Culture and Environment in Africa Series 7

Elsemi Olwage

"Growing together": the politics of knowing and creating an urban commons in Cape Town, South Africa

Edited by the Cologne
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Preface

This thesis is about the role of nature conservation – both as a historically-constituted discourse and a multifaceted practice - in the making and contestation of the urban commons within the setting of post-apartheid Cape Town. It is based on four months of ethnographic research at a small state-owned conservancy within the Cape Flats area of the metropolis. During the period of research, this conservancy was managed according to the recently institutionalized biodiversity discourse. As a starting point and theoretical focus, the author addresses the dynamic and complex relationship between knowledge and practice. In doing so, she foregrounds, on the one hand, some of the epistemological and spatial legacies of colonialism and apartheid embedded within contemporary urban nature conservation practices, whilst simultaneously sketching the importance of local actors – both human and nonhuman – in the continual remaking of these legacies through situated practices. Drawing on detailed narratives and brief ethnographic depictions, the author argues that despite the authoritative voice of the scientific discourse within globally circulating representations of valued natures, processes of local translation bring to fore competing and diverse valuations. In some instances, these valuations offer a radical critique of the assumed divide between "natural" and "social" worlds and histories - a divide inherent in dominant nature conservation discourses – reclaiming urban nature conservation practices as harbouring political and ethical transformative potential, both in terms of peoples' capacity as well as their relation to places, to others and to themselves.

This thesis is a minor dissertation and forms part of the set requirements for the completion of a Masters degree in Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town. The Department of Social Anthropology, its' staff and fellow students created an enabling postgraduate space that allowed for creative and interdisciplinary theorizing. Lesley Green's postgraduate course in environmental anthropology was instrumental in introducing students to the field, whilst the authors' involvement during her Honours year with the Archive and Public Culture initiative, headed by Carolyn Hamilton, worked to sensitize her to questions of memory, history and inheritance. Andrew "Mugsy" Spiegel, as the supervisor of this thesis, was key in the development and careful refinement of the text and its' content. His wealth of knowledge with regards to core voices within the anthropological canon and his long-term engagement with the discourse and practice of Development guided its' writing throughout. Furthermore, during the period of the author's research there also emerged a broader interdisciplinary concern at UCT in what is termed environmental humanities. Several seminars and talks on this theme inspired much of the ways in which this thesis developed.

The practitioners as well as writers involved in the Cape Flats Nature Project that ran from 2002 till 2010, as well as individuals engaged in self-organizing practices of urban

gardening and social development within the Cape Flats, shared their experiential knowledge and practices indiscriminately. It is through them that this thesis received its impetus.

Since 2014 Elsemi Olwage is conducting research within north-western Namibia in the context of the LINGS project (Local institutions within Globalized Societies) which addresses the question of the institutional formation in relation to communal resource management, specifically water management. Her MA thesis is published in this series as it marks one of the focal issues of our interdisciplinary MA Culture and Environment in Africa and shows that environmental issues are pertinent in urban areas as well. At the same time her thesis addresses our concerns in the field of environmental humanities, one of the key research areas at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Cologne.

Abstract

This dissertation is based on research conducted at a small state-managed conservancy called the Edith Stephens Nature Reserve (ESNR) situated in the low-lying flatlands of the Cape Town metropolis. By tracing some of the complex and varied ways in which different ways of knowing and valuing urban "natures" and practices of conservation co-constitute each other, this dissertation critically engages with the social power relations at work in the continual making and unmaking of Cape Town's "natural" heritages. In doing so, I argue for recognizing the ways in which Cape Town's urban "natures" remain entangled with the epistemological, ecological and spatial legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Moreover, by focusing on the ESNR, I explore the current material and discursive practices by the state in relation to urban "nature" conservation. In recent years, the discursive framework of biodiversity conservation was mapped onto ESNR through the state apparatus. At the same time, ESNR was identified as pilot site for an experimental partnership project that was called Cape Flats Nature (CFN), a project that ran from 2002 till 2010 which explored what biodiversity conservation would mean within marginalized, poverty-stricken and highly unequal urban landscapes. By engaging with ESNR's historically constituted material-discursivity, this dissertation argues that, during this time, a particular relational knowledge emerged which, in turn, co-crafted and configured the emerging poetics, politics and practices at ESNR. In doing so, I foreground my main argument – that urban "nature" conservation, far from only being about conserving and caring for nonhuman lifeworlds, is rather simultaneously about conserving a particular relation to the world, to others and to oneself.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of all my research participants in the co-creation of this dissertation and in the shaping of my thinking and theorizing, and would like to express my deepest gratitude to them, for opening up their lives, and in some cases their homes, to me, and for sharing their experiences and knowledge. Special thanks to Luzann, Stacy, Dale, Ma Gladys, Bahia and Yaseen. During my research period various scholars working on the same topic assisted and inspired me in many ways, and I want to especially acknowledge Tania Katzschner and Janie Swanepoel for their important contributions. I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Andrew 'Mugsy' Spiegel for his endless patience, advice and invaluable support during my research and during the writing of this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank the AW Mellon Foundation, whom without I would not have been able to pursue my passion and this degree as well as my family and friends, for their love and compassion throughout the past year.

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List of Acronyms

CASE	Community Action for a Safe Environment
CBD	The Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	Community Based Organization
CFN	Cape Flats Nature
CFR	Cape Floristic Region
CFK	Cape Floristic Kingdom
CoCT	City of Cape Town/ local state administration
ESNR	Edith Stephens Nature Reserve
ESWP	Edith Stephens Wetland Park
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SANBI	South African Biodiversity Institute
TMNP	Table Mountain National Park
WESSA	Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa
WWF	World Wildlife Foundation

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Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with the politics, practices and poetics of so-called "nature conservation" within urban landscapes. Apart from having been immensely shaped by my diverse encounters with various people and places across the city, this dissertation primarily draws on research conducted at and around the Edith Stephens Nature Reserve – previously the Edith Stephens Wetland Park – a small, state managed conservancy situated in Cape Town's low-lying and densely populated flatlands.

Figure 1: The Cape Flats: An approximate geographic indication of the Peninsula's low-lying flatlands.

The story of the Edith Stephens Nature Reserve (hereafter ESNR) begins with Edith herself, a somewhat eccentric woman botanist who wandered through the Cape vleis[1] more than fifty years ago. As the story goes, Miss Edith Stephens, seen as one of South Africa's "foremost algologist(s)" (Creese 2010:20), was known for her passion for mapping ecologies and for the systematic studies of various endemic plants – a passion that led her along numerous pathways – identifying, naming and classifying the botanical treasury of the South African landscape through the language and lens of the natural sciences. After completing her studies in 1906 at the then South African College (now the University of Cape Town), she attended the Newnham College in Cambridge, England, where, unable to receive a degree because she was a woman, she collaborated with other specialists as a graduate research student on various projects. She returned to take up a staff position in Botany at the University of Cape Town, later becoming senior lecturer and publishing various academic papers. Apart from her professional responsibilities, Miss

[1] Colloquial South African term for wetlands, pans and marshlands.

Stephens was also on the council of the Botanical Society of South Africa and played a leading role in the founding of the Cape Natural History Club (Creese 2010:18,22).

Numerous stories abound about Miss Stephens: one imagines her walking alongside a busy highway, a white, elderly woman, alone and half bent over, with a wide-brimmed hat and black-rimmed glasses, eyes focused on the ground, carefully searching for different life forms. It was rumoured that a policeman once picked her up, convinced she had escaped from a nearby mental institution. She was also regularly seen at Natural History Club outings, standing in the middle of one or other Cape vlei in an old green overall and large gumboots, and with multiple specimen vials hanging from her neck, her face exuding childlike pleasure.[2]

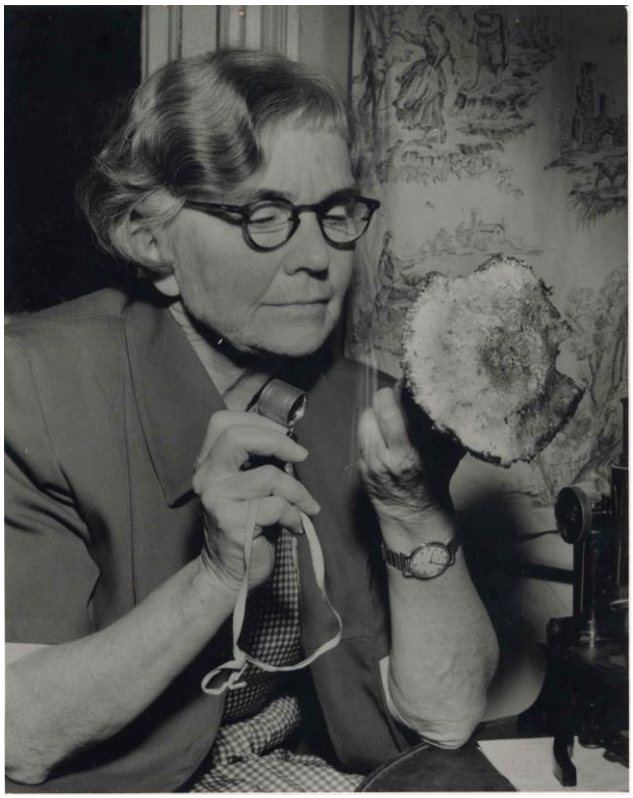

Figure 2: Miss Edith Stephens

Miss Stephens was particularly enamoured by and fascinated with the Cape Peninsula's various fungi and "thousands of mushroom-lovers sought her advice" on which were edible, which poisonous.[3] It also seems that Miss Stephens invited the worlds of fungi into her home, and into her body: one of her reported pastimes and hobbies was to eat

[2] Details taken from her obituary - Cape Times 12 March 1966 – Thousands of mushrooms lovers sought her advice. M.K. Jeffreys. Some details acquired from the display and information boards currently standing on ESNR.

[3] "Thousands of mushroom lovers sought her advice" Cape Times March 1966. During the later parts of her life Miss Stephens worked on a comprehensive book on mushrooms but she was unfortunately unable to complete it before her death in 1966. It was published posthumously. See Creese (2010) for a more detailed historical account of Miss Edith Stephens and her academic career.

unidentified mushrooms and simply leave a note with the description and name of the species in case she succumbed – thus producing knowledge through particular embodied intimacies and familiarities. As one 1958 Cape Times article's writer described her: "I found Edith in a depository of fungi. They were on all the chairs of her living room, on shelves and on bookcases. The pleasant smell of muscardine invaded all."

Apart from her love of mushrooms, Miss Stephens was also deeply interested in aquatic life forms and habitats, a curiosity which sent her wandering[4] from the forested slopes of the mountain into the vleis of the flatlands (Creese 2010:20). It was here that she one day during 1955 reportedly encountered a small, fern like plant, rather ordinary and plain in appearance, in one of the vleis situated in what is now known as the Philippi area in Cape Town. Her extensive scientific knowledge of the taxonomic varieties and botanical communities, both in the Cape and elsewhere, enabled her to recognize the uniqueness of what proved to be a two hundred million year old fern subsequently named *Isoetes capenis*, often described as a "living fossil".[5] She then borrowed money, using the mortgage bond on her house, to purchase the three hectares of land which was the fern's habitat. Having bought the land – then called Isoetes Vlei or the Edith Stephens Flora Reserve - she entrusted it to the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens in whose ownership it remained after her 1966 death and for five further decades. Little did this botanist, Miss Stephens, or *Isoetes capensis,* the 200-million year old fern-like plant, know that they would become key actors setting into motion complex historical contingencies, leading to the emergence of the current ESNR – no longer a patch of farmland[6] but rather part of a densely populated urban landscape and a complex socio-ecological assemblage.

This dissertation is concerned with the complex role of knowledge in relation to shaping, determining, contesting and influencing which nature is to be conserved, for whom and through what practices. Through disentangling and tracing some aspects of how various ways of knowing urban "natures" and practices of conservation co-constitute each other, the dissertation critically engages with the politics and poetics of the continual making and remaking of "natural" heritages, of inherited urban lifeworlds, within the ecological and cultural landscape of the Cape Flats. To do this I focus specifically on ESNR.

Narratives such as that about Miss Stephens provide historical specificity to the ways inherited urban "natures" are made, unmade and remade over time through on-going historical and material entanglements between both human and nonhuman lifeworlds –

[4] "She was remembered as a person who travelled on foot..." (Creese 2010:22).

[5] Today, Isoetes capensis is identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as endangered and is part of their Red List for endangered species – an international database of species that are at risk of extinction.

[6] See Annex 1

entanglements predicated as much on the sustenance of living as on chance encounters and differentially forged co-dependencies, attachments, intimacies, valuations (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006; Whatmore 2002; Raffles 2004). Thus, Isoetes Vlei emerged and was made through a particular way of knowing and valuing urban "nature" – through discursive and empirical practices underpinning the botanical sciences, realized through Miss Stephens' embodied engagements with the ecologies of the Cape Peninsula, through her way of moving, of seeing and of sensing.

However, one cannot ignore the fern's agency – its rarity, presence, antiquity and affect in not only inspiring preservationist desires but also in co-determining knowledge of what constitutes valued urban nature. Donna Haraway (in Hubbard et al. 2004:169; Haraway 1991, 2004) argues that while material presence in itself produces agency, such agency becomes *relationally enacted* through being *simultaneously* "conceptualized within linguistic or semiotic systems which constitute them as known entities within cultural systems". In other words, Miss Stephens' ability to translate her situated practices into a language of expertise, a "universalized" knowledge, (that of the botanical sciences) enabled her to constitute the fern, *Isoetes capensis,* as a "matter of concern" – taking on the aspect of a "tangled being" – with the potential for "forming rhizomes and networks" (Latour 2004:24) and assembling together multiple other associations over time: Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens and later the City of Cape Town's (hereafter CoCT's) Biodiversity Management Branch that currently manages the conservancy.

Thus, evident in Miss Stephens's story are the ways that particular ways of knowing the world emerge through people's embodied engagements with specific nonhuman lifeworlds and through their cultural practices in which "nature" is inscribed with meaning (Grove 2008:209; also see Escobar 2008; Haraway 1991; Ingold 2000). Anna Tsing's (2011:1) point that "wandering and love of mushrooms engender each other" reminds us that it is in our entanglements and encounters with nonhuman lifeworlds that our own being and processes of becoming, our identities, are affected and transformed. In narrating the Edith Stephens story, I wish to foreground the dynamics of diverse historical encounters and the crucial role that inter-subjective and inter-corporeal knowing (Whatmore 2002) plays as regards the creation and making of urban "natures".

Donna Haraway (1991, 2004), like other post-structuralist and post-constructivist theorists including Bruno Latour (2004, 2005), has shown that nature, rather than being "a set of observable, factual and manageable phenomena", as positivist science long had us believe, is constituted through "situated knowledges". According to Haraway (2004), knowledge of what constitutes "nature" is contingent upon situated "material-semiotic" or

"material-discursive" practices.[7] Such a situated epistemological position emphasizes the effect that diverse embodiments and emplacements and their historical contingencies and cultural specifics have on all practices of knowledge production, as well as on the relations of power that continually mediate these practices.

Yet, such a position, rather than being simply constructivist, is also "radically performative" (Lie and Law 2011:69; 82) and it thus signals that the distinctions and differentiations that constitute our known worlds are always made in and through situated material practices, and are enacted into being within different times and spaces *in relation* to others – both human and nonhuman (Mol 2010; Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006:136). As Barad (2003:8) has pointed out, "material-discursive" and "material-semiotic" practices are productive and generative, they bring things, subjects, objects and worlds into being (c.f. Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006:136). From this perspective, social agency – the power to determine what becomes known, to act and to be affective – rather than vested in an autonomous rational individual or overarching encompassing structures is something relationally constituted and distributed, often unequally, within continually formed collectivities or assemblages comprising both human and various nonhuman actors (Latour 2004, 2005; Bennet 2010; Whatmore 2002).

Following this theoretical thread, I understand urban "natures" and the contours of difference that give them form as never done. Rather, they are continually coming-into-being – which, importantly, does not exclude periods of stasis. They are emergent in that they are continuously being remade, unmade, contested and re-imagined through particular spatial and socio-cultural practices and through everyday embodied and relationally enacted material encounters between both human and nonhuman lifeworlds within situated "topologies of power" (Whatmore 2002).

In trying to interpret the continual making and unmaking of urban "natures" – the "processual materiality of environments" (McCormack 2008:141) – I use the critical theoretical framework of urban political ecology, the substance of which is a kind of an "ecological sensibility" in which everything – both the material and the immaterial, the human and the nonhuman – are understood as interconnected and not easily reducible to a "simple substrate" (Bennet 2010:xi). Consequently, questions of power, distribution, agency and materialities are crucial. Urban political ecology thus focuses on tracing the "social power relations (whether material or discursive, economic, political, and/or cultural) through which socio-environmental processes take place and [...] the networked connections that link socio-ecological transformations between different places" (Heynen 2006:11).

[7] Throughout this thesis I use Haraway's concept of "material-discursive" practices – even when I do not always acknowledge her as the source.

