukwakumkanya*. For this reason, it may not be entirely legible to the second public, which is potentially constituted by a global scholarly readership. I am in conversation with this second public through my citational frames and linguistic register. Both publics are important to this text. To value them both demands a practice and ethic of partial legibility invested in Glissant's concept of opacity and obscurity. To be a native informer who overtranslates for my scholarly audience is to lose my rural community as a future audience. It is to repeatedly eject those who want to see themselves in history. To write exclusively in the metaphors and tenor of my community risks missing my scholarly audience. I live in both worlds and this text is a meeting place for these worlds. As African scholars, the politics of addressivity in the context of epistemic gatekeeping means that we are not often given the space to address our complex worlds. This text attempts to carve a place of congregation for worlds we know too well but are unable to inhabit fully within the academy. By centering Mpondo theory, I am

foregrounding the rural protagonists through a scholarly register that does not lose the soul of the village. Mpondo theory and its method and form of *ukwakumkanya* therefore enable me to assemble a theoretical performance in a double register that will hopefully have both sides of the floor nodding in moments of recognition or incredulity.

The writing cadence follows the register of isiMpondo as a language and way of life. The very poetry of the language is its ability to evade capture through its refusal of standardization into the written form. I read the language as an insistence on beauty in spite of hardship and pain. Here poetics can be understood in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's (2013) conception of the politics of the undercommons. It is a way of exceeding the hold and a practice of black livingness through opacity. Poetics is akin to *ukwakumkanya* as a way of knowing that shifts between looking, listening, and feeling askance, blocking out, facing away. An insistence on black interiority through the embrace of multiple registers. Lewis R. Gordon (2015, 73–74) has observed a similar commitment to the poetic in Caribbean scholarship. He notes that “this kind of writing challenges purities in theory and practice as different, even opposing, elements of writing are brought together for the sake of reality.”⁴⁸ This method of exploding distinctions was a Fanonian feature of writing when he sought to negotiate the space between the historical and the poetic. Life is lived in these spaces of relation rather than in disciplinary corners. The drama of life and history cannot be captured by a singular way of attending. This project is attentive to complexity rather than clarity and arrival—a *chaos-monde*, if you will.⁴⁹ The frequent questions signal this inability and refusal to arrive. The de-formative practice and nonlinear sociality of the subject work in tandem to produce a black studies from here.

The envisioned audience of this text is best told through a brief account of Mpondo music and the language itself. Here, I move away from the mostly visual plane and illustrate a more aural dimension of *ukwakumkanya* as an audible archive only accessible through listening askance. Mpondo music and the style of singing are simultaneously beautiful and disruptive. Its call and response is common to a universal blackness and other black musics. However, its multiple interjections signal subaltern capacities that work against transparency. These occur through voice, whistle, claps, and use of hands to ventriloquize voice. Sazi Dlamini (2010) terms this Mpondo vocal polyphony and harmony to signal the multiple simultaneous and independent melodies a single musical piece can have.⁵⁰ The music signals an openness and hybridity that combines multiple styles and histories. A

key feature of this music is *ukugwaba*, which is a strategy of closing down, muffling, creating reverberations, collapsing into tonal sounds, hums that cut off words, and partially uttered phrases that all appeal to the sensorial and surrender to the nonverbal. The music entails losing oneself to the chorus and folding into the group. *Ukugwaba* begins with some structure and responsorial legible to the “colonial” ear, but it soon collapses into tonal sounds characterized by shifts between tonic tonality to counter-tonic tonality and a buildup of tonal masses that go to pieces.⁵¹ This is partly achieved through a vocal technique of prolonging the tone with closed lips. Similarly, as a practice of *ukwakumkanya*, isiMpondo is an unruly language that evades writing and produces new grammars and idioms of living in relation. Mpondo children do not read books written in their language. They are taught isiXhosa. There is something tragic in not being taught to read and write one’s own language. In the move to create legible postapartheid identities, people have been truncated into larger, more legible groupings and languages. Alongside the official languages are languages and people that occupy unofficial registers.⁵² Nondominant groups fall into the fissures. However, the beauty of not pinning down a language means that it remains unruly and unresponsive to discipline and demands of transparency. It grows and is open to influence from other languages. IsiMpondo is not self-satisfied, and connection is more important than the perfection that Glissant describes as a poetics of language-in-itself. It is nonterritorial and evades perfection and capture. Like the music, the language thrives in marginality and the grammars of multiplicities, opacity, and going to pieces.