Approaching urban conservation practices from an urban political ecology perspective considers how ecologies are politically made – by both human and non-human actors – while working from a premise that how they are understood and represented is *inherently* political. In other words: "*who* produces what kind of socio-ecological configurations *for whom*?" (Heynen et al. 2006:2, my emphasis). As Escobar (2008:14) has pointed out, "power inhabits meaning, and meanings are a main source of social power; struggles over meaning are thus central to the structuring of the social and of the physical world itself".

To begin to trace some of the social power relations involved in the making of Cape Town's inherited urban "natures", my first chapter continues with exploring what urban nature conservation means. It focuses on the historical and political role of the botanical sciences in relation to constructions of a particular valued urban "nature" in Cape Town. Moreover, it considers how this way of knowing nature has shaped the dominant practices of conservation by the state, science and particular publics. Such an epistemic and ecological legacy continues to underpin the current material and discursive practices by the state through a recent institutional and conceptual shift towards the techno-scientific practices of biodiversity conservation. The section following engages with the current dominant discursive framework and legislation that form the context of the state's nature conservation practices. Chapter one concludes by describing my research methods and ethical considerations.

After sketching the broader political and historical context, I narrow my focus, in chapter two, providing a brief reflection on the situated urban political ecologies within which ESNR is located and continually formed. I then illustrate how a particular urban nature – that of ESNR – has been made, imagined, cared for, protected and transformed over recent years. In doing so, I foreground the complex historical contingencies and simultaneities that came together in the particular making of ESNR. During the early 2000s, ESNR emerged as a kind of "convergence space" (Escobar 2008). On one hand it was incorporated into the CoCT's "Biodiversity Network" whilst simultaneously, on the other, it became one of the main pilot sites for an experimental project called the Cape Flats Nature Partnership Project (CFN), which ran from 2002 to 2010. I argue that, ESNR's being a "convergence space" (Escobar 2008), enabled a particular relational knowledge to emerge there, a knowledge which in turn re-configured emergent practices of conservation within this particular place as well as in the Cape Town.

My third chapter shifts to the micro context, providing detailed empirical data that elaborates on this argument and shows how the CFN partnership project has had a lasting impact in terms of affecting shifts in people's knowing of what urban nature conservation entails. Moreover, I argue, it has given rise to the formation of particular environmental subjectivities (Agrawal 2005) at ESNR. Thus, chapter 3 explores what

urban nature conservation means by tracing some of the narrations and enactments that continually make and remake the boundaries between the “social” and the “natural” in an effort to define what should be cared for, protected, known, preserved or transformed within the Cape Flats. In conclusion, I argue that the articulation of a particular “conservation ethic” (Davis 2005) forms the crux of ESNR’s politics, practices and poetics.

Chapter 1: The science of conservation in the Cape

Collective enactments

Cape Town is unique for exploring the dynamics and complexities of urban "natures" in relation to practices of "nature conservation". Being just one of three cities worldwide with a National Park – Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) – situated within its metropolitan boundaries, ideas of the "natural" and of "nature" within the city, as well as the material-discursive practices that animate conservation, have been immensely influenced by its presence. Unlike the twenty-four state-managed "nature reserves" and conservation areas within the city (See below Figure 3), TMNP is managed through SANParks – a national body responsible for rural South Africa's wildlife and natural parks. Moreover, in an era of neoliberal globalization, Cape Town has also gained internationally recognized conservation value from its proclaimed situation within the Cape Floristic Region (CFR), a bio-geographical area within the Western Cape of about 90 000km^2 large, constituting the indigenous Cape Floristic Kingdom (CFK).[8] The CFK is one of only six floral kingdoms worldwide comprising exceptional species-rich vegetation classes, most notably the dominant Fynbos Biome.[9]

Classified as the smallest of the six floral kingdoms, yet comprising immense diversity of rare endemic species (up to 9 000 different ones), many of them listed as highly endangered[10] – the CFR has in conservation sciences' parlance, been labelled as a "global hotspot" or rather the "hottest hotspot". This has consequently led to the CFR having been declared a World Heritage Site (Cowling et al. 1996; Myers et al. 2000; Katzschner et al. 2005) and to the steady creation of state-managed conservation areas within and around the Cape Town metropole.

[8] In scientific terms, a Kingdom is the highest taxonomic rank and refers mostly to a group of forms of life that have certain fundamental characteristic in common. The phrases Cape Floristic Kingdom and the Cape Floristic Region are often used interchangeably, yet there seem to be on-going dispute and discussion with regard to the geographical boundaries of this winter-rainfall vegetation region as well as its status as a floral kingdom. See for example Born et.al (2007) and Goldblatt and Manning (2002).

[9] Fynbos is originally an Afrikaans word and literally translates as "Fine Bush". Although not synonymous with the Cape Floristic Kingdom, which includes other vegetation as well, this biome has contributed immensely to the species richness and aesthetic and ecological distinctiveness of the region.

[10] Cape Town itself is home to about 3000 indigenous plant species.

Figure 3: City of Cape Town Nature Reserves (2012)

However, as Jonker and Till (2009:306) have pointed out, Cape Town's violent and divisive colonial and apartheid histories have also made it a haunted city, its "natures" knotted up with "phantoms, histories, remnants, submerged stories and ways of knowing".

For one, such current conservationist concerns for the Peninsula's indigenous life forms – and as harboured by Miss Stephens – were not always so readily accepted in international scientific networks and did not always embody preservationist valuations amongst the broader public (van Sittert 2002, 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Rather, Miss Stephens was the flowering bud of a mainly (and manly) metropolitan discipline – Cape Botany – a discipline with deep imperial[11] and taxonomic roots that had come into being since the late 17th century, often through the practice of well-off men, amateurs in the field (van Sittert 2002; 2003). According to environmental historian, Lance van Sittert (2002:103; 2003), conservationist concerns for the endemic biota emerged only with the indigenization of botanical science in the Cape during the early to mid-20th century, as it steadily became "practiced and patronized by the Cape Town patriciate", exactly the period that Miss Stephens encountered the fern.

According to van Sittert (2003:113; 2002), before the mid-1890s most settlers in the south-western Cape were "historically aficionados of exotic flora and disdainful of the region's indigenous vegetation", as reflected in both public and private gardens. Moreover, during this time, the colonial administrative state was also actively involved in introducing various exotic plants in order to engineer the landscape – an example of how the state relied on and used the sciences as a means to rationally order the landscape (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Adams 2003; Scott 1998; Anderson and Grove 1989).

The low lying Cape Flats area especially has a long history of colonial authorities introducing exotic species such as Port Jackson[12] and Australian wattles, in attempts to stabilize the ever moving dunes and make the hostile marshlands areas manageable for agriculture (Anderson and O'Farrell 2012). According to Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:245), "so eager were the authorities to see these exotics take root that they distributed millions of seeds and awarded prizes for the greatest acreages" during the 19th century. Anderson and O'Farrell (2012:6) have pointed out that introduction of alien plants also happened following growing demands for timber and other raw materials from inhabitants of both the city and the colonial metropole. Many of the xotic species migrated rapidly and spread beyond the confines of people's gardens and the imperial plantations and fields, and the city's' ecologies were steadily interlaced and populated by an eclectic mix of vegetation (van Sittert 2002, 2003; Beinart 2003).

[11] According to Beinart (2003:65) "botanical knowledge" was "intimately bound up with colonial expansion".

[12] Scientific name *Acacia saligna.*

This is in stark contrast to the current material-discursive practices within which the state, science and environmentally-minded publics co-constitute valued urban "natures" in today's greater Cape Town region. Over the last few years, an impressive knowledge economy have emerged dealing with the behaviour of some "exotic" plants and their tendencies to colonize whole ecologies in ways that preclude much variation or richness of diversity (Jarman 1986; Siegfried and Davies 1982). Now known as "alien-invasive" species, they are understood to be one of the main threats to the conservation of rare and endemic flora and thus to the biodiversity comprising the Cape Floristic Region (Biodiversity Network 2003). The ecologies at ESNR, for example, have been managed over the last twelve years in accordance with this body of knowledge – giving preference to indigenous species through projects of "rehabilitation" in which the reserve is continually cleared of all alien-invasive species through contracted manual labour, creating a *particular* bio-diverse ecology constituted mainly through the language of conservation science.

According to van Sittert (2002:114), "floral nativism" and identification with and concern for the indigenous Cape Flora took on a particular salience only after the frontier's closure[13] when settlers in the Cape Peninsula sought to "nationalise and naturalise the imperial connection". During this time, a discourse of the indigenous came to define Cape Botany, a discourse in which valorisation of Cape Flora was animated by accounts of its "extreme antiquity" and its immense "uniqueness", both of which implied an idea of "threat". Subsequently, Cape Flora have been designated as endangered. For van Sittert (2002; 2003; also Anderson and Grove 1989; Adams and Hutton 2007), emergence of these conservationist concerns, at this particular moment, had both ideological and practical roots.

On one side, the Cape's endemic and unique biota were appropriated as a "mark of class, ethnic and regional identity for the old imperial urban, English-speaking middle class marooned in a new nation state governed by rural, Afrikaans republicanism" (van Sittert 2003:114). van Sittert (2003 in Green 2007:173) has shown that Table Mountain especially, "functioned as a site of particular significance for the emerging white middle class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries" and "was conceived of as a space of natural beauty and botanical and spiritual significance, but above all it was a leisure space, one separate from work".

Endemic flora's status as "endangered" was, moreover, continually mobilized by concerned members of Cape Town's mostly English-speaking "white" bourgeoisie in

[13] The Nationalist Party came into power in 1948 and remained the ruling party until 1994. In 1961 South Africa, a former British colony, resigned from the British Commonwealth and became a republic.

attempts to convince the state to intervene and to enforce enclosure of the commons, thus converting certain spaces into a "preserve for patrician leisure and contemplation" (Van Sittert 2003:114). For example, already in 1905 the then colonial government created the Wild Flowers Protection Act. This Act mostly targeted the underclass and poorer peoples' participation, especially local flower-pickers and their harvesting of public land, whilst the middle- and upper-classes' use of the commons in the form of leisure, flower exhibitions and science were encouraged. The idea of "floral reserves", backed by scientist and powerful members of the public, quickly caught on and by the 1930s several urban commons were enclosed for preservation (Van Sittert 2002:113; 2003).

Moreover, within in the context of the state's "natural resource management", and enclosure of the commons for environmental preservation from the early to mid-20th century, scientific knowledge became an effective tool used by the state to classify, order and count nature, thus more easily to control by government bureaucracies "set up to optimise relations between state, society and nature" (Adams and Hutton 2007:153; also Scott 1998; Grove 1989). Thus, although multiple and overlapping logics intersected nature conservation practice within Cape Town – scientific, utilitarian, social and aesthetic – nature conservation signalled some of the earliest ways in which capital, the colonial state and science colluded as a means to legitimize and naturalize particular claims to space, extending their power through contested colonial topographies (Adams and Hutton 2007).

Although nature conservation practices in Cape Town developed along their own unique pathway, several scholars have argued that they remain attached to a history of colonial and imperial "conservationist modes of thought" (Watts 2000:47; Beinart and Hughes 2007:14-15; Adams and Mulligan 2003:5; Van Sittert 2002, 2003; Anderson and Grove 1989). Since the late 19th century, these "conservationist modes of thought" have been strongly driven by a "fortress approach" used in the creation of large fenced-off game reserves mainly located in rural areas – understood as the epitome of valued nature – particularly "wild", "untouched" "natures".[14] Such "purity conceptions of wilderness" resulted in practices of conservation rooted in an ideological and spatial separation between valued nature and society (Beinart 2000 in Cocks 2006:3; also see Ramutsindela 2004, 2007; Bologna 2008).

Such a way of knowing and valuing nature is predicated on an understanding that humans are somehow removed from and are beyond nature and the *natural* world *out there,* which, in turn, are susceptible to being controlled, manipulated and exploited (Argyrou 2005:125). This conceptual division between "man" and "nature", translated into a

[14] See Agryrou (2005) for a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between such cultural constructions of "nature", notions of alterity, colonialism and religion.

separation between the “urban” and the “natural”, has been the bedrock of the modernist trajectory of development as well as the ontological basis of the Western episteme and its accompanying practices of knowledge production (Beinart and Coates 1995; Latour 2004). Construed through the dichotomous vernaculars of Cartesian dualism, and forged in the then still hot embers of European Enlightenment, it ushered in the “Age of Reason” – an era of unwavering belief in the “superiority of mind over matter and of humans over ‘non-rational’ nature” (Adams and Mulligan 2003:3).

According to Adams (2003:43,42), this rationality led to urban nature conservation practices in the then colonies being regulated and managed through “bureaucratic control”, which cultivated a preference for “modern techno-scientific knowledge over folk knowledge, and privileged centralised and formalized ways of knowing nature over localized and informal ways”. Such mechanisms often led to the production, in many places, of “an official landscape” – a practice that “writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental”, paying little heed to the existence of a “vernacular landscape” – to “the affective, historically-textured maps” that weave places together (Nixon 2011:17). As Raffles (2002:327), drawing on Latour, reminds us:

> *…it is by virtue of the length and strength of the networks they are able to assemble that some knowledge systems are consigned to parochialism and other become universals. Explanatory power results less from intrinsic truthfulness than from the successful collaboration of political, cultural and biophysical actors (“actants” in [Latour’s] terminology).*

Following van Sittert’s (2002;2003) arguments, certain situated and collective cultural practices of relating to particular nonhuman lifeworlds, and forging particular intimacies and attachments to the endemic flora as a poetic of belonging and identity, have combined with the production of scientific expertise and the utilitarian needs of the colonial state in forming a network of institutions, knowledge and resources. This in turn was mobilized to create a series of “protected areas” as well as particular urban “natures” that not only excluded certain peoples’ political and socio-economic participation, but whose land-use potential also became strictly regulated – both explicitly and implicitly. In doing so, not only was Cape Town’s urban landscape given particular form and ecological fabric, but these practices of conservation, in turn and as I show below, also influenced the dominant way that urban “natures” subsequently came to be discursively constituted - as ahistorical spaces, to be preserved for their intrinsic scientific value through a politics of aesthetics rooted in a particular vision of valued urban “natures” as “nature reserves”.

Thus, even though Miss Stephens was something of a maverick in her time – following fungi and ordinary-looking ferns into swampy vleis rather than the revered floral kingdoms of Table Mountain, and preferring to wander in the world of science rather than to be

confined to the domestic domain as was normally expected of women – she was not acting in isolation. Rather, she belonged – as a gendered semi-outcast – to a scientific and socio-cultural community with international connections, and formed part of what is now a legacy of "capturing and renaming nature" within the British colonies (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011:11).

Consequently, Miss Stephens' historical narrative points to how Cape Town's urban "natures" continue to embody histories of the colonial encounter, and draws attention to the multiple connections and relationalities, across different scalar and temporal topographies, that have formed and continue to form a small piece of land in Cape Town's low-lying flatlands. Yet, this historical narrative, apart from foregrounding colonialism's epistemic and ecological legacies, also points to the complex hybridity of postcolonial landscapes as people's identities have been co-constituted and have co-emerged alongside diverse nonhuman lifeworlds and places at the interstices of contested belonging, different ways of knowing, and forms of entanglement (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Escobar 2008). Such considerations of urban "natures" and their historicity (Trouillot 1995) in Cape Town, provide fertile grounds for considering the co-constitutive processes and relations – biological, social, cultural, political, discursive – that go into the continual making, unmaking and re-making of "natures", of places, and they re-situate agency within a distributed framework in terms of who has the power and agency to define and re-make environmental heritages (Heynen et al. 2006).

Discursive urban "natures"

Animating much current international and local conservationist concern for the Cape Floristic Region is an anxiety about biodiversity loss, about the status of the Cape Peninsula and the CFR's endemic and indigenous plant and animal life. During my research period, from mid-January to early May 2012, ESNR was under the jurisdiction of the CoCT's Biodiversity Management Branch in the city's Environmental Resource Management Department. ESNR also formed part of the city's Biodiversity Network (See below Figure 4). This network constitutes a series of interlinked sites that included twenty-four "nature reserves" as well as various identified "corridors", "links" and "mixed-use areas" within the city boundaries that had been identified, through systematic conservation planning, as crucial for the conservation of the city's inherited diversity of endemic plant and animal life found outside Table Mountain National Park (Biodiversity Strategy 2003).

The densely populated low-lying Cape Flats retain patches of these "valued" inherited "natures", of few wind-crafted dunes, of permanent and seasonal wetlands and of outcropping and interlaced patches of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and Cape Flats Dune Strandveld – biomes that have survived rapid and largely unregulated urban development

and that comprise plants and ecologies found nowhere else in the world. Such spaces, although rare and small, have become havens for various aquatic and other botanical communities, as well as for diverse species of birds, mammals, amphibians and other critters. ESNR is one of the spaces that materially embody these ecologies, ecologies very different from the more "highly valued" biomes of Table Mountain and the rest of the Cape Peninsula and surrounding mountain ranges, and which, only in recent years, have entered the optic of the newly democratic state and broader public concern through the lens of conservation sciences.

Thus, seen as "growing in a broken patchwork of remnant ecosystems" (Davis 2005:3), as well as emerging in various open spaces through the "dense comings and goings of urban life"[15] (Hinchcliffe and Whatmore 2006:123), these Cape Flats spaces have, during the last few decades, increasingly become cause for concern amongst established scientific organizations and interest groups, environmental organizations, state environmental personnel, and individual activists. Such conservationists' concern has fuelled formulation of various policy interventions, the formation of partnerships across institutional and geographic boundaries and the reformulation of urban planning initiatives.