If Mpondo music and language are invested in the multiple legibilities of *ukwakumkanya*, to describe them requires a strategy akin to the music itself. To show and conceal. Those inside the Mpondo culture recognize the secret and nuance, and those beyond the culture are engulfed in the collapse and tonal maze. Those outside of the culture are part of the sound and are affected by the atmosphere but unable to determine the terms of the singing. *Riotous Deathscapes* adopts an approach similar to Mpondo music. The audience of the text works together with the multiplicity evoked by Mpondo music. I conceive of this audience as my Mpondo interlocutors and those interested in a form of African black studies in conversation with diasporic black and indigenous studies. I am not invested in translation. In this regard, Mpondo theory is queer in relation to the nation state and its global relationality. But notwithstanding these investments in opacity, fear of legibility should not render one mute. To follow the

example of the Mpondo technique of *ukugwaba*, one can speak in multiple registers to communicate what is necessary to maintain relation. There is an urgency for this accounting of the ontology of black suffering—of how different life forms exist in a world that has only ever written them out and mistranslated. Mpondo theory unmasks this violence but also tells a story of black survivance and livingness that works against obliteration.

An Itinerary of Riotous Deathscapes

Riotous Deathscapes is both a set of thematically related essays and an argument that builds progressively across the chapters. While the chapters can be read alone, a fuller understanding of events and concepts is elaborated as the chapters unfurl. The chapters are organized in ways that are attentive to the chronological occurrence of the historical events that the text engages. While each chapter explicates an aspect of Mpondo theory, there are overlaps as the theory is enfolded and difficult to parse out into discreet parts. For example, the body cannot be read apart from the spirit, and the hill cannot be neatly parsed out from the river valley from which it arises. Each chapter plays with temporality by moving between time-scapes which I term cylindrical epiphenomenal temporality.⁵³ In addition, each chapter is centered on a wayward ancestral figure and contemporary protagonists. These ancestral figures are cotheorists rather than illustrations. They include Nongqawuse in chapter 1, Nontetha Nkwenkwe in chapter 2, Clara Germana Cele in chapter 3, Sarah Baartman in chapter 4, and Khotso Sethuntsa in chapter 5. With the navigational tool of *ukwakumkanya*, the chapters are organized as follows.

In chapter 1, we explore Mpondoland as a place of crosscurrents between Mpondo people, living in relation to Khoekhoe and San people, and European and enslaved African and Asian shipwreck castaways. At stake here is how indigenous theorization illuminates errantry and freedom dreams across time. Our driving concern is what this confluence and assembling of people teaches us about ancestral relationality. This chapter explicates Mpondo theory by focusing on the tumultuous ocean. It shows how the ocean rubs against the landmass of Mpondoland and how it forces us to grapple with centuries of intimacy between those who arrived by ship and those they found on the seashore. The ocean is examined as a source of conflict, the site of arrival of otherness through shipwrecked castaways, a place of renewal, and for how it produces the possibilities of identities that unsettle

hierarchies of being. Here, we explore extant identity making and resurgent views of race purity and racialization. This chapter thinks through a series of questions that are important for interrogating truths that might be more complex than dominant narratives would have us believe. It addresses the following questions: How do I, and my family, figure in the narrative of Mpondoland and what might autoethnography reveal about the longtime production of black subjectivities? What are the traces of the arrival of the Europeans and enslaved Asians and Africans in cylindrical epiphenomenal temporality? What explains the life of the traces long after the colonizer has departed? What are the problematics of not following the winding spoor through the dark tunnel of time? The text contends that we have fractured identities whose cartilage—the rationality that forms us—is worn and fragile. When the rain, sun, and wind—the weather—erases the footprints of conquest, is it possible to piece together a path that might join the dots in the present and future? What is the meaning of time for making sense of devastation? Nongqawuse anchors this chapter as a riotous ancestral figure who collaborated with the ocean to change the course of history. Reckoning with the ancestral is central to the oceanic forces that enable arrivals and departures in shaping Mpondoland and the people of this place. Life and identity occur at the confluence of these forces which give us the tools to think of ways of refiguring black being.

In chapter 2, we are grounded in the rivers of Mpondoland, which connect personhood and the longtime of history. Here we come to understand what it means to be unhumaned but also to be reborn in waters that operate on a queer frequency. We look to the history of Mpondoland to see how people there have always resisted abjection and asserted their being in the face of capitalist imperialist discipline. The chapter dwells on the incessant onslaught against Mpondo bodies and indigenous ways of life. Here, history is my alibi. I begin this history with the sinking of the *ss Mendi*. But the history I lean on is a lived-in history that is given form by the elders I talk to—my coprotagonists. They go back to the revolt on Ngquza Hill and caress it like an old scar.⁵⁴ They tell its story to mark an old history of their animalization but also to recall their valor and resistance. I connect Ngquza Hill to other hills that bore witness to black death and resistance. At the base of the hill is the river. At the end of the river is the sea. These are places of healing and fortification where death and trauma are cleansed. Chapter 2 presents an argument that cleansing ceremonies at the river are deeply embodied rituals that are primarily concerned with redeeming bodies that have been marked as deviant by trauma. Fortification

crafts a space between livability and the fungible. In this chapter, I build the case for queering Mpondoland as an analytic that opens up routes to black freedom. The chapter takes up the question of how we might re-cast history to trace queer socialities of refusal. I argue that the history of amaMpondo refusal makes possible the resistance that amounted to the Marikana massacre and other movements such as that against titanium mining and “development” in Mgungundlovu, Mpondoland.⁵⁵ But there are prior lineages from which we draw. Prophetess Nontetha Nkwenkwe shows that the bombarded always resist, even after they die. They do this globally through queer gathering in mass assembly. Even as it gestures to the mourning that engulfs this place, this chapter resists any notions that the people of Mpondoland are passive or pathological.

In chapter 3, we move into the present and more recent past and find adolescents reaching for the supernatural to assert black queer buoyancy and refusal in a school system predicated on capitalist discipline, anxiety, and mournful community surveillance. This chapter lingers on the queer pre-occupations of this text. As people at the bottom of the hierarchy of the un-humaned, through spirit possession or *ukukhuphuka izizwe*, young women defy societal and market control by finding shelter in multiple worlds and temporalities. I offer *ukukhuphuka izizwe* as a queer formation that enables opacity and errantry under pressure. Clara Germana Cele’s *ukukhuphuka izizwe* in the early 1900s points to historical antecedents of liberatory leaps through the breach as queer refusal. Here, motifs of the river and ocean illustrate Mpondo theory through the centrality of these sites for spiritual corruption, cleansing, and renewal. This chapter demonstrates how capitalist desires and consumption play out in the wasteland and hinterlands of the neoliberal market. Dissociative symptoms are read as worlding practices that push against black queer enclosure.

In chapter 4, we deal directly with the graves of the dead, engaging with ancestors and their presence in the landscapes of what were or are enclosures and sites of genocidal hauntings. As a death-defying ancestral being, Sarah Baartman grounds this chapter. Here, an unflinching gaze is cast on the deathscapes of Mpondoland’s black enclosures. In order to understand the devastation wrought by the AIDS pandemic and debilitation—the slow wearing down of bodies—on the rural landscape, I lean on *ukwakumkanya*’s sensorial registers to attend to the vibrational frequencies that emit from the deathscape. This chapter pauses on the graves of the dead in order to both demonstrate the reality of our multiple dyings at the other end of neoliberalism, and to illustrate how dying is coopted by Mpondo theory. The

chapter theorizes through refusal and indigenous wisdom in order to think of ancestors as formations that defy death.