[15] In what is called "recombinant ecology" (Baker 2000; quoted in Hinchcliffe and Whatmore 2006:123).

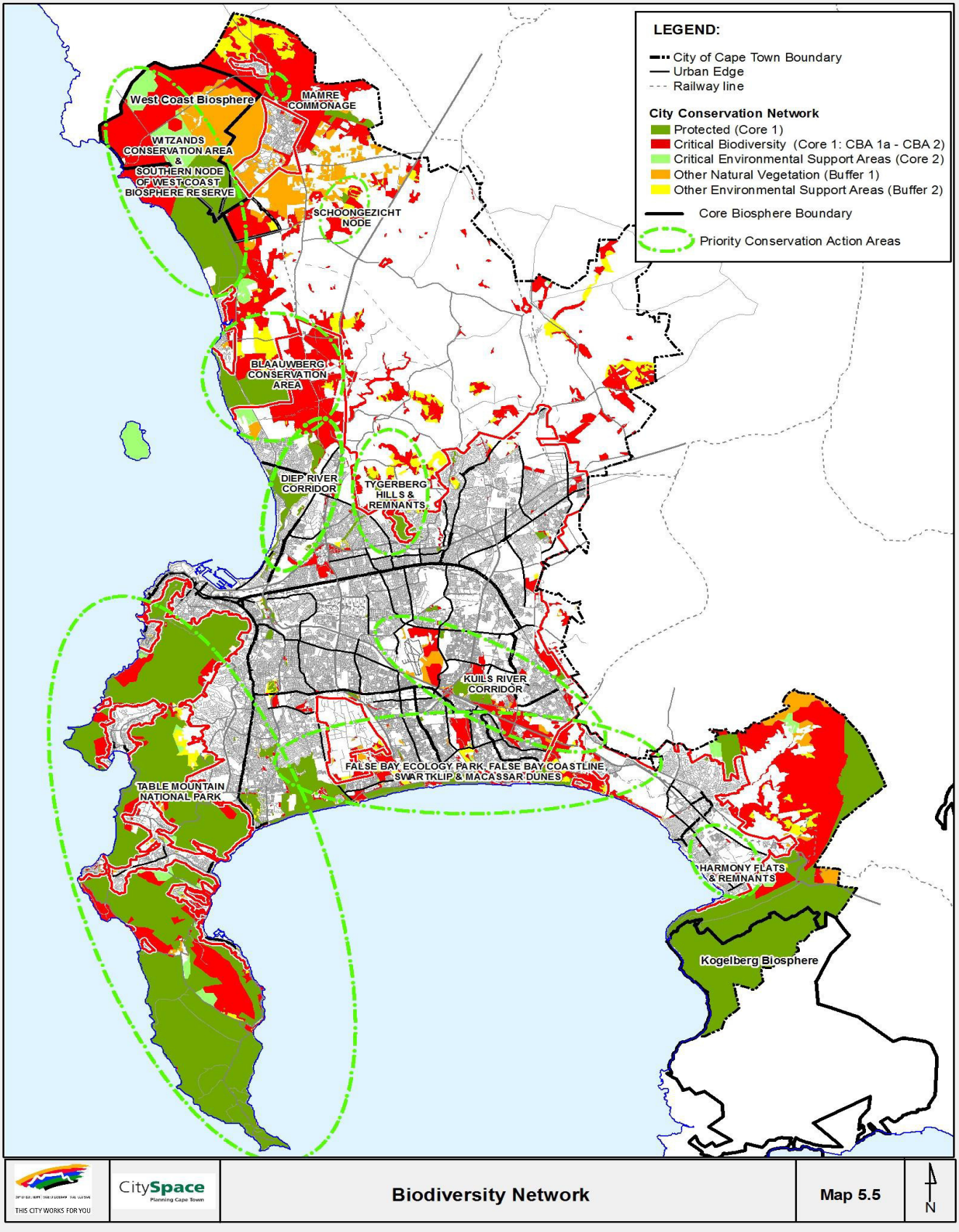

Figure 4: Cape Town's Biodiversity Network

I learned of ESNR as a place driven by people-centred or "community"-orientated approaches to nature conservation, one that focused on the creation of public partnerships with various people and non-governmental organizations in surrounding neighbourhoods. ESNR management and staff inherited such a "community"-orientated way of practicing conservation from its involvement with a particular project. Between 2002 and 2010, ESNR became one of the main pilot sites for the highly experimental and developmental[16] Cape Flats Nature Partnership Project, a project which had a strong commitment to the creation of public partnerships as a way to address the conservation of the dwindling Cape Flats Flora and to encourage the re-imagining and re-creation of the urban as "social ecological systems that are resilient, self-generative and adaptable" (Pitt and Boulle 2010:63).

Figure 5: A young man engages with a Cape Dwarf Chameleon at ESNR

However, simultaneously, in recent years, ESNR had to also work to secure its place within the Biodiversity Network, a status which regularly came under question in the conservation sciences' techno-scientific imaginings of the place (Katzschner 2012), imaginings concerned purely with the place's nonhuman lifeworlds. Practices of conservation at the "Biodiversity Network's" sites, apart from environmental education, are primarily dedicated and mandated towards ensuring attainment of quantifiable

[16] Throughout this thesis I make use of the term "development" In using this concept, I do not refer to the kind of narrow definitions embodied by neoliberal economic models or the ideals of "Western" modernity. Rather, I use the term in relation to its local vernacular, which, apart from livelihood considerations such as adequate housing and employment, also included other intangible social, cultural and psychological aspects such as human dignity, the development of human capacities and potentialities, and the expansion of choices. As I illustrate in the latter part of this dissertation, within the context of ESNR, development was defined as "growth", the growth of the person through the development of particular ethical sensibilities, sensibilities which could capacitate a person to, for example, live a "productive life" or to overcome lived realities of poverty, drug abuse and recruitment into local gangs.

representative samples of various endangered biomes, samples understood to be imperative for enabling continuation of diversification and survival of the region's biota (Cowling et al. 2003:191).

Over the last decade, the biodiversity conservation discourse has become institutionalized knowledge in South Africa and has consequently formed a particular "knowledge/power" (Foucault 1980) constellation, working at multiple levels to give form to the real – through policy interventions, environmental education and the management and creation of *particular* bio-diverse spaces, i.e. "natural" spaces that host predominantly endemic species and exclude humans. Moreover, in recent years "biodiversity conservation" has become a "key organizing concept" and discursive framework within the "current cacophony of environmental voice" (Fairhead and Leach 2003:82), one that animates environmental organizations, state conservation practices and international agendas.

Escobar (1998:53) reminds us that, although "biodiversity" "has concrete biophysical referents, it is a discursive invention of recent origin", a "historically-produced discourse" that entered the international arena during the late 1980s. Biodiversity conservation's salience and its accompanying discursive frameworks have grown considerably since first entering the domain of global policy and governance when several states signed The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a non-binding agreement presented as part of the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its three objectives employed the developmental rhetoric of the day – conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of biodiversity benefits. They also ushered in an era of "global environmental governance" (Whatmore 2002:92).

South Africa became a signatory partner on 2 November 1995, convinced of the "new and many opportunities offered by the Convention for integrated planning and development" (South Africa National Report 1998). According to Escobar (2008:139), such concern for biological diversity conservation since the early 1990s has become an:

> *impressive science-cum-policy movement, resulting in notable set of actors and interventions: a multiplicity of new institutional sites that speak about it, from international organizations to governments, NGOs, corporations, and grassroots groups; a host of strategies and interventions the world over, from basic taxonomic inventories to ambitions integrated conservation and development projects; and a growing array of expert discourses, from conservation biology and biodiversity planning to bio-ethics. In hardly a decade, the concern with biodiversity enabled the creation of a vast network for the production of nature and culture.*

South Africa is no exception and, having been ranked the world's third most biologically diverse country, has become part of this vast network.

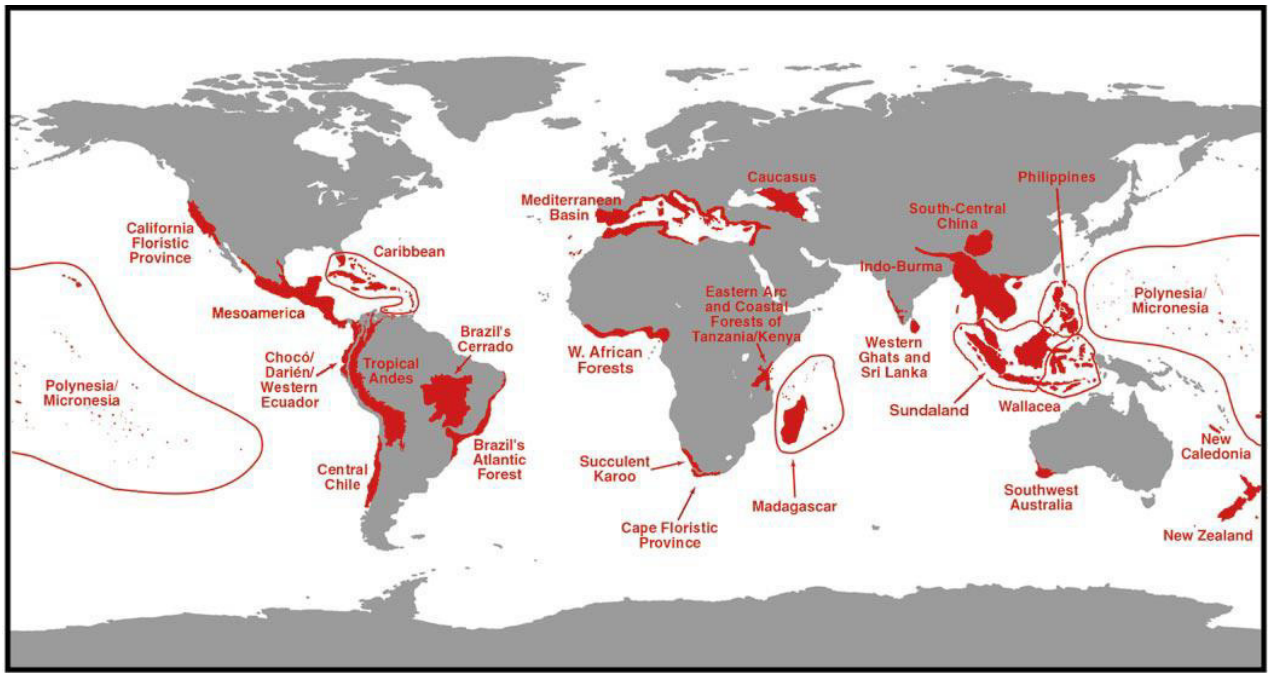

Figure 6: Global biodiversity hotspots (Source: Myers et al. 2000:853)

After signing the CBD, the then newly elected democratic South African government produced a National Policy on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biological Diversity (South Africa 1997). This led to the creation of a plurality of legislative and policy documents after 2003,[17] each containing detailed reasoning legitimizing state intervention in the conservation and management of the country's biological diversity. Apart from ecological justifications, these documents also provided reasons stretching across economic (resources, technology) cultural (heritage) and social (equity, sustainability) terrains. The publics animating this policy concern comprised mainly the international scientific community plus a few local environmental and conservation agencies such as WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society South Africa).

Several other institutions work closely with the National Department of Environmental Affairs on the issue – most notably the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the National Parks Board. The former, known previously as the National Botanical Institute, is now a public parastatal, established through the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004. SANBI has become a major role player and actor within the biodiversity conservation network, having situated itself as a national institution that "bridges science, knowledge, policy and implementation – a unique

[17] The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (2004) and Protected Areas Act (2003); The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) (2005); The National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment (NSBA) (2004). Presently, the main national legislation is The National Biodiversity Framework (NBF) and The National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (NPAES), both published in 2008.

entity considered to be global best practice".[18] Its main mandate is biodiversity knowledge management and research in order to inform policy- and management-level decision making regarding biodiversity, as well as to provide information to the general public. It explains biodiversity conservation as:

> *...biodiversity richness is one of South Africa's greatest assets. Biodiversity in terms of landscapes, ecosystems and species - the web of natural life - provides goods and services vital for human well-being and the survival of the planet. Goods and services such as water purification, grazing, eco-tourism, fisheries, sources of medicine, energy, food, healthy soils, pollination, carbon sinks, clean air and production of oxygen, etc. Unfortunately our biodiversity, as is the case on the globe, is under threat. Some of these threats include ecosystem destruction and accompanying species extinction through human activity, climate change, and invasive alien species.*[19]

In other words, SANBI argues that the conservation of inherited biological diversity is crucial for the sustainability of economies and for overall human survival and well-being.[20] From this perspective, dominant valorisation of biodiversity is mostly rooted in their "commodity potential" (Philip 2004), as an asset that should be "sustainably" managed to provide "goods and services". Dominated by the physical and biological sciences and neoliberal economic models, knowledge of what constitutes the diversity of "nature" that it to be valued and thus conserved is firmly situated within techno-scientific representations and economic valuations. Despite re-situating the human as dependent on and interconnected with "nature", the discursive framework of biodiversity conservation continues to reinforce a separation between human and nonhuman worlds, between cultural and biological diversity. Moreover, although this discursive framework has situated ideas about diversity within ethical and political domains, framings of biodiversity, for the most part, remain generalized, universalist and ahistorical and do not take into account questions of distribution and power. As Vassos Argyrou (2005:124-125) has pointed out – even though the term "biodiversity" often "passes for a purely technical term that denotes the plurality of life forms, the importance of which is explained on mostly instrumental grounds [...] ethical considerations cannot be wholly ignored".

Diversity is not a neutral concept – more often than not it has been mobilized in ways that pacify highly politicized cultural and social tensions and reinforce racism and other forms of discrimination. One reason is that this abstraction and conceptualization of difference has a tendency to render all difference as sameness, ignoring the role of power and agency – the agency of *particular* human and nonhuman agencies in the co-determination of what becomes valued, conserved, what becomes lost and what becomes known.

[18] http://www.sanbi.org.za/about
[19] http://www.sanbi.org.za
[20] Also see www.iucn.org; www.conservation.org;

Consequently, this model of conservation ignores the multiplicity of ways in which people's everyday lives become intertwined with non-human worlds, the situated, lived, historically contingent, embodied and emplaced aspect of knowledge of diversity and the politics of valorisation. Furthermore, it also obscures broader processes of political economy that contribute to biological diversity losses and destruction of social ecologies. Yet, despite this discursive convention, the multiple articulations of biodiversity conservation and its accompanying discursive frameworks do not manifest in a vacuum. Rather, they are mapped onto and translated within material lifeworlds that are immersed within cultural and historical contingencies.

Thus, as I show throughout this dissertation, there are various particularities in terms of how conservation science practices – especially those relating to biodiversity conservation and its resultant material-discursivity – have become emplaced, situated, contested and legitimized within the Cape Town context, more specifically in a small Cape Flats conservancy. As already indicated, Cape Town's conservation practices are attached to a long history of specific cultural, political and economic processes and relationships in the city.

The CoCT released its own Biodiversity Strategy in 2003, before national legislation was passed. It did that because of the city's unique ecological conditions and its integrated approach to urban development. In 2001, the CoCT adopted its first Integrated Metropolitan Environmental Plan (IMEP). Within the IMEP, six priority strategies were identified for implementation within two years. One was the Biodiversity Strategy. Importantly, the IMEP stipulated a need to find ways to practise biodiversity conservation that are aligned and integrated with other interventions intending to address the city's ever-growing complexities of stark inequalities, poverty, unemployment and crime. Along with the city's Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the IMEP provided a political framework within which the Biodiversity Strategy was formulated. Consequently, the guiding principles of the Cape Town Biodiversity Strategy (2003:11) include "promotion of biodiversity as an asset in poor/low income communities"; "no ecology without equity – no equity without ecology"; "equitable access to biodiversity for all"; "social upliftment and economic development through the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity"; and the building of "participation and partnerships" Even though biodiversity conservation is underpinned by a particular knowledge of diversity – one constituting biological diversity as separable from cultural and social diversity – in the Cape Town context such concerns can only be legitimized by embedding them within interventions that target inequality and mass poverty, phenomena that play a huge role in structuring the politics of difference and everyday lived realities of urban dwellers.

In Cape Town, meeting the double agenda of social development and biodiversity protection has and continues to present great challenges to older preservation practices of creating "protected areas" managed through a top-down manner (Ernstson 2012; Katzschner 2012; Davis 2005). My focus specifically on ESNR allows me to explore some of the current ways that the science/ state/ public interface has been reconfigured in the wake of growing international concern about possible accelerated loss of the inherited biological diversity of ecologies, and of the post-1994 shift towards democratization of public management of "nature reserves" within densely populated, highly segregated and culturally diverse urban landscapes. In doing that, my goal is to develop my main argument that nature conservation practices, rather than simply being about caring for, protecting or utilizing nonhuman lifeworlds (within the city), are about conserving and enacting a particular *relation* to the world, to one's immediate environment and to one's self.