The supernatural as technology for rural life is the focus of chapter 5. From the vantage point of the hill, we look at vampirism, cannibalism, and the occult as forms of consumption for those who are excluded from the processes of capital accumulation. As grasps for freedom, we conceive of these practices as queering and parodying consumption. In a way, cannibalism and the frustrations that flow from here have some of their roots in the AIDS genocide and colonial violence. The chapter is concerned with how the material remains of the body, both dead and dying, are a means of making meaning of how we live in a global world where the consequences of inequality are most pronounced among abandoned rural subjects. I illustrate that stories of gravedigging medicine men, cannibals, and vampires are imaginative moral frameworks for making meaning of inequality that is always present in migration, development, markets, and consumption. But I also illuminate how these systems of modernity come loose at the seams and fail. By centering Khotso Sethuntsa, I suggest that black subjectivities are made through a long self-referential and refracting history. I return to Ngquza Hill, introduced in chapter 2, and demonstrate how this relates to cannibal and vampire activities that flare and proliferate in the rural countryside. Ultimately, the chapter mounts an argument that black survivance and livingness are tied to famished and queer registers of desire and occult practices.

Introduction

- 1 Nguni people primarily lived in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga provinces. While they previously lived as diverse clans and did not share an overarching identity, some kings attempted to consolidate their power and influence by creating homogeneity across their subjects. Though the Mpondo share commonalities with the broader Xhosa group and the Zulu people, they have distinct chieftaincies, overlapping cultures, and language. For more on Mpondo people, see Timothy J. Stapleton (2006) and Abner Nyanende (1996).
- 2 For more on *ihahamuka*, see Athanase Hagengimana and Devon E. Hinton (2009). While my mother has not lived through violence as extreme as that of the Rwandan genocide, she has experienced repeated violence over many years.
- 3 Although the term *kaffir* was initially reserved for people living between the Cape and Natal, in what is modern-day Eastern Cape, it was used to describe black South Africans in both colonial and apartheid South Africa (Theal 1886). All references to the term are in scare quotes. I however insist on its use in recognition of its continued salience. I see it as an apt representation of the sedimented trauma of black people and Mpondo people in particular. Historically, the name was so entrenched in the making of blackness that it appeared in the titles of several books. See, for example, Theal (1886), *Kaffir Folk-Lore*; Drayson (1858), *Sporting Scenes*; Angas (1974), *The Kafirs Illustrated*; and Mathabane (1986), *Kaffir Boy*. Gabeba Baderoon (2004a) has written an important paper titled “The Provenance of the Term ‘Kafir’ in South Africa and the Notion of Beginning.”
- 4 I find synergies with Cornel West’s conception of niggerization in the US context. In a 2007 article in the *Atlantic*, he observed: “Niggerization is neither simply the dishonoring and devaluing of black people nor solely the economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement of them. It is also the wholesale attempt to impede democratization—to turn potential citizens into intimidated, fearful, and helpless subjects” (West 2007).
- 5 Failure indexes refusal and resistance.

- 6 Here, I refer to *Man* to signal Sylvia Wynter's (2001) critique of the
universal representation of the human as masculine, Western, and
white—monohuman.
- 7 I alternate between Mpondoland and emaMpondweni. I similarly use
both descriptors of Mpondo people and amaMpondo.
- 8 For more on indigenous inscriptive practices, see Rumsey (1994).
- 9 I note Gayatri Spivak's (1999) contentions on the native informant. One
who writes from a position of alterity is always caught in a foreclosing
double bind—damned if they do, damned if they don't.
- 10 This is not a widely used word, and its meaning is slippery and unsettled.
Like isiMpondo, *ukwakumkanya* is unwritten and exists as a colloquial
word among older villagers.
- 11 Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) uses the concept of black shoals to think of black
and indigenous studies together. She imagines the shallow part of the water
in the shore as the meeting place of land and water for theorizing black
studies and staging an ethical engagement with native studies.
- 12 In this respect, I am in conversation with Deborah A. Thomas (2019),
whose work on Jamaica theorizes from inside in order to claim sover-
eignty, witnessing, and repair in the wake of colonialism and in this epoch
of neoliberal exploitation and state violence.
- 13 Jill Bradbury (2019) productively theorizes narrative timescapes and how
they work with history.
- 14 I expand on King's (2019) conception of black shoals in the discussion on
indigenous studies.
- 15 By dyings, I signal the deathbound position of black life in contexts where
dying is overrepresented and a constant feature and preoccupation of the
living.
- 16 This as an attribute that resonates with indigenous values of honoring the
natural world as sacred and as essential for living.
- 17 For more on this, see Mignolo (2009).
- 18 I follow Hartman's (2019) intervention when she endows the enslaved and
wayward woman with a critical voice with authorial gravity.
- 19 For more on this African philosophy, see Nonceba Nolundi Mabovula
(2011) and Julius Gathogo (2008).
- 20 Unlike the extractive tradition of anthropology, this work sees local villa-
gers as theorists and as coprotagonists. The village is a crucial place from
which to think.
- 21 Katherine McKittrick (2006) has usefully framed blackness beyond viola-
tion with the question, "What else happened?"
- 22 For an excellent critical engagement with the limits and possibilities of
posthumanism and animalism, see Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2013).
- 23 Alexander Weheliye (2014) provides a useful analysis of the genres of the
human.

24 Indigenous mapping seeks to render legible community rights, resource uses, sacred places, and other important spatial features to outside entities (Caballero Arias 2007; Mansutti Rodríguez 2006; Offen 2003; Sletto 2009). Indigenous mapping has the potential for an alternative means of storytelling and place-making, a radical change in the ways landscapes and places are documented, represented, and vested with meaning. For thinking from low spaces, see Charne Lavery's (2020) sea-level theorization.

While countermapping enables a defense of local territory, it is caught in the politics of legibility, which are counterintuitive to indigenous space making. For more on countermapping, see Bjørn Sletto (2012).

25 Dionne Brand (2012) has evocatively drawn the limits of mapping and the failures of grafting belonging onto maps.

26 However, as I watch the standoff between the state in partnership with mining corporations and the villagers of Mgungundlovu, I can see the value of an indigenous map that would visually claim the land earmarked for development. Joel Wainwright and Joe Bryan (2009) have termed this the cartographic-legal strategy. This contestation between villagers and the state is explicated in chapter two.

27 To name the territory of interest Mpondoland is to return to nativism, which might be read as making essential claims to land on the basis of ethnic origins. However, not to do so falls foul of purportedly neutral naming such as the now defunct Transkei or the current designator, Eastern Cape. The Kei River after which the Transkei territory was named is quite a distance from Mpondoland and in some ways discounts the specificities (and rivers) of the place. The Eastern Cape on the other hand is a return to the colonial name that reads the land from the Cape whose center is Cape Town. Both the Eastern Cape and Transkei might therefore be considered as misrecognitions of people and place.

28 The Mpondo people, like the Xhosa, Thembu, Mpondomise, Mfengu, Phuthi, Ntlangwini, Qwathi, Xesibe, Hlubi, Bhaca, and Bomvana people of the Eastern Cape, have occupied this part of the continent long before 1700.¹ Oral sources and shipwreck records attest to this existence (Hendricks and Peires 2011). Theal (1886) observed that the first white explorers found four major chieftaincies, the AmaMpondomise, the AmaMpondo, the AbaThembu, and the AmaXhosa, occupying the land between the Cape and Natal in 1688. Even as I side-eye colonial records, Theal suggests that the land has a long association with the people who currently reside on it.

29 The apartheid Bantustan system created ethnicized homelands for the different major ethnic groups of South Africa. These segregated homeland spaces were seen as surplus to South Africa. For more on this system, see William Beinart (2012).

30 Achille Mbembé and Sarah Nuttall's (2004) "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" is a seminal example of this. An earlier (1973) version