Methodologies and ethical reflections

During my research period, a renovated old farm house at ESNR served as the Biodiversity Management Office and was "manned" by four women: an on-site manager, Luzann; a "people and conservation" officer (environmental education), Stacy; an administrative assistant, Aisha; and a volunteering social entrepreneur, community-worker and life-mentor, Dale – already a twelve-year long partner of ESNR. Three other regular volunteers also helped out during this time. Luzann, Stacy and Dale were my main interlocutors. While those are their real names (ESNR is so small, one cannot hide them), I have used pseudonyms for those research participants who requested anonymity or who preferred not to participate formally.

Alongside the Biodiversity Branch's employees, ESNR was maintained by people employed through the national Working for Wetlands (WfW) initiative – a governmental cooperative working closely with SANBI and which forms part of a National Expanded Public Works Programme. WfW's goal at ESNR was to combine wetland conservation with a wide range of other concerns: knowledge sharing, capacity building and especially poverty alleviation. Regular workshops at ESNR provided WfW employees with some basic plant identification skills and knowledge to enable them to distinguish invasive species (for eradication) from endangered endemic species. ESNR also had a nursery, managed by Richard, who worked as the Biodiversity Branch maintenance manager and also the WfW programme staff manager. Finally, there was Jessie, the ranger, who dealt with issues such as dumping, poaching, species control, fires and border patrols.

Also on site was another building housing the Primary Science Programme (PSP) – a non-governmental organization orientated towards teacher training and focusing mainly

on disadvantaged and marginalized schools in order to try to redress educational inequities.

Apart from conducting semi-structured interviews with ESNR and other city staff, I also visited ESNR each day over a period of about twelve to fourteen weeks. During that time I often conversed informally with the staff and participated in some of the conservancy's day-to-day activities. I also regularly accompanied Stacy on her environmental education outings to various schools and to some of her "community partners" in surrounding residential neighbourhoods. My conducting social research within a state institution was not always welcomed and supported, and it often produced moments of misunderstanding. It required continual careful negotiation of alliances and friendships in order to build trust and rapport. Throughout writing this dissertation, I have tried to remain sensitive to and critical of the impossible task of simultaneously engaging with state officials as people and engaging with one of the more powerful institutional structures that define lived-realities in urban settings.

Initially, I had embarked on a research project that aiming to understand the many self-organizing conservation practices taking place across the Cape Flats. Due to ESNR's orientation towards forming relationships with already existing CBOs and individuals engaged with environmentally-orientated projects, I had hoped to be introduced to ESNR's "community" partners in order to find research participants. Unfortunately, Stacy the main ESNR person visiting surrounding neighbourhoods and whom I had hoped would be my main informant, ended up being absent, for personal reasons, from ESNR during the first six weeks of my research.[21] Consequently, my research focus shifted towards ESNR itself and its history with the Cape Flats Nature (CFN) partnership. Still, in the final weeks of my research, I did form close relationships with various people I met through Stacy and Dale, people who were crucial in sensitising me to the complexities and politics of urban conservation.

Thus, it was, through ESNR, that I was able to have encounters that shaped my knowledge of the emerging socio-ecological assemblages – of the plurality and multiplicity of urban "natures" that are made and remade through practices of urban conservation. This dissertation is consequently also deeply rooted in my own encounters – as an Afrikaans-speaking female researcher, an anthropology student enamoured with political ecology, a resident of Cape Town's lush Gardens suburb, and, in apartheid terms, a "white" person. Those encounters were with various people, plants, places and different "natures" as I moved across and through the city's different geographies.

[21] The recommended time for research for a minor dissertation.

Chapter 2: Situated urban ecologies

Entangled urban "natures"

Nearly twenty years after the establishment of a post-apartheid, post-colonial state, Cape Town's urban landscape remains highly segregated and immensely unequal, contested, messy, and fragmented – a space where the logic of global capitalism intersects violently and unpredictably with the legacies of past injustices. These realities are strongly reflected in the environmental disparities within and amongst Cape Town's urban dwellers. Most of the greater metropolis' squatter camps and townships are situated on the Cape Flats, an area prone to floods during the heavy winter rains and sand storms during the summer months, conditions that greatly affect those without adequate shelter. Environmental problems in this part of the city are wide-spread and both immediate and life-threatening and are exacerbated by the on-going lack of provision of basic municipal services, such as sanitation and refuse-removal, to a large section of its inhabitants, as well as the ongoing influx of migrants (McDonald 1997).

State practices of nature conservation in colonial and apartheid Cape Town were embedded within the broader regimes of governance and care (Shepherd 2007:24), regimes that emerged from convergences of state and capital and which directed their investment and gaze only towards particular people and places within the city. Consequently, due to these legacies, Cape Town's urban "natures" were also steadily folded into specific hierarchies of value and moral and material economies (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002) that shaped them in highly unequal and racialized ways.

Driving to ESNR, from Cape Town's CBD to the Cape Flats, with the poetic omnipresence of Table Mountain slowly receding and the leafy southern suburbs of aged trees, privatized security and situated capital folding away into its slopes, the city's topographies flash by in continually changing, starkly contrasted and vividly unequal forms. Thousands of shack dwellings leaning into and onto each other, sculpted mosques, grid-like neighbourhoods of painted brick houses shaded by palms, large overhead electrical web towers, patches of farmed land and a myriad dystopic industrial complexes. At several traffic lights, large groups of men sit, waiting for a chance, perhaps, to be picked up for piece-work job somewhere in the city (Sharp 2012; Sterken 2010). Presently, comprising about 39 hectares, the rectangular-shaped ESNR lies at the intersection of two main highways cutting across the Cape Flats; its entrance on Lansdowne Road. These roaring highways mark the physical boundaries of the seasonal wetland reserve, which sits nestled between neighbourhoods called Philippi, Sweet Home and Manenberg, with Hanover Park and Gugulethu close-by. Although the boundaries between the neighbourhoods are porous and shifting, the legacies of apartheid planning remain palpable with Manenberg and Hanover Park being predominately Afrikaans-speaking,

Coloured neighbourhoods whilst Gugulethu, Philippi and the more recently established Sweet Home, places with a predominately Xhosa-speaking demographic and a diversity of African migrants. Situated in the most densely populated area of a city with an immense housing shortage,[22] ESNR is an anomaly, a curiosity, a rarity. The small conservancy seems sober and solemn alongside its surrounds – a landscape devoid of large and secure green public spaces and parks, with few aged oaks and removed from the city's majestic sloped mountainsides of pine forests and "fynbos" alongside which many Cape Flats residents and their ancestors had previously lived prior to apartheid-era forced removal.

Due to the stark contrast and visual comparison between ESNR and the surrounding settlements, the conservancy, in some sense, retains memory of particular histories of urban planning within the city Cape Town, especially the apartheid-era political and economic transformations and transmutations and their material consequences. Moreover, as illustrated in chapter 1, ESNR also vividly speaks to the histories of conservation within the city and to how spatial as well as epistemic legacies of colonialism continue to persist in the present in unpredictable, contradictory and sometimes generative guises.

Dale, one of ESNR's "community partners" introduced me to Yaseen, a recent gangster-turned-avid-gardener who resided in Hanover Park, just a stone's-throw from ESNR in a small brick house. Dale used to "do tourism" – not "township tours" she assured me, rather "community tours...economic, conservation and education tours". Although no longer much involved with tourism, she still knew people and places across the Cape Flats. Explaining to me, she said:

> *…so if you are interested in conservation I don't take you to Edith Stephens. I rather take you to people on the Cape Flats who changed a dry piece of land in front of their houses into an oasis...then you can speak to them....*

Driving through Hanover Park, trash littered many of the open spaces - gardens of tin roses and plastic ferns scattered across dry sandy plains. Most of the council apartment buildings that dominate this urban landscape no longer hold any colour, offering testimony to the harshness that time holds in its belly for those denied the promised rhythms of so-called modernity. Yet, marks of care are also evident in many places – small but lush private and public gardens and carefully crafted homes, shadowed by lines, heavy with washing.

[22] Between 2002 and 2009 the number of informal dwellings in the Cape Flats increased by 100 000 – indicating "strong urbanization" (State of Cities Report 2011:50) and a too fast growing demand for the housing supply.

Designated previously as surplus grounds for extensive agricultural production**,** from the mid-20th century onwards large parts of the Cape Flats surrounding ESNR were turned into settlements to accommodate persons classified "coloured" or "black" that were relocated from the central business district and the now upmarket suburbs by apartheid's 1950 Group Areas Act. This legislation, having grown out of the National Party's policy of "separate development", "compelled municipalities to enforce racial zoning" (Harrison et al. 2008:24) and led to a series of forced removals within the city. According to Harrison et al., such legislation began a process in which "the state was much more involved and involved itself in the process of urbanization" in order to construct and engineer a political economy in which the means of production was firmly within the hands of "white" South Africans.

A consequence was a particular ordering of urban "natures" in which Cape Town's interlaced lifeworlds became highly racialized through spatial segregation, with more "valued" "natures" being subsumed into "white" spaces. Thus, areas surrounding and close to Table Mountain and surrounding beachfronts were declared "white-only" living spaces. Meanwhile, residents classified "black" and "coloured" living in such places (District Six, Green Point, Claremont and Constantia) were forcibly relocated to the wind-swept townships of the Cape Flats – a process whereby many were separated from close kin and neighbours in an effort to engineer racially homogenous residential areas (Seekings 2010:3; Field, Meyer and Swanson 2007). While I was doing research in Hanover Park and Manenberg, people often pointed this out to me. I often heard the painful refrain: "we were just dumped here" or, as Bahia, one of my research participants and a life-long resident of Hanover Park, put it: "*Ons mense was van ons grond afgesmyt gewees*" [Our people were thrown off our land]. In other words, many older people I encountered had keen memories of having been exposed to a particular nature and denied another (c.f. Field, Meyer and Swanson 2007). As Bahia told me:

> *We are living so on-top of each other...maybe if you could see a mountain or the ocean then you could have a little bit of peace. Just the other day, I saw a bunch of younger guys arguing about something. When I went closer the one of them pulled out this gun. I am not intimidated. If he wants to shoot me then he must shoot me. For a young boy to have a gun in order to feel powerful...no, man, Elsemi, it's sad...Our young children are recruited into the gangs when they walk to the shops alone.*
>
> *When you are looking out of your window, all you see is each other. We have been thrown so on top of each other. We don't even have a porch... and look how these flats are built. The bathroom is in the lounge! Drugs are a huge problem. We struggle incredibly. There are a lot of challenges.*

> *And there is a lot of gossip...it is corrosive...children need the right guidance. There is a very narrow mentality. And the "tik-monsters" (crystal meth addicts)! The Khoisan has to come out... that ubuntu[23]... it's no longer in our community. There has been break down of communication. Maybe it is because of the apartheid law that threw us here...I don't know...We are too much on top of each other.*

Seekings (2010:3) has explained that, apart from racial segregation, the apartheid system of planning and governance was also infused with a "racial hierarchy" where "someone's racial classification shaped the range of possible class positions open to him or her" – with "coloured" being positioned on a somewhat higher rung than "black" or "native". This led not only to urban segregation but also to forms of "ghettoisation" – a large divide being formed between "South Africans classified as white [living] in relatively prosperous neighbourhoods with good municipal infrastructure [and] with lucrative pockets of commercial activity" whilst people classified as "black" or "coloured" were relocated to "less-serviced neighbourhoods, where poverty, drugs and gangs were rife" (Seekings 2010:6). Yet, ones' class position also played a determining role despite of this and many lower and working-class families were resettled in council housing or "flats" in designated parts of the Cape Flats, such as Hanover Park and Manenberg.

Various present day Cape Town spaces imagined as "natural" and thus "apolitical" and "ahistorical" continue to carry sets of associations about exclusivity and elitism for many of the city inhabitants. Moreover, they often still remain inaccessible to the majority because of apartheid's persisting socio-spatial legacies and growing structural inequalities. As Christine, who worked at the Manenberg People's Centre explained:

> *People here don't have access to Table Mountain and those places such as Newlands Forest[24]...not even a bus going past there, no public transport go[es] to these places. Even the concerts in Kirstenbosch are orientated towards the upper class.[25] They have access because they have cars. No Africans, no coloureds....no bus, transport and food...*

On another occasion, during a meeting at ESNR where the Table Mountain Fund presented opportunities for funding grassroots environmental projects, Dale responded:

> *But why is it called the "Table Mountain Fund"? There is still stigma there. When one hears the "Table Mountain Fund" the first thing that one thinks is*

[23]The word *ubuntu* has its origins in the Bantu languages of southern Africa. Although its meaning is contested, it refers to a particular ethic that foregrounds people's relationships with and to each other as a crucial component of the constitution of one's personhood. Or as the saying goes: I am only a person because of others persons.

[24] Newlands Forest is a large forest on the lee-ward side (east) of the mountain comprising mainly plantation pine trees and small patches of indigenous forest.

[25] Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens also situated on the lee-ward side of Table Mountain; as an internationally celebrated botanical garden.

that "no...you can't apply there". If you guys present here, the first associations that we make are whites, and rich whites.[26]

However, despite the starkly unequal inherited urban realities of Cape Town, and dominant discursive and material practices that formed and continue to form metropolitan "natures" in Cape Town, urban lifeworlds are also always subjectively experienced and valued, and continually emerge through people's embodied and emplaced cultural practices that ascribe and contest meanings within situated political and social ecologies (Whatmore 2002; Hinchcliffe and Whatmore 2006). The following example illustrates.

Arriving at Yaseen's house in Hanover Park, Dale parked her car at the end of a small dusty street curving into a crescent shaped T-junction and pointed out his garden - indeed a small oasis. Situated on a slither of land across from his small house it was populated by a great diversity of species, "indigenous" and "exotic": salt bushes, crasulas, aloes, and trees of varying heights – it was beautifully crafted. The soft shadows of a wide star-fanned palm tree made the garden especially welcoming in the mid-summer heat beating down on the sandy flatlands. Two paths ran through the garden as a walk-through, and two mounds formed raised-beds overgrown with plants. Across the road, on another open patch, a cluster of tall Eucalyptus trees towered over sculpted rows of flowers and a large white board that read: *Hanover Park, Best Practices, Greening Award 2004 by the City of Cape Town.*

Behind his garden, Yaseen had painted the wall with a mural depicting a scene with shifting depths of blue and brown mountains, fore-grounded by thin palm trees that seemed to be growing in a vast desert-looking landscape. Closer inspection revealed images of other structures of Middle-Eastern architectural forms. On another wall across the street Yaseen had inscribed two moral codes.[27] Dale then left, and we sat down in the garden beneath the cool shade of a tree. The world outside the garden slowly faded away and a feeling of peacefulness swept over me. After a few introductions, Yaseen, leaning over, a golden sliver shining in one part of his mouth, his eyes warm yet layered with wariness and intelligence that comes only with time and experience, slowly began to tell me parts of his story.

[26] Similarly Green (2007:176) has shown that there exists a strong continuation of perceptions of Table Mountain as being part of the "white" city, "as a beautiful image but something distant and inaccessible".

[27] See Appendix 1

Figure 7: Yaseen's garden

For Yaseen, what he does is for the next generation. He said that he genuinely wants to give back to the community through something that can outlive him. His inspiration for starting the garden came one day, he said, whilst he was watching his grandchild play in the open space across from his house. The space was littered with various disposable items people had dumped there. Whilst he watched her play, his grandchild cut her foot badly, and it became septic. After this, he said, he had thought, "Fine. You can call garbage removal. But the next day the space will once again be filled with litter, but if you make a beautiful garden then maybe no one will pollute it".

Yaseen is a reformed gangster. He spent twenty years in a state prison, in Pollsmoor.[28] It is there that he learnt and taught himself some gardening skills. Reflecting on his past and the difference the garden had made in his life, he said:

> *You think when you have a revolver that it makes you strong, but I have turned my life around now. I work with nature. Look at the farmer. Farmers have a real "mede-menslikheid" (co-humanity). People that work with the land, it humbles you, you feel humble. I want to lighten things up a bit here. This place, it's very "agtergeblewe" (disadvantaged). Look at trees and the time it takes for them to grow. Trees grow in five years. They grow in spurts. Every five years you can look at them and see...yes, they have grown now. What does this teach you? If you want any good thing in life, you have to make sacrifices.*
>
> *If you sit here in the garden it is good for your soul, it is a thing that helps you. I want this for my grandchildren. God is one; he wants us to live in harmony. Nature is in harmony with itself. We investigate and research and look at nature – but still we don't know the answers. We just have to make sure what we are doing is for the greater good.*

[28] Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison, situated in Cape Town.

Yaseen then explained that, in recent years, he and his wife had embarked on a spiritual journey and converted to Islam. For Yaseen, practices of gardening within public spaces seemed to symbolize a material inheritance that could perhaps embody a different ethical sensibility and way of being in the world – as captured in his moral codes – from that which he had practised during his time as a gangster. From my various conversations with Yaseen over the next weeks, it seemed that his conservation practices, and the materiality of his flourishing garden, were intertwined with his continual practices of self-creation and self-formation, with his on-going processes of becoming a "reformed gangster" and of becoming a Muslim. Moreover, for Yaseen, the making of and caring for a garden also seemed to represent a possibility of change on a relational plane, as something that could be good for others and that could "lighten things up a bit". He expressly wanted to do something for the "greater good", for the "community" and he sensed that his garden represented such possibility. Pierre Bourdieu (1980:4 in Hillier and Rooksby 2002:5) reminds us that "the relation to what is possible is a relation to power". As Yaseen continued to explain, looking about his garden:

> *What the world needs is good women and mothers. Without them communities can't survive. Look at the women here. You just watch. They are all on drugs, some kind of drug. They are maybe twenty three or young like that, but they look forty or fifty. It is sad. My wife is a really good wife. People need to work together. Look, your life experience and knowledge, you [Elsemi] are still young – but combined with my life experience – together it brings wisdom. If people don't communicate, it brings gaps and cause conflict.*

Made evident in my conversations with Yaseen were the ways in which material and moral economies of places are intertwined, how his practices of creating "a little oasis" were inseparable from his engagement with those things he perceived as working against the "greater good". Yaseen told me that he had also had a vegetable garden but that once people realized what he was doing, the very next year they dug out all his potatoes and stole them. So now he no longer wanted to do that. When I asked him about making the garden more secure he responded that he does not want to fence it off because, for him, it is for the "community". On another occasion whilst visiting Yaseen, he explained his motivation for making the garden and the impact it had and potential can have:

> *My garden, it was a complete turnaround in my life. Around here, when people have grievances, there is a lot of "skellery" (arguing and shouting), but slowly it started to go away and people started to enjoy it. Here everything ends up at the scrap yard. I am trying now, myself, to decorate my own place...but it will not be destroyed, because people have a share in it. But if you don't keep an eye on your house it will end up in the scrap yard. There is nothing more. The drugs have sent our community into the abyss. At first it was just the mandrax tablet...in our time...but people did not like it. Drugs separate the community. People cannot let it go; there is*

too much money in it. It is a whole different picture now. Things are more dangerous. Recently a three-year old child was shot dead in the arms of her mother. Things have gotten worse. If we don't do something ourselves – in terms of our environment, our lives – then we are in for much worse. Things can get worse.

E: And can something be done, say through … the environment?

Y: The environment...definitely...just look at a person from a better environment...there is a change…this is the gutters, it is the ghetto, the backstreets...you can look at a person, the way that he handles himself...like people from Wetton and Kenilworth. But just come here between the "skurke" (villains)...there is no longer a difference, we are all neglected and destroyed. But we are in one ship...there is the upper deck and there is the lower deck of the ship. Let's make a hole in the bottom of the ship. We don't want to bother the people from the upper deck. But if they don't care, then we will all sink.

The on-going theft of property by so-called "*tik-monsters*"[29] (meth-monsters/meth-heads) was a recurrent topic of conversation amongst many other people I encountered in Hanover Park and Manenberg. It seemed that the almost apocalyptic spreading of crystal-meth addiction was rendering life in this part of the city ever more precarious (Versfeld 2012; Salo 2004). Crystal-meth presents a powerful metaphor for understanding the "affective capacity" (Deleuze 1988 in Tolia-Kelly 2011) of particular materialities in co-determining what becomes known and experienced within a place as well as peoples' capacity to act and to effect change in terms of societal and personal transformation and preservation.[30]

Asked to reflect on his practices of conserving his garden, Yaseen always referred to the kind of forces within his immediate environment that were acting on the possibilities of being and becoming within this particular place – dumping within open spaces, escalating gang violence, the power of drug abuse in defining "communities", theft of scrap and other materials, the limited extent of the state acting as regards these issues, and the lived experience of inequality and segregation. Yaseen's way of knowing the nonhuman lifeworlds in his immediate environment was inseparable from his intimate knowing of the politics of the place and power (see Escobar and Harcourt 2005). Consequently, Yaseen's practices of conservation were shaped by his particular situated way of knowing, through embodied and emplaced practices. His story show how urban "natures" and the contours of difference that give them form and meaning are experienced, constructed and contested within situated power relations which often include "some very active and

[29] This name strongly indicates the ways in which this drug has, in the eyes of others, come to erode people's personhood.

[30] I was often strongly reminded of the immense power of crystal meth in giving form to emergent socio-material realities - shaping material flows as well as configuring socialities. As Yaseen pointed out; "with the drug problem everything ends up at the scrap yard" and "the drugs have sent our community into the abyss".

powerful nonhumans" (Bennet 2010:23). In this instance, Yaseen afforded his garden social agency and transformative potential – both in terms of his own selfhood and in terms of the politics of place and "community" – in *relation* to multiple other forces at work. Yet, as Raffles (2002:329) reminds us and as is evident in my conversations with Bahia and Yaseen, all places are also "constantly in dialogue with other people and places, constantly reconfiguring and reinventing their own locality in relation to the innumerable elsewheres in which they participate physically, imaginatively, culturally, and through the expansive networks of translocal political and cultural economy". Even though ESNR has visible spatial boundaries, it is entangled with particular historical and cultural contingencies and emplaced within particular urban political ecologies that have come to deeply shape its politics, practices and poetics of nature conservation.

Making and re-making a particular urban nature

For fifty years after Miss Stephens gifted what was then known as Isoetes Vlei or the Edith Stephens Cape Flats Flora Reserve to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, it remained relatively isolated and invisible, except within established scientists' networks. During that same time, the wide-reaching and low-lying flatlands within which this seasonal wetland was situated underwent drastic changes as rapid, urban expansion spread across its surface and burrowed into its ecologies.

During this fast-paced urbanization, from the 1950s onwards, a growing body of scientific literature was produced on the rich diversity of endemic plants within the low-lying flatlands, and on their endangered status. Consequently, a project, funded by the then apartheid government under the Fynbos Biome Programme, was launched to identify particular conservation "priority-areas" in the low-lying flatlands (Jarman 1986).[31] Yet, due to a combination of increased agricultural development, forced relocations, a later influx of migrants from rural areas and development of factories and industrial complexes, many of these "priority areas" were lost. Meanwhile, the few so-called "nature reserves" on the Cape Flats, including Isoetes Vlei became primarily industrial waste dumping grounds.

According to one state official, Mr. D,[32] during the mid to late 1980s, the CoCT's Environmental Resource Management Department undertook a viability study of the retention pond situated on a piece of privately owned land neighbouring Isoetes Vlei, for flooding and storm water detention. He explained that the objective had been to turn the area, including Isoetes Vlei, into a utility and "community" park. A process of slowly

[31] Sites for conservation were identified through ordering them by means of a numerical rating. The principle factor that determined the value of the rating was the rarity of the vegetation type at each site. Second level and third level factors included habitat diversity, specie richness, size, shape and degree of alien invasive species (Jarman 1986). Also see the Biodiversity Strategy (2003:6).

[32] Pseudonym

purchasing the piece of land thus began. Even though no developmental plan was implemented during this time, much of the intended land – about 26 hectares – was bought by the state and thus the Department of Environmental Resource Management owned it over the next decade. Only after South Africa's 1994 political transition, when the state's gaze and political imperatives moved somewhat towards historically marginalized areas, was an attempt made to implement the initial idea to convert it into a "community park". This illustrates how a combination of apartheid planning's bias towards Table Mountain and "white" areas, in terms of regulated, prohibited and directed development, and the city's post 1994 political and administrative transition, has meant that the city's lowlands received very little to no state attention, in terms of nature conservation, at least until after 1997 (Katzschner 2012; 4; Biodiversity Network 2003).

Consequently, and perhaps unanticipated by Miss Stephens, her mid-20th century conservationist actions and practices were to reverberate into early 21st century Cape Town in unexpected ways, given that nature reserves are so uncommon within the Cape Flats area. Thus, as the narrative about her as well as Yaseen's story illustrate, despite dominant regimes of governance and care, within the "quotidian spaces of everyday life" (Whatmore 2002:97; c.f. de Certeau 1988), marginal and idiosyncratic practices of conservation were and still are often acted out. Such practices continue to influence the present, giving form to the inherited urban lifeworlds of Cape Town and shaping environmental heritages in very particular ways.

Mr. D also explained to me that it was only in 1999 that the CoCT's Environmental Management Department re-considered the initial plan to create a "community park" within and around Isoetes Vlei. The CoCT had imagined a "community park" as a place that would create jobs and be used for various forms of recreation and that there would also be a "nature reserve" with an environmental education centre. Moreover, he added, it was also imagined as a place that would integrate residents from surrounding and historically segregated neighbourhoods (c.f. Maze et al 2002:95 in Katzschner 2012:6). Due to Miss Stephens' legacy and her "foresightedness", the CoCT decided to name the place, at first, the Edith Stephens Wetland Park (hereafter ESWP).[33]

Implementation of the plan to create the ESWP was led by a steering committee that included various partners and stakeholders. One stakeholder was the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, formal custodian of the 3.5 hectare Isoetes Vlei. Mr. D said that the Environmental Management Department had been keen to work with Kirstenbosch to develop the place for environmental education purposes. Yet, he pointed out, that the CoCT had to struggle to get SANBI, then still the National Botanical Institute

[33] Many of the people that I encountered during my research praised Miss Edith Stephens for her "foresightedness"

situated at Kirstenbosch,[34] on board, and to convince them of the conservation value – in terms of the occurrence of a rare and surviving endemic flora - of the new 39 hectare ESWP.

This was mainly due to the fact that when the CoCT had embarked on rehabilitating the land around Isoetes Vlei in 1999, most of it was heavily overgrown and dominated by Port Jacksons and other "exotic" species, as well as being degraded; it thus showed little preservationist potential. First, using resources from the National Working for Water Programme,[35] in conjunction with the National Expanded Public Works Programme, the Environmental Management Department was able to contract (short term) a number of people from surrounding neighbourhoods, to undertake "alien-clearing", and later to rehabilitate the wetland ecology by planting large quantities of indigenous species. Yet, heaps of heavy cement blocks and steel structures, previously dumped on the site, presented a challenge and, after consulting a landscape architect, it was decided to use those waste materials to build an amphitheatre. Carefully scooped into a crescent-shaped hill, and covered with a rich layer of imported top soil, the waste was incorporated into the "nature" reserve, reshaping the topography by "natur-ing" the erstwhile pollutants. A large wooden stage was then built to complete the amphitheatre as a recreational space.

The CoCT also worked to renovate the abandoned and, by then, derelict farm house. One room was redesigned as a hall, a space for "community" events, meetings and workshops. Large parts of the reserve was also re-made through the creation of a water-wise indigenous garden, through planting over 4 000 locally-indigenous trees, through the creation of a medicinal garden, and through building a bird-hide – a small wooden look-out over the retention pond (a constructed wetland) at the end of a boardwalk. The CoCT also erected a high metal fence around parts of the reserve to prohibit persistent dumping – yet most of this fence was gone by the time of my research, having reportedly been stolen.

During the time of this rehabilitation project, a shared conviction came to animate environmental politics within established networks of environmental organizations: that the Cape Town Lowlands (Cape Flats) had been historically "underconserved" despite containing more than 1400 indigenous plant species of which 203 were threatened with extinction.[36] An influential study to shape this conviction was the Botanical Society of South Africa's (1997) *Cape Flats Flora Core Conservation Sites* study. Through target-driven systematic conservation planning, thirty-seven "Core Flora Sites" were identified as critically important for conservation (Katzschner 2012), with the 3.6 hectare Isoetes Vlei

[34] The National Botanical Institute had been formed in 1989 through an amalgamation of the National Botanical Gardens and the Botanical Research Institute – organizations whose origins stretch back to the early parts of the twentieth century and whose roots lie firmly with scientific taxonomies and categorization that emerged through the practice of Cape Botany.

[35] This maintenance responsibility was later taken over by the Working for Wetlands initiative.

[36] See Katzschner (2012; forthcoming), Biodiversity Network (2003), Davis (2005).

being identified as one core conservation site. The report also suggested that expansion of the conservation area would greatly benefit the preservation of the rare seasonal wetland habitat, a recommendation which might have helped fuel Kirstenbosch's eventual buy-in in terms of turning the ESWP into a "nature" reserve.

The 1994 political transition not only radically diverted the state's gaze towards historically marginalized places within Cape Town, it also opened up the country to the potentialities and contradictions of global citizenship. A consequence was improved access to new networks of knowledge and resources – the two often intimately co-dependent. One key paradigm shift that emerged through this new connectedness was a conceptual, discursive and political shift towards concern about the crisis of biodiversity loss and the consequent biodiversity conservation discourse as a crucial component of managing state owned "natural" spaces. According to Mr. D and Katzschner (2012), who had been involved with the ESWP rehabilitation project, the partnerships and relationships that had developed through this project, as well as the growing concern for the Cape Flats Flora, helped to fuel and energize the establishment of the Cape Flats Nature Partnership Project (CFN).

This partnership, established during the early 2000s, included the National Botanical Institute (later SANBI), the Table Mountain Fund of the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), and Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens plus the CoCT's Environmental Management Department. It was also supported by the Table Mountain section of SANParks, and by CapeNature, a provincial conservation body. The CFN partnership was formed in order to work collaboratively to re-think and explore what biodiversity conservation would mean within densely-populated urban landscapes characterized by histories of segregation, under-resourced government structures and low-income to very poor households (Katzschner 2012:1). During the formation of this partnership the ESWP was primarily managed by a contract maintenance service, no on-site managers or staff existed and very few people actually made use of this space.

During the course of the CFN partnership-project, ESWP's management was passed on to the CoCT's Nature Conservation Department. The then CFN project manager explained to me that this occurred because the partners involved were convinced that, being driven by a strong "community development" approach, local government still had a crucial role to play in taking responsibility for managing urban "natures". Once the ESWP was handed over to the Nature Conservation Department – later renamed the Biodiversity Management Branch - to be managed, the concept of it being a "nature reserve" was mapped onto the place and it was re-named the Edith Stephens Nature Reserve (ESNR).

As shown so far, over the years the land that is now ESNR was made, remade, contested, imagined, re-inhabited and managed in a multitude of different ways by both human and

nonhuman actors. Consequently, ESNR, far from being a "nature" reserve – a concept which has come to embody ideas of it being "outside of human fashioning and historicity" (Greenough and Tsing 2003:15) – is best seen as a hybrid landscape. It has come to be continually "territorialized as both an object of conservation" and "deterritorialized as a space of potential development" (Grove 2008:210).

The former happened through the intersection of the place's specific ecological conditions, the "foresight" of Miss Stephens and the subsequent indigenization of the botanical sciences in the Cape Peninsula. Conditions were accentuated by the uneven, enforced and fast-paced processes of urbanization that led to the survival of very little publicly owned land embodying particular valued inherited ecologies and its preservationist-potential being fore-grounded by the biodiversity discourse. Subsequent processes of rendering it as a place of potential development emerged through attempts to stabilize economic relations and then through post-1994 political and institutional shifts. These rationalizations were translated into action through the utilitarian needs of the state in terms of managing the instabilities of the Cape Flats ecologies and the flow and storage of water. During my research period, this hybridity of ESNR – the confluence of preservationist desires and developmental potentialities embodied by its nonhuman lifeworlds – were continually shaping the "political and ethical struggles" that fuelled conservation practices at ESNR (Grove 2008:207-208; 213).

Through these processes, a particular "knowledge/power" constellation (Foucault 1980) – biodiversity discourse – was mapped onto the space and worked to bring on about certain curvatures in its on-going emergence. It resulted in the formation of partnerships across institutional, geographical and cultural boundaries and to the emergence of a particular relational knowledge and material-semiotic practices. The following section explores some of the knowledge contestations, mappings and practices that animated more recent politics of place and conservation at ESNR.

Mapping knowledges

The CFN partnership aimed to breach the assumed division between cultural and biological diversity - between the city's natural heritage and society – with the aim of radically altering how city dwellers relate to nonhuman worlds whilst simultaneously addressing social developmental concerns. According to Katzschner (2012:2), an ex-city official cum development practitioner who was deeply involved in the original conceptualization and implementation of the CFN partnership, who was member of the Project Advisory Group, and who is currently writing a thesis about the project:

> *The project (CFN) aimed to reconnect people with history, place, and knowledge and to challenge the ontological division which has 'the social'*

> *as ineluctably separate from 'the natural'. Cape Flats Nature developed a vision of socio-ecological practices working across shifting and permeable boundaries between nature and society which it made and remade in efforts to address protection of biodiversity in a context of poverty and marginalisation.*

In order to do this, the CFN partnership identified four pilot sites from which to develop its practice – all of them "nature reserves" situated within similar socio-economic demographics across the Cape Flats. The Project Advisory Group identified ESNR as a pilot site and it provided the CFN partnership's main office space, hosting a project which aimed to "network people and nature in the city".[37]According to the previous CFN project manager, Tanya Layne, who was based at ESNR, the first few years were spent trying to build connections between reserves and surrounding neighbourhoods through holding participatory planning workshops and stakeholder meetings.

Unlike like the three other reserves, ESNR already had some established relationships with locally-based structures and organizations. These were mainly a product of the rehabilitation project at the reserve initiated through the Department of Environmental Management. Christine, a strong and outspoken woman and the project manager of the People's Centre Manenberg explained how she came to be involved:

> *A workshop was held in order to introduce the nature reserve. It was to ask what does the community see what must happen there. My gut feeling was that there must be houses built. It took some time to be convinced. That is how they started to get partners. They wanted people to participate in the management and in deciding what the park should look like. Many people don't know that it is a nature reserve until they participate in meetings there. They (the community partners) had to teach the people at Edith Stephens that if you want to impose, the people won't buy in - you have to bring your people here. Exposure is needed. We had a star gazing evening and not even ten people from Manenberg showed up. You have to make an effort and get the people there to see places (the surrounding neighbourhoods) for themselves...*

As Christine pointed out, in order to publicise concern for biodiversity conservation, ESNR had to allow for processes of translation, processes contingent upon, on one hand, working towards getting people to participate in some form of activity at the reserve or in other "natural" spaces across the city, and, on the other, on nature conservationists being exposed to the lived realities of neighbourhood residents. Thus, the CFN partners were required to facilitate a process of translation from a scientific discourse of ecological sustainability and biodiversity conservation into a language that resonated with people's everyday lived realities and the social histories of the Cape Flats (Pitt and Boulle 2010). Layne explained during an interview that when she had become involved with the

[37] CFN partnership project brochure

partnership, she had come with a particular perspective which had attracted her to the project:

> *...I kinda got a sense that local level stuff was maybe where, where there were gaps. So it was very grounded, engaged with community, engaged with government, uhm...and nature. I am not the kind of person that has known the name of the flowers but I have always loved being in nature. And I am still like that. Like, don't ask me a technical question about the nature of the ecosystem but, you know, tell me that it is beautiful and I'll go, ja...so, that is where I was coming from...and also the kind of social justice, equity kind of perspective.*

This shows that the CFN partnership and the people involved with it brought various languages of value within which to situate bio-diverse and green spaces – languages, such as that of aesthetics and social justice, which moved beyond purely abstract scientific valorisation in order to find common ground for dialogue, debate, engagement, justification and thus action. This required a shift from an "ontological reduction of reality" (Argyrou 2005:4), as embodied by the kind of techno-scientific knowledge frameworks within which conservation practice is situated, towards more democratic forms of knowledge production and participatory-planning approaches that are reflexive, flexible and responsive (Katzschner 2012:23).

In trying to publicise concerns over biodiversity loss and the care of diverse nonhuman lifeworlds in the Cape Flats, as well as to integrate people into the managerial practices of conservation and environmental management, the CFN partnership said that a "change at the level of internal belief systems and attitudes - of individuals, organizations, institutions, and indeed, whole communities – is both possible and necessary" (Katzschner 2012:8). Consequently, the CFN partnership, tried to shift nature conservationists' preservationist attitudes whilst simultaneously trying to form, what they called, "urban conservators" (Pitt and Boulle 2010). [38] In doing so, many legacies were de-stabilized.

According to Dale, conservation practices in the city remain burdened by a perspective of its being a "white middle class thing". Christine, for example, once mentioned that ESNR received far fewer resources and lesser care exactly because of its racial demography. As she said:

> *Just look at the state of Edith in relation to Blaawberg and Kirstenbosch...or Helderberg…it's because it lies at the brink of black and coloured communities. The biodiversity department...they think that nature conservation is only for nature conservationists. It is a mentality – still a white mentality.*

[38] According to Pitt and Boulle (2010:23), this means that "by benefiting more people through nature conservation – and by making people truly aware of our interdependence with nature – we develop the consciousness that will create a city of conservators".

Apart from the stakeholder workshops, the CFN partnership tried to change this perception through encouraging a range of activities at ESNR – from allowing social workers to use the space for counselling sessions, hosting holiday programmes for children, candle-making workshops and star-gazing evenings. ESNR has also acted as a "neutral" space for the "gang peace talks" to take place.[39] Rather than strictly regulating the use of the space, the CFN partnership tried to draw people into meaningful and reciprocal engagements with the place as a way to build partnerships.

According to Layne, one of the first things to emerge from the stakeholder workshops was the "community" partners' desire to have on-the-ground management at ESNR. She explained:

> *Community people were in agreement with conservation people in the city saying that 'we want on the ground city management – we want a person – we want somebody to relate to around what we do here'. That was a surprise to me. I thought people would want community employed...I thought there was going to be more of that...but it makes sense, especially in the urban context and to have...it really helps to have dedicated management and its hard work to be in a city bureaucracy. It is better to have an in-person, than to just be on the outside shouting in.*

Consequently, one of the CFN partnership's first interventions for which it sought funding was the creation of on-site management positions at all the city nature reserves.[40] During the course of the CFN partnership, management positions and salary provisions were slowly taken over and permanently integrated into the CoCT's Biodiversity Management Branch and many positions were occupied – in apartheid colloquial - by "black" and "coloured" persons. In other words, the CFN partnership attempted to institutionalize a democratic and participatory approach to urban conservation which resulted in state-locality[41] relations being re-structured to facilitate decentralized forms of environmental governance.

Ultimately, it was CFN's open-ended "good" practice that was also its demise. When one of the main partner and funding organizations, SANBI, suddenly suffered serious financial strain in 2010, the CFN partnership was one of the first projects to dissolve, albeit not without resistance. Not only was the CFN project neither institutionally nor contract-bound at that time – but it was also seen as falling outside the mandated framework of SANBI as a knowledge-management institution. One of the partners then involved with CFN, and now working for SANBI, explained to me:

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[39] Between some of the main Hanover Park gangs and the police.

[40] According to the CFN project manager much of the first few years of the partnership project were spend trying to set up a funding proposal and to find possible financial supports that would enable them to employ people.

[41] See Agrawal (2005).

> *...people stuff is messy and not seen as science even though I would argue... but you know, it's not seen as proper science, it's messy, it's grounded, it's real, it involves people...it's soft...you don't do experiments...*

The kind of relational and situated knowledge that emerged through CFN's everyday grassroots practice, and the kind of horizontal networks it was working to create, were thus not seen as something necessarily pertinent to the kind of knowledge needed in order to *conserve* and *manage* biodiversity and urban "natures" - at least from the dominant institutional and governance perspectives. In trying to re-imagine and re-configure self-other environmental relationalities, the CFN partnership created a particular knowledge of diversity, knowledges, which due to their fragile and situated existence at the interstices of ontological difference and translation, are difficult to define, to map onto abstract representation and to reproduce. They are thus not as highly valued within the public domain of institutions and textuality (Pitt and Boulle 2010; Katzschner 2012).

Despite the project's demise, the CFN's awareness of people's role in conserving biodiversity came with the realization that such people-centred practice would "demand particular skills of biodiversity practitioners, and institutional processes to support the development of these skills and the growth of this practice" (Layne 2011 pers.com in Katzschner 2012:8). Consequently, during the second phase of the project, CFN tried to institutionalize some of its practice. This process led to the publication of *Growing Together: thinking and practice of urban conservators* (Pitt and Boulle 2010), which has now become a resource for local biodiversity management practitioners and is also used in tertiary educational settings. Other permanent positions were also created on the sites – e.g. an environmental education officer or "people and conservation officer". The CFN partnership project also introduced a practice of hosting Champions Forums, a practice which continued during my research period. The Champions Forum was framed as workshops to be held in order to bring together "community partners" and reserve managers to deliberate over possibilities of embarking on collaborative projects.

Most importantly, as the CFN partnership was based at ESNR, the employees working there were intimately involved with the unfolding of its practice and language. As I will show in the final chapter, the ESNR staff were able to become involved with diverse projects, workshops and initiatives, enabling the creation of different forms and hierarchies of knowing and of expertise amongst them, and shaping their subjectivities in very particular ways.

Through the CFN partnership and its practices of building relationships, holding workshops and exposing urban conservators and scientists to some of the complexities of the socio-materialities of the Cape Flats, a particular relational knowledge emerged – knowledge rooted in an ecological sensibility that advocated a nuanced understanding of human and nonhuman lifeworlds as interdependent and interconnected and thus defined

by multiple self-environmental relationalities (Pitt and Boulle 2010). Consequently, the CFN partners worked to incorporate such an understanding into the conservation practices of the CoCT. In doing so, it has impacted to some degree on emerging practices of conservation.

"The spirit of Cape Flats Nature isn't dead"[42]

During my first day of fieldwork it was already evident that the CFN partnership-project had a lasting impact on the practices and poetics of nature conservation within Cape Town. Luzann advised me to attend a workshop held by Cape Nature for final year Nature Conservation students from Cape Peninsula University of Technology at the Blaauwberg Nature Reserve. Cape Nature had invited Tanya Layne, Municipal Biodiversity Programme Co-ordinator for SANBI and previous project manager for the CFN partnership, and Bridget Pitt, co-author of the CFN publication and an established novelist, to introduce the "Cape Tech" students to the approach generated by the CFN partnership.

Most of the students present were wearing their dark green nature conservation uniforms – uniforms which themselves are steeped in a particular militaristic and imperialistic history of conservation and with multiple continuing associations. Stacy once explained to me that, for a while, she was permitted to wear her own clothes because of Luzanns' sensitivity to the context within which they were working:

> *...like I'd have a badge right...but I'd like wear my own three-quarter pants and I'd still be looking very much green but not standardized like...you know...ja, "hier kom die boere" (here come the boers). Imagine marching into Manenberg looking like a 50/50[43] conservationist...I mean people would have stoned me by that point...*

As Stacy pointed out, many parts of Cape Town remain sensitive to its histories and thus conservation interventions based on authoritarian and imposing practices are not welcome.

Once Bridget arrived, everybody was asked to go outside and gather in a circle alongside the lake. As everyone settled into the space, we were asked to close our eyes and to think back to that very first moment when we discovered our connection to nature. Opening our eyes, Bridget instructed everyone to take a walk somewhere on the reserve and to go and sit quietly for a while to let our senses take in the immediate. She also asked everyone to

[42] Interview, Tanya Layne, CFN project manager

[43] 50/50 is a recent South African nature programme that was usually scripted in Afrikaans.

pick up something that reminded them of their own conscious experience of connection to nature. After a few minutes we all moved into the education centre.

Once inside Bridget asked everyone to just speak out any one word or phrase that they associate with nature, making a list on board. Among the words spoken included peace, serenity, variety, joy, completeness, oneness, alive, amazing, purpose, clear thoughts, freedom, friendship, part of something, release, closeness to God, spirituality, growth, quality of life and making a difference. Some students were asked to share their testimonies of how they came to be studying nature conservation. The reason for this, Bridget explained, was to remind them that they have to keep the connection alive for as they start to work within an urban setting, it becomes easy to forget why exactly one is doing such work. Bridget continued by asking everyone what happens to them when they do not spend time in or with nature. Responses included feelings of depression, anger, stress, detachment, sickness, chaos, frustration, an illusion of control and feelings of being trapped.

Bridget then talked about the implications for people who have never been able to access nature, suggesting that they might have little appreciation for it and often felt feelings of fear and detachment. Nature conservation should be about educating for nature, she explained, about bringing nature to people and breaking their fears. It should be about allowing them to connect somehow, because, she asked: “how much is the education going to mean if you don’t have that connection?” For Bridget, humanity has never been so disconnected from nature - the challenge is real, you have to keep that connection alive and share your passion.

After this discussion, Stacy and another two urban conservators from other reserves did a role-play. Animated and creative, the role-play performed the complexities that arise in contestation over space use in Cape Town’s nature reserves. In the dramatization, a Rastafarian was harvesting plants and smoking marijuana when an urban conservation officer encountered him. Instead of immediately responding in the register of legality and calling in the police, the role-play portrayed – quite effectively – possible negotiating modes suggesting a way that allows for respect and a sharing of knowledge.

Nature conservation in this setting was enacted as the conservation of specific values. In reflecting on their own reasons for having gone into nature conservation, the students were made to consider their own values and valorised ways of being. My own thinking back to that first moment of connection involved a deep emotional recall of my hometown – of dusty streets and spectacular sunsets, of summer storms and the subsequent awakening of the Kalahari bush, suddenly bristling with life – it involved a sensuous remembering, of textures, of affect, of being-in-place. It thus fore-grounded the emotional and affective aspects of embodied experiences associated with an attachment to a

particular emplaced nature, the relational aspect of knowing what constitutes nature. Moreover, nature conservation and environmental education were linked not only with the care and protection of nonhuman worlds, they were simultaneously concerned with care of the self and care of others. It was enacted as an ethical practice (Lambek 2010; Foucault 2005).

Chapter 3: Urban conservation from a micro-perspective

Becoming a manager; managing "natures"

Whilst I was doing research at ESNR, the place seemed to be going through an unsure transitional period – from being enfolded within a people-centred practice to having to prioritize the objectives set by the Biodiversity Branch. Yet, Luzann, the on-site manager, pointed out that "biodiversity conservation" has recently been taken out of the CoCT's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and, with the current housing crisis and the continual migration of people into urban areas, these sites' survival remained largely undetermined. As she asserted:

> *We are not relevant to our city. If we are not on the IDP, it means that we are not important to our city. That is quite scary; if the pressure will increase ...we will lose the debate...If we want to successfully conserve our sites and keep them...we are going to have to get people to understand what we are doing.*

Despite her managerial responsibilities, for Luzann, the formation of partnerships was crucial for enabling forms of dialogue and translation and thus ensuring that the place would become relevant and valuable to others and, therefore, "more likely to be conserved". Luzann had started out by working at Harmony Flats Nature Reserve[44] for her practical year whilst studying Nature Conservation at the Cape Peninsula Technikon in Cape Town. After the completion of her studies, Luzann was employed at ESNR at the age of twenty-one as one of the first and youngest on-site managers to receive training through the CFN project. She acknowledged the vital impact that CFN had on her practice and thinking as manager:

> *...a lot of things that I think around my work, stems from that, from Cape Flats Nature as a project. Look, I am not Sharlene or Levine[45] - who were also in the Cape Flats Nature project; but they have had years of experience in conservation before they actually came in contact with Cape Flats Nature, while I was fresh out of my student year into a project like Cape Flats Nature...so...a lot of things that I thought around my work were influenced by the people involved in the project.*

Although the CFN partnership significantly shaped her managerial practices, during my fieldwork and my conversations with various people, I became aware that Luzann's presence, capacity and ethical sensibility had not only enabled the continuity of the CFN project, but also had been instrumental in co-crafting CFN practice and the relational knowledge that emerged through it. This is perhaps due to the kind of space created by

[44] This interesting piece of land is extremely small in size and yet contains a very high concentration of biological diversity. It is also situated between two highly contrasted neighbourhoods – in terms socio-economic conditions (See Figure 3).
[45] Two other women on-site managers from other "nature" reserves.

the partnership which allowed Luzann to bring her own personal history and way of knowing into this political domain. As she told me:

> *I didn't grow up in a community where conservation was popular...that was just not the way things were and I think it was nice for me that Cape Flats Nature also appreciated that background, where I came from. That it wasn't just the thing of everything else that you did before studying was wrong...I like that, I didn't have to leave myself behind, that I could bring my past with me, bring my upbringing with me, and bring my background with me....*

Luzann grew-up in Montana, Grassy Park, a lower to middle-class neighbourhood in Cape Town's southern suburbs that formed part of the designed "coloured" residential areas during the Apartheid years. Both of her parents were qualified teachers and devote Christians who were often involved in community activism and played a formative role in both Luzann's political awareness and moral sensibility. Her mother experienced the Apartheid-era's urban re-structuring first-hand when she was forcibly relocated from Claremont to Athlone – another suburb close to Grassy Park and the place where Luzann spend some of her early childhood years. It is also here, in Athlone, in her grandmother's backyard garden that she had some of her earliest and most memorable encounters with urban nature, marked as they were by her grandmother's love for and knowledge about Cape Flora. As Luzann told me once – "she knows species, maybe she doesn't say it in scientific language, but she knows species and she can tell me about them, she can describe plants to me that she knew as a girl and that she doesn't see anymore…the Red Data Species[46]….you know, the knowledge in one person in that generation is amazing". Nine years after Luzann first started working at the ESNR and now with a husband and three children of her own, her passion for urban nature conservation remains deeply folded within a concern for knowledge-sharing, heritage practice and social justice.

Speaking to some of the people associated with SANBI and the *Growing Together* publication, they often reiterated that Luzann "works amazingly organically" and that "she just does the stuff by instinct". Stacy expressed it poignantly and animated:

> *But the one thing that I will always say is that Luzann just got this know-how...she thinks community conservation. Cape Flats Nature had no idea that she was the best thing that ever happened to them. I mean she was the first and I would say the most diligent community conservator. She had to get my head around working with the community when I got there. I mean she basically thinks streamline community. And she taught me everything I know...how to collaborate with the community, how to think like a community person, how to do project programmes...if I wanted to develop something new, she would be okay....look at it like this. She trained me basically how to become a community programme initiator. She also has this heart, like, which speaks from the community.*

[46] The IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species.

The CFN partnership project manager also spoke about Luzann's orientation towards forming relationships and saw people like Luzann to be crucial to the continuation of the ideas introduced by CFN because of the:

> *vision that she has and the way that she works with building relationships and making connections and her ear for what is important for community and what's happening there. Luzann just has an amazing way of weaving those relationships.*

In similar vein, in my conversation with Bridget she explained:

> *We met a few managers like that who did have that...they just had a real gut feel for the need to work like that...it's just natural to her. I don't think that she even really thinks about what she is doing, she just does it.*

The metaphor of somebody working organically or something emerging organically was often used at ESNR and by the CFN partners and seemed to underpin valuations of self-organization, self-reliance and integrity. Moreover, as I continue to show, this metaphor was given a relational and reciprocal dimension through another metaphor, "growing together",[47] a metaphor often used by Luzann, Dale and Stacy to describe what the partnership-approach or "community conservation" meant for them.

Through my research and through engaging with Tania Katzschner's (2012) work it became apparent that crucial to the shaping of the CFN partnership were the diverse people that came together in its making, and the kind of relational knowledge that emerged through their practice. This was due to their practice being orientated towards protecting biodiversity by "engaging with people rather than erecting fences" (Davis 2005) and through encouraging dialogues, debates, and encounters rather than just "educating" (Pitt and Boulle 2010). Moreover, Katzschner's (2012) work suggests that this practice led to the articulation of a particular organizational ethic premised on flexibility in terms of forging relationships, an openness to making connections across multiple lines of difference and a commitment to the continual engagement in collective cycles of learning through reflexivity and careful deliberation. In speaking to Luzann she reflected on how this manner of working had impacted on her own managerial practices:

> *…the important thing for environment is to keep the debate open...and respectful. A lot of times, we, professional people, scientists...we do come with the attitude that we have the answer, we either are the answer and the saviours or whatever...and we are coming there to teach you, to make you aware, to open your eyes because you were blinded for all your life, that kind of attitude. But actually, if you start opening the conversation, there is a lot of things that we were blinded to because, if we think about what we need to do and what we need to save, but there are a lot of other things that make it lot more complex than just saving a piece of land. People bring*

[47] This is also the name of the CFN publication.

> *that. People bring the other layers. If you speak to them in a certain manner, if you open up the conversation again. But I think that again makes us aware of what context Edith is existing in...things like: the communities we worked in, for instance, housing would be a big thing for someone living in the vlei, in the informal settlement on the other side. But for people like Manenberg, Hanover Park, much more settled areas...the social things are issues...like drugs, and crime....those things, so how do we keep those conversations open? How do we hear what they say and they hear what we are saying? It's important…and very difficult as well...but I think it's important to keep the conversation open, it's important that our education programmes are relevant, it's important that our interventions we are doing are relevant...so uhm, that's...that way of thinking, that comes from Cape Flats Nature...that comes from people, that comes from it being not only being a one-dimensional thing we do...there is a whole different dimension and being aware of those dimensions.*

In listening to Luzann, it seemed that the CFN partnership had managed to encourage what Whatmore (2009:587) has termed "generative dialogues" or "new ways of practicing relations between science and democracy", between expert and public knowledge. According to Luzann, the conversation or debate about what should be conserved and how it should be done has to be kept open - a conversation that has long been the reserve of scientists, urban planners, architects, and public managers and which has historically excluded the majority of urban dwellers. In opening up the conversation, multiple other layers and dimensions emerge – both political and ethical – that complicate purely preservationist and scientific practices of conservation and technocratic top-down models of urban development. For Luzann, the success of conservation practices are highly dependent on opening up the conversation in order to find common ground from which people would want to or would be capacitated to join the debate, and in which knowledge-exchange can take place. As Luzann explained:

> *It's good to have information, knowledge is important; science is a very important part of our job. But it's what you do with that knowledge. So, for instance, do the communities understand their right to a clean environment? And uhm....those kind of knowledge of how much is left, what is left....we need to conserve....need to relate to things like that. You know, those kinds of things. You need to be careful about how you are giving the knowledge...in ways that people understand. How are we translating the knowledge we have in our sector?*

As Luzann often reiterated, approaching Cape Town's problem of biodiversity conservation is related not only to the problem of knowledge-exchange, but also to a problem of translation, a problem she has tried to overcome through forming partnerships. Yet, practices of translation are complex and are about more than just educating or explaining "facts" to people. They involve forming relations, both intimate and familiar, over time. As Luzann told me: "we are talking that now people need to change their attitude, people need to change their behaviours. That takes engagement, hey, that takes

engagement". For Luzann, ESNR – as a commons - can play an important part in facilitating such engagement, in affecting a shift in people's knowing towards becoming urban conservators. As she explained:

> *...I think we still have a long way to go. I think there has been a lot of isolation. People have been isolated from natural areas; natural areas are seen as places where they have to pay or go out to the outskirts of town, and they weren't made to appreciate what is in their backyard...just around the corner...and keep that clean and keep your environment within your community clean. Uhm, that's a mindset that had to change because, for them to appreciate us, this site...they need to appreciate their environment...because, if you think about it, Edith is not Table Mountain National Park and Edith is in their backyard, is kind of in their backyard. So for them to appreciate this, they have to appreciate their communities...and we have to make sure that Edith is part of that community that they are appreciating. That is the point.*

In speaking about ESNR as "Edith", Luzann fore-grounded its social history - as having been co-constituted through the involvement of a particular woman, a factor seemingly affording the place social agency in terms of affecting perceptions of "natural" places, of re-imagining the agency of people in the continual making of "natures" and of re-connecting to these histories. For Luzann, in order to protect biodiversity, both the "urban" and the "natural" need to be perceived differently - "it is a mindset that has to change", a mindset about the multiple nonhuman lifeworlds that interlace the urban fabric and how these lifeworlds should be valued, especially those ones in people's "backyard".[48] Importantly, it also includes places which, historically, have been subjected to state abandonment and are currently, often stereotypically, represented as ridden with gang violence, poverty and neglect. Moreover, Luzann also reiterated that ESNR could provide perspective into what parts of the Cape Flats looked like before the extensive urban development. Consequently, for her, this historical perspective could facilitate forms of re-connection between "society" and "nature" – understood to be crucial not only for conserving biodiversity, but also for building other forms of connection within urban spaces:

> *That is one of the things about an urban space...that disconnection that always exists, hey...there is always a disconnection from the natural area, a disconnection from the people around you, there is always a disconnection...and one of the things we need to do is create connection again. That is part of what we do. And I think that is always difficult. I mean, to get people to feel connected to their past, connected to their future, connected to people around you, connected to nature...that is an important part of what we do. Create that awareness and stuff.*

[48] Yet, this is not to forget that there are numerous people, like Yaseen, who are engaged in self-organized practices of conservation across the Cape Flats, people who nurture and transform that which are in their "backyards".

It seemed that there was a shared perception amongst the people involved with the CFN partnership and urban conservation – an understanding of the urban condition as fraught with lived experiences of isolation and disconnection,[49] an understanding that places like "Edith" along with practicing conservation in a way that includes people, might help to facilitate experiences of re-connection and re-valuation, experiences understood in turn as crucial for the creation of urban conservators and an urban commons. Yet, for Luzann, in order to affect this change, people first need to appreciate their communities and "Edith" needs to be part of that "community" which they care for. At ESNR, this partly entailed a political practice of coming-into-community with people that were politically visible within their respective residential areas, people who were usually active in locally-based organizations such as Manenberg People's Centre and Hanover Park Civic Centre, or who were interested in what was termed "community development".

One of ESNR's partners was Ma Gladys, a Xhosa-speaking woman in her mid-70s whom I initially met through Stacy. Originally from the Eastern Cape but resident in Gugulethu since 1968, her life and know-how had been significantly shaped by her strong enterprising spirit and the care she took for others. Despite being recently retired, she and her husband were among few Gugulethu residents collecting glass bottles on a large scale for recycling, a practice meant to supplement their income.[50]Apart from this side-project, Ma Gladys was also seen as a pivotal force in her "community". As Stacy told me: "she is a stirrer – that is what makes Ma Gladys achieve, she doesn't sit down. She stirs". Even though Ma Gladys supported the idea of conservation, she also acted as a mentor for many young unemployed people and thus valued being connected to possible avenues of knowledge and support through ESNR. In turn, Stacy and Luzaan valued being connected to Ma Gladys due to both her intimate knowing of life in a part of the Cape Flats and her rich experiential knowledge. Layne, reflecting on the partnership-approach introduced by the CFN partnership, explained to me:

> *As organizations at community level ebb and flow...you know old partners leave and new partners come abroad...for me it is less about holding on to any specific project or partner that the fact that those relationships are there...even if they come and go...that there are relationships with community, to understand what is alive within that community, in that point in time.*

[49] This understanding comes from a certain "common sense" – shared by many environmentalists worldwide – a common sense based on an assumption and belief that modernity has been acquired at a price, that we have become ever more "disconnected" from "nature".

[50] Working with an established firm, they received a large container which, once filled up to a certain marked level, was collected. Lately, due to other people having started doing the same thing, it was no longer an economically-viable project for Ma Gladys.

Evident in this management approach is a flexibility towards forming relationships as an end in themselves rather than just a means; a valorisation of inter-subjective knowing for practices of urban conservation. Hence, needed in order to politically negotiate the conservation of urban "nature" is an understanding of what is "alive" within different contexts at particular times - knowledge of the situated relations of power and how social agency can be negotiated. This seems pertinent for translating conservationist concerns into collective action. Luzann, reflecting on the role of specific partnerships in her own thinking and practice, pointed out:

> *I also surround myself with people like Dale because I think that there is always a threat of being stagnant...because it is human nature to be in a comfort zone all the time. So I always try to find people who are shocking me out of my comfort zone so I don't know...Christine does that quite often, Ma Gladys does that quite often...Dale definitely does that quite often...so you always have those kind of people that make sure that your practice is alive and fresh and relevant to the times.*

It seemed that the more long-term partners of ESNR were people whom affected Luzann's own knowing in a way she valued, in a manner that undid her convictions and certainties to some extent and through which her managerial practice could be responsive and relational rather than prescriptive. Indeed, many of the partnerships seemed to have taken form due to a particular openness towards different perspectives within ESNR's managerial practices. Still, importantly, the main partnerships were mostly rooted in interpersonal affinities (Fore 2012).

The main partnership that energized the ESNR politics and practices during my research period was between Luzann and Dale. Dale had been an ESNR "community partner" since the first project the CoCT initiated and was also present during the CFN partnership. A woman in her late sixties, Dale was comfortably retired after a life-long career of nursing, being a social entrepreneur and business owner, a life trajectory she had crafted despite various hardships and with almost no starting capital. As a young child, Dale had taken care of her siblings when her parents were no longer able. She moved to Cape Town only as a young woman in order to pursue a nursing career. Shortly after, Dale got married and had two children which consequently interrupted her nursing training. When her husband unexpectedly fell seriously ill and she had to suddenly "put food on the table" as well as care for him and the children, Dale decided to start her own business:

> *So for me…nothing held me back from my dream. I made space for where I wanted to go and I did it and it was not easy…it was 1986. What bank would have given a coloured woman a loan? But I got the loan and bought my own vehicle and I went out and got contracts. I worked hard. Because I thought, I am not only doing it for them, I am also doing it for myself, because I want my freedom.*

Dale often engaged in long debates and conversations with Luzann on what "best practice" might be in terms of the management of ESNR. She was committed to being critical of the government whilst at the same time working with officials in order to access resources and support. People volunteering at ESNR often approached Dale to help them navigate the city bureaucracy and she always reiterated that "you have to understand the process" and "educate yourself". During my research period, Dale and Luzann were creating an ESNR-based permanent social developmental initiative which aimed to combine Dale's entrepreneurial skills with Luzann's conservationist sensibilities and their access to government opportunities. Thus, the CFN project's openness and flexibility towards the formation of partnerships have also led to the Biodiversity Management Branch engaging –albeit not directly- in unlikely collaborations and to the re-imagining of what nature conservation means.

Yet, partnerships, Luzann explained to me one day in the midst of the daily business of the office, must be like marriages – partners have to grow together and you have to take time to reflect. In other words, she valued partnerships like that of Dale and Ma Gladys, which could potentially be reciprocal, which would enable the development of both people and organizations involved. This "development" often happened, according to Luzann, through bringing together different perspectives. Although in such relationships – both formalized and familiar - she often reiterated, that it is important for partners to have their "own identity". As she explained to me:

> *I think sometimes, even with our best intentions we (the state), cripple people and we shouldn't do that. That is why I am very keen on working with organizations that have their own identity. They know what they are about, they know what they are moving towards; and all we are doing is we complement that, we build on that...That is important.*

In other words, despite valuations of difference and diversity there was both an element of self-reliance and mutual responsibility within the idea of "developing" or "growing" together – partners had to be capable and they had preferably to know towards what desired objectives they were moving.

Thus, despite Luzann's tendency towards incorporating diverse perspectives and keeping the conversation and debate about the environment open, it seemed that she also realized that, in navigating the political terrain of pluralism and difference, one needs to work to preserve and reflect on some kind of stable ground of explicit values from which to secure ones' identity and perspective – however much it might be in flux. In an in-depth interview, Luzann, reflected on her practice as a public official navigating this difficult state/science/public interface on an everyday level and the challenges she faced in becoming a manager and practicing conservation through engagement with people:

...there are some things that I am not flexible on and some things that I am flexible on, you know,...there are principles that you have that's got nothing to do with the diploma that you studied, hey…it is all about who you are and what you believe in, right? And I think those are things that I am not flexible on. So when somebody says something...like, "Edith the social project"...and "don't worry just so we can finish out operation stuff"...I am not cool with that. Because if you are a person of integrity, which is what is required of us as government workers, integrity...so if you sign for funding and take a project then you should deliver on it.. Like I said, that is not something that you learn at a Technicon or an institution. Those are the things you pick up on.

Like, I have some people, when they say something they keep their word and that is something that I have learnt from them. So there are things that I will not easily be flexible on, and I have people, whether it is personally or at the workplace, I will hold them accountable for those things. So there is this accountability for me on different levels: whether it is in my job to my manager, but also to a lot of people and I talk about my work all the time. I promise you, I love my job quite a bit...I will be at a social event and talk about my job....I just really love what I do and uhm, like I said, when I have these conversations I have the kind of friends who will tell me; "No that is not right, what you did was wrong!"

And, uhm, sometimes at work you don't have that kind of accountability because people are willing to give up principles and standards of their own to achieve a job. It is always a question at work, how much are you willing to give up as a person, of who you are for the work that you do? So I love my cause, but I am actually not willing to give myself up for the cause or who I am. You know, uhm, conserving nature is something that requires integrity. You know like, uhm, people won't believe in your cause if who you are is not well represented. Right? Because you represent your cause, right, so if you are stabbing people in the back and you don't have integrity, people start seeing environment in that way, you know, the sector that manages it is what they represent nature to be. And nature is such a pure thing how can you not be a person of integrity when you are working with something so beautiful. Sorry that was more poetic than anything else but that is just that how I see things....

I mean, you go out and you enjoy Table Mountain, or you enjoy Helderberg, or you go to these areas...it represents something so natural, and so beautiful...and that is what our cause is as conservators, that is what we represent, that is what we are bringing across to people, that is what we want to conserve and I think it is just right to be, to do that in the right way...To give benefit to the things that we are trying to conserve, you know. That is how I see things, maybe also a bit naive also, but anyway....I have fought very hard to protect that, that idea in my head. Because, like, you start getting involved with all of these scientific things, you know, and this and that and you forget about the original reason, why you are actually...For a time, when I was struggling, who I was as a manager, I lost that...so I protect that. So sometimes even when I am having debates with people and I feel it comes to a point where I am getting frustrated and I am losing my faith in what I am doing, then I will stop the debate because I need to protect my passion, my idea that I have of what I am conserving. And I think that is why Dale says that she can connect it so easily with the social things, how can you not connect it to the social things??? [laughter] If

you see it that way you will connect it to the social things very easily, ja...that's true....

I often encountered this kind of political subjectivity amongst newly constituted urban conservators - subjectivities in which one's values or ethical sensibilities were not something that was *outside* of conservation but rather that constituted it and the very stuff from which it was made, re-made and practised on an everyday basis. As Luzann put it: "I need to protect my passion, my idea of what I am conserving". Through my research and my various conversations with people that were previously involved with the CFN partnership, it seemed that their focus on translations, on building relationships and on reflective practice[51] as well as their working towards opening up possibilities for encounters of a different kind in trying to build a commons, (to find commonalities) - led to the foregrounding of the ethical, not as a set of norms and ideals to be held up but rather as something contested, lived, relational and practiced (Lambek 2010) and as central to urban conservation.

Evident in this narration was Luzann's own ethical self-fashioning (e.f. Fore 2012:22-27) and how she reflected on how the process was continually being affected by the multiple relationships in her life, and by the difficulties of navigating between professional and personal accountabilities. Through her experience, she said, she had found that conserving a "pure" and "beautiful" nature have meaning and truth to her, and was crucial to her identity construction and to practicing urban conservation. Grove (2008:208) has argued that such attachments to particular conditions and objects, including the nonhuman, "become invested as the grounds of identity" (also Butler 1993, 1997; Foucault 2005) and that the enactment of a discursively purified "nature" as the grounds for subjectivity, may lead to an experience of hybridity as a threat to one's ontological security. In situating Table Mountain and Helderberg – both places which also harbour long cultural and social histories – as "something so natural and pure", Luzann juxtaposed them to "Edith", a place of hybridity and thus, perhaps, unintentionally, de-valued ESNR's "nature" in relation to them.

But for Luzann, what one represents as a person is inseparable from the kind of environment one wants to conserve or create. Thus, for her, to convince others about conserving that which one values, one has to embody these values and practice them on an everyday basis. Consequently, conservation for Luzann entailed not only the protection and care of a "beautiful" and "pure" nature, it also entailed conservation of the self in one's relationship to others – both human and nonhuman- and of particular modes of being and of becoming.

[51] See Katzschner (2012); interview Layne, Pitt and Boulle (2010).

"Growing together": towards an urban commons

Dale and Luzann together conceptualized the "Hyacinth project". A few years previously they had embarked on a project engaging with the Expanded Public Works Programme and various other governmental partners to clear the retention pond of Hyacinth – a competitive weed that spreads quickly, suffocating life-giving flows in freshwater systems. Instead of bringing in contractors to get the job done as quickly as possible, they conjured an alternative approach, one built upon getting unemployed youth from surrounding neighbourhoods involved in the removal process. It was Dale who challenged the CoCT to re-think its approach. She explained:

> *You know, they wanted to use chemicals for the removal of the hyacinth and I said "no ways". They wanted to tell me that the chemicals would do nothing to the life in the water but I replied: "there is nothing what you can say in terms of it not having negative effects. The effects might not be visible now but you are changing the concept of the water, totally, whatever you introduce the content of the water becomes something different. So maybe now it does not have an effect but in ten years' time what you might have done now would have an effect then. You can't plant something and because you can't see the growth in fifteen years you think it is not growing. It's got its own time".*

Working with the established "community" structures, Luzann and Dale sought not only to provide an income to those involved but also tried to assist them in pursuing longer-term livelihood strategies. Consequently, their selection process for the programme was driven by an assertion that the appointee had to have ambition and a willingness "to grow as a person". After the Hyacinth project's relative success,[52] Luzann decided to formalize the partnership with Dale in order to support her in creating a permanent initiative based at ESNR. The initiative was envisioned as a "platform" - a connecting point between locally-based non-governmental organizations and the state bureaucracy for knowledge sharing towards a fostering of entrepreneurship *within* the bounds of conservation concerns or objectives. As Dale asserted:

> *I'm a business person and I don't understand "NG-world"...I could never be able to operate efficiently in an NGO concept. Because the NGO concept is "we are trying to change your life", but the people that are driving it they've often got nothing that has changed their lives. So you cannot safely say I am doing something for you if you are not taking care of yourself...I can't tell you, "here is a piece of bread" but I don't have bread to eat. So many NGO operate on that basis. And I didn't understand that and we didn't want to reinvent the wheel...*

[52] Three people found permanent employment in the city bureaucracy

Moreover, Dale often reiterated that they had to create a space for people to "grow", a growth that was defined through a particular ethic based on the nurturing of autonomy, self-reliance and self-preservation whilst simultaneously emphasizing and embedding it within practices of mutual care. As Dale expressed it:

> *The person should stay in the programme for a maximum 18 months. Then you have to be out. Then you should have grown already. You should have grown. So another person could come in. Because many NGOs have these projects and then it doesn't work...then people work with them for twenty years and they just don't grow, they just stay there, below. Their self-esteem doesn't grow, their way of being at home doesn't grow...And it is the growth that I dream this platform will enable...You have to learn how to go further. So that is what the platform does. But it uses government opportunities.*
>
> *I go look where the opportunities are, where the money is - but it has to be linked with conservation. Because many people think that conservation is just this (gestures towards the surrounding park). It's not. Conservation is your whole lifestyle. That is what conservation is. It is the way you interact with your electricity, with your water at home and with people. The whole thing about conservation is that you have to conserve the body. Self and nature is not separate. If you can't conserve yourself...you have to educate yourself how you can do it sensibly.*

As this narration of Dale indicates as well as in my conversations with Luzann, within this context urban conservation was enacted *as* development – the development or "growth" of particular ethical sensibilities for relating to the world, to oneself and to others. Dale named the platform the Joseph Pedro Foundation after another "community partner" who was also avidly involved with ESNR, an elderly man from Hanover Park, described by Luzann as a "hard-core champion". As she said:

> *...you don't get people like that, really, he was like a soldier. He was amazing. He was involved with the Health Forum, he was involved with the Policing Forum, he was involved with education...he was involved with church stuff...he was just involved and he was interested in really building up Hanover Park as a community again. I remember, at his funeral, people were saying that he always got involved with everything but he always had time to knock on your door and ask you how you were doing...He was just that, he had a big heart...*

Sadly, Joseph Pedro passed away not long after the Hyacinth project came to an end, and it was a hard blow for Luzann and Dale who had hoped that he would be at the "fore front" of the new "grassroots" project. Consequently, Dale decided to name the project after him:

> *For me it was just...for the life he lived...we are paying something back so that we can always remember - his unselfish way of doing things...for no payment just for that passion and that is why we called it Joseph Pedro.*

Apart from establishing the Urban Agricultural Group at ESNR, Mr. Pedro had also affected most people working there at that time, and seems to have been an important part of what the place had become. In speaking to Stacy, who had then recently received an award for her environmental education work at the Community Service Awards[53] ceremony in Hanover Park, where Mr. Pedro was also awarded posthumously, she explained:

> *Mr. Pedro was one of my milestones in life...if I did not meet him; I wouldn't be where I am either. I said that to his wife the other day....I said, you know, I would not have been looking at Hanover Park in the way I do today, like it's my community. I don't know if the award nominations would have even looked at me if I hadn't been one of Mr. Pedro's...what do I call myself...I was one of his causes...and he was not one of mine, I was one of his causes...his cause was to get me so "in-depthly" involved in Hanover Park that I couldn't leave. He took me to one of the old-age homes and all he did was introduce me to everybody...*
>
> *He was trying to show me that, no matter who you are in the community, no matter how many walls you have between yourself and like the normal community, what your position is or what you were doing when you were ten years younger, you play a part...there is no, like...you can't develop this person because this person belongs to an old-age home...because I never knew the linkages I could make. And that was Mr. Pedro's big thing...everybody is connected...he showed that to me so clearly.*

The practice of forming "community" partnerships, the staff at ESNR often reminded me, has never been a one-way process. Rather it affects all those involved – albeit differently – in their own knowing and processes of becoming. In being embedded and emplaced within a particular context – the Cape Flats – and through the involvement of particular people and partnerships, ESNR's staff members were exposed to particular encounters, encounters that had come to generate new ways of knowing the place and that had re-configured the emerging material and moral economies, both at and around this tiny wetland reserve.

For Luzann, Dale's entrepreneurial experience and sensibility had challenged her to re-think possible ways of drawing people into meaningful partnerships with ESNR in a manner that addresses both conservation and social development concerns. Attempting to take the Joseph Pedro Foundation forward, Luzann and Dale were experimenting with the idea of introducing *"waterblommetjies"*[54] within the surrounding rivers as an economically viable harvesting project as well as rehabilitating waterways. For Luzann,

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[53] The awards were organized by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport. More than fifty awards were handed out to nominated members of the Hanover Park community in an elaborate and touching ceremony.

[54] Literally translates to 'small water flower', known in English as Cape pondweed or Cape hawthorn, scientifically as *Aponogeton distachyos*.

this project promised new relations between urban dwellers and their immediate environments:

> *It is a lot about re-connecting, but with an economic spin-off. We are looking at testing it here at Edith and then introducing it into communities...so most of the flats always have some kind of river or some kind of aquatic system going through it...and we are hoping to reintroduce it. And uhm, what I have told Dale, once we introduce it into communities, it is not something that we as Edith want to carry anymore – that the community should take ownership of it.*

Whilst I was researching at ESNR, Luzann was considering buying a farm in the Philippi area through the Public Works Programme. As the *"waterblommetjie"* is seasonal, she and Dale were planning to initiate a bee-keeping business in which honey and wine could be sold. Other ideas included purchasing horses that could be used for tourism and recreation, beginning weaving workshops and creating an organic garden. In managing these activities, Luzann and Dale wanted to establish a co-operative and then continually draw others into it. All of these products could then be sold at ESNR in a locally-based market. Yet, this process, Dale often reminded me, should not just be about payment. Rather, it had to entail the development and investment into that person and should be about creating a life for him or her that happens on their own terms, a productive life.

During my research I discovered a shared understanding among the ESNR staff that, in order to effect a change in people's attitude and behaviours towards conservation, what is needed is to engage in both "self-development" and "community development"; in a process of mutual growth. This understanding manifested more as a shared and intuitive common sense than an explicit code of conduct. Moreover, exactly how this development was to be practiced, and what it entailed, was never articulated in a collective vision. Instead, it seemed to mean different things to different people and was highly dependent on Luzann's, Dale's and Stacy's past experiences, especially those which had been pertinent to the formation of their self- and personhood.

Weaving through the ideals of "growth" that Dale articulated, was a particular neoliberal rationality - one in which the "proper 'management of the self' became a question of personal adequacy, [and] which at the urban level include[d] the requirement to be an enterprising citizen" (Brand 2007:626). In other words, it seemed rooted in the production of environmental subjectivities in which urban citizens were to be re-constituted as self-governing free-market individuals, individuals who were self-responsible and morally-bound to be productive, and to regard the environment as an important reference point for their own development (c.f. Brand 2007:626; Foucault 1982). Yet, this rationality was not just to be driven by pure self-interest or by producing environmental subjectivities mainly concerned with their individual selves. It also seemed to be embedded in local ideals and

ethics of mutual care and reciprocal development. As Dale explained to me: “the platform can find people that are already linked to another garden, but wish to do their training at ESNR, then ESNR gets labour as well as being able to give something back. Basically then you are growing your garden, but as your garden is growing you are also investing in other areas”. Giving me another example she said:

> *Take for example dhania (coriander) – you can reap it and sell it. If you partake in working in the garden, that becomes yours. It can generate an income for you. We have to find innovative ways. Not even just payment, but rather development and investment into that person.*

As mentioned, ESNR’s staff’s ideas and ideals about self and community development differed and were continually negotiated in relation to the staff’s own personal experiences and influenced by the partnerships that the place and people formed. In reflecting on her experience of becoming an educator through collaborating with CASE (community action for a safe environment) - which involved taking a group of young people from Hanover Park on regular hikes in the different city reserves - Stacy told me: “as I developed, they developed with me” and “it was a growing experience for both of us, for both sides”. She explained:

> *I will never ever forget that development in my life. It also brought me onto the aspect of me being an educator and actually knowing what I was doing, you know? I knew I survived the same shit even though it looked like it was much more glamorous on different levels...I survived the same shit. They just did it with much less finance, and I had a lot of support. Then I knew this is one of the things I need to do because nobody was there for me when it came to going to Rondevlei and healing myself. I knew the journey I had taken and what it entailed. So all you can do is...you impart yourself...I knew that would be one of the biggest growth points ever. And that I could be that. That was the one thing I was really strong in.*
>
> *They also let me see that you don’t have to control everything. It will flow...when it needs to flow it will flow. As long as you are there. That’s the thing you have to be, someone who can be there, who wants to be there. You might not have the time but if you want to make the time there is more than enough. It’s amazing...it’s the bleeding-heart syndrome as Luzann puts it.*

Stacy, now in her early thirties, also grew-up in Grassy Park and remembers visiting Rondevlei, a park and “nature” reserve situated in her neighbourhood at a young age in order to deal with personal challenges. She explained to me: “I just needed time to think and to escape the whole going to school, coming home and the hassle...now in hindsight there were a lot of other stuff in my life that I was trying to escape that I had no idea about”. Her involvement with the CASE project foregrounded the importance of her own personal history and experiences in the creation of dialogue and practices of knowledge-exchange. Eleanor, an experienced social worker who worked with CASE explained to me

that the aim was to find young people within Hanover Park, between ages fourteen and twenty, who expressed potential for leadership development and to design a programme that would possibly contribute to breaking the cycle of crime:

> *In the Hanover Park community…its' mostly gang-related violence…and the children from a very young age go into gangs and I said to the rector…why don't we get them in touch with nature? So, once they are in touch with nature they will get in touch with themselves. And that is how we started and then I was looking for places and then Edith Stephens was here. That is how I connected the two.*

During her previous work experience in counselling rape-victims and survivors, she experienced the healing-potential of particular spaces and activities first-hand and this motivated her course of action for the CASE project. In the end, Stacy was assigned to take the young people on guided and educational walks in the city's reserves in order to introduce them to the city's heritage and also train them over time to become similar guides. This four-year long project impacted significantly on her own growth as an educator:

> *I didn't think that I would make a good teacher but now because of the initiative with them I got the confidence. 'Cause I know what I've learnt and what I teach, it leaves the ground running. It is something...not that nobody else has thought of it, but nobody has piloted this. Just to be honest with them and not to bring yourself to a level that you are above them because then you won't reach them at all. Show them how real you are because if they have people in their lives that are leaders they don't want them to be president and secretary of state, they want it to be like the kid next door or the parent next door who is cool and can chat to them and be honest.*

After matriculating, Stacy had considered going to veterinary school but unfortunately could not achieve satisfactory marks. Consequently, she decided to find an alternative that would still enable her to express her love for animals – hence her pursuit of a Nature Conservation diploma at the Cape Peninsula Technikon at the age of twenty. Her parents were able to support this tertiary endeavour financially. Stacy did her practical year at the Helderberg Nature Reserve and her site in particular was Harmony Flats Nature Reserve. It was here that she and Luzann became acquainted and where both of them got involved with Cape Flats Nature as an emerging project and practice. Unfortunately, soon after starting her practical year, Stacy experienced a bad bicycle accident that rendered her jobless and forced her to stay at her parents' home for a few months to recuperate. It was also during these years that Stacy battled with drug-dependency and addiction problems – personal battles which she sees now as having contributed tremendously to her capacity to relate to others and in building connections.

During her recuperation period, Luzann contacted her to ask for assistance with the YES programme – Youth, Environment and School Programme – at the ESNR where she,

Luzann, had gained a managerial position. In the end, an informal agreement was reached that enabled Stacy to complete her practical year at the ESNR through volunteering for eight months. This was in 2005. At the time of my research, Stacy had been working at the ESNR for seven years and credits Luzann for having fought not only for the ESNR being incorporated into the biodiversity network, but also for the creation of permanent employment positions for her and others. As Stacy told me:

> *They (The Biodiversity Branch) made her (Luzann's) life miserable. I mean she was now trying to get one family to sit at the table with another family...and the table was a bit higher than one family and one is taller...it was a total shift, a paradigm shift. But once they got together and our branch realized exactly what Cape Flats Nature were doing...they were gone. So Luzann, Levine, Sharlene...they were ones that were to carry it forwards. And I mean they specifically didn't want to pay these three managers, because who de hell wants community driven conservation? Nature and people, are you crazy? You know. This was the kind of mind-set that our branch had. Only when they started to see that you can't have a community and a nature reserve separated because it is their heritage...you don't stand a bloody chance without them, then they come looking for Luzann. 'Right, you have to show us this....come, I know you know this.' And I think...so...she's got a lot of insight. Uhm, she's got a lot of training from her family's point of view. She was brought up in that whole Apartheid regime where the Boere kicked us out...now why turn around and do the same thing?[55] It is not gonna work. I volunteered for Luzann after that one programme. I volunteered for eight months for nothing. My mommy paid my transport, my family had a fit because I had to take a bus to work and they were like, o, my god, Hanover Park, what's wrong, did you get shot, did they rob you? And Edith would have been passed on to Parks...as in mow the lawn, have a play park...bye bye...no biodiversity, anything...they were ready to chuck us. And Luzann said, o, no you don't and she pulled out all that paperwork.[56] And we walked into a disciplinary, a grievances meeting...with a file that this…(indicates the size). She fed us all this information. She helped. I got the union representative that we needed and God was just there for us that day because half-way through the meeting, corporate HR was fuming and swearing. They had to add us to the biodiversity...she took the lessons that her parents learnt with apartheid and implemented it with us. We each had jobs and ja, on the ground worker salaries and obviously when evaluation came through I moved up to management. I think we started off with R8 000 a month...from R3 000 to R8 000 a month...they (the other staff) were impressed because nobody had ever fought for them like that.*

It was in 2006, shortly after her volunteering period and now as a permanent employee at the ESNR, that Stacy got involved with the CASE project, which lasted until 2010.

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[55] During this time period, top management positions in the Biodiversity Branch were still mainly occupied by "white" people.

[56] Cape Flats Nature as a project recorded, kept and archived a lot of their practice through detailed case-studies, reflexive practices and the recording of workshops and email correspondence. Luzann continued this practice after the CFN's demise.

Through my different research encounters, it became evident that within the context of ESNR and the Cape Flats, conservation was less about the protection and care of nonhuman lifeworlds than about the conservation of a particular relation to the world - a way of relating predicated on building connections between people and between places, and learning how to be actively involved in the unselfish "co-development" (Fore 2012) of others and of oneself as both an end in itself as well as a means towards facilitating the creation and reclamation of an urban commons. Moreover, urban nature conservation practices within the Cape Flats was often situated within a register of healing – as a crucial part of the process of shifting relations between places and people (Ramphele 1996). Yet, such a practice of conservation *as* development was also still being negotiated within the institutional context of the local state administration and the Biodiversity Branch's mandates. Thus, for example, the recent managerial requirements placed on Luzann in terms of handling the everyday operations at the reserve often clashed with Stacy's preferred way of working with "her partners" – many of whom were Hanover Park residents.

Stacy valued being able to visit her "partners" at their homes or work places and the exposure it brought, and through that had formed intimate friendships. I often accompanied her on her visits to Hanover