- of this location of blackness in the city is N. Chabani Manganyi's *Being-Black-in-the-World*, republished in 2019.
- 31 Counterpoised to Collis-Buthelezi are works that argue against race in South Africa. These include Zimitri Erasmus (2017) and Njabulo Ndebele (2016).
- 32 For examples of work in South Africa and beyond, see African contributors such as N. Chabani Manganyi (2019), Keguro Macharia (2019), Gabea Baderoon (2014), Yvette Abrahams (2000), Bhekizizwe Peterson (2000), Harry Garuba (2003), Neo Musangi (2018), Grace A. Musila (2020), and Sylvia Tamale (2020), among others.
- 33 See, for example, Grace A. Musila (2019) and Amanuel Isak Tewolde (2019).
- 34 Frantz Fanon (1967) has argued that instead of postcolonialism, neocolonialism more accurately follows colonialism.
- 35 My invocation of Mpondo music, later in this introduction, is to highlight the aural means through which we attend, witness, respond, and remain in step with each other.
- 36 Indigenous storytelling and scholarly discourse are both forms of knowledge. The former is nurtured intergenerationally and taught by elders and indigenous cosmologies, while the latter is taught within formal institutions like universities.
- 37 In posing this question, I engage the works of Mohamed Adhikari (2010), Yvette Abrahams (2000), Jauquelyne Kosgei (2021), Naomi Kipuri (2017), and Riswan Laher and Korir Sing'Oei (2014).
- 38 Kerugo Macharia (2020) has argued that it is not politically and conceptually useful to say that Africans are always queer because this framing does not address endemic nationalist homophobia and structural misogyny in Africa. Billy-Ray Belcourt (2016a) has similarly described indigenous reserves as queerphobic. While I find resonance in Macharia's and Belcourt's contentions, a return to earlier meanings of queer enables us to repurpose the concept to engage our supposed oddness and the ways in which we are always negated and primitivized. It is also to recognize the possibilities enabled by being queerly positioned.
- 39 Similarly, Macharia's (2020) evocation of African belatedness to critique the ways in which Africans are indexed as delayed, not "yet" ready, or primitive is a commentary on African failure to be proper.
- 40 Xavier Livermon (2020) takes up urban queer making in Johannesburg by centering cultural labor for queer visibility. I gesture to something different in the rural context—a freedom to live freely in all its possibilities even if it means being unmoored from the nation and aspirations of modernity. Here, queering does not center legibility.
- 41 T. J. Tallie signals the double possibilities of queer by considering how practices can be simultaneously normative and queer. Through *ukuphazama iNatali*, Tallie disturbs and queers colonial historiography.

- 42 To extend Paul Gilroy's (1993) observation that sex is another means of
talking about race, I add that queer is a language of race.
- 43 Musangi (2018) provides a seminal lesson on the intellectual contribution
of black women who live in community beyond kinship, thus embodying
black theory and a logic of care.
- 44 In Nira Yuval-Davis's (2006) formulation, our multiple identities are con-
stitutive of the experience of life.
- 45 For Alistair Hunter (2015), deathscapes can encompass durable markings
of the landscape (e.g., cemeteries) as well as more ephemeral manifesta-
tions and artifacts such as the scattering of ashes.
- 46 The dying epoch was Hilton Als's (2019) formulation to make sense of
queer death from AIDS in 1980s United States.
- 47 Coulthard (2014, 24) terms this a resurgent politics of recognition that is
"premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural
practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of
settler-colonial power."
- 48 Walcott (2015) similarly observed that Caribbean writing insists on ex-
ploding distinctions between the creative and theoretical.
- 49 Édouard Glissant (1997) has defined this as the energy of preserving poet-
ics and the refutation of order and established norms. Even though it has
a hidden logic, this order does not presuppose hierarchies of all forms,
including languages or peoples.
- 50 Referring to *Pondo Blues* by Eric Nomvete, performed in 1962, Dlamini
(2010, 169) writes that the song had a triple consciousness: "The horns,
like human voices, intoned wordlessly a well-known melody of symbolic
performance significance, to the accompaniment of traditional drum
rhythms and piano reconstruction of the voices of the absent choir."
- 51 For a comprehensive account of *ukugwaba*, see Deirdre Hansen (1981),
whose work I think with here.
- 52 Among unofficial languages are isiMpondo, isiBhaca, and languages
that fall between the cracks of seSotho and seTswana. Descendants of
enslaved people such as those of Malaysian and Indonesian descent are
truncated into the "coloured" category in ways that obscure their histories
and complex identifications. Zimitri Erasmus (2001) uncovers some of
this complexity.
- 53 See Yvette Abrahams (2000) for an explication of cylindrical time and
Michelle Wright (2015) for more on epiphenomenal temporality. I work
with these terms throughout the text.
- 54 Ngquza Hill marks the highpoint of the Mpondo revolt, an occurrence that
is central to this text.
- 55 For more on this massacre, see Peter Alexander et al. (2012) and Greg Ma-
rinovich (2016). On mining on Amadiba land and resistance, see Andrew
Bennie (2011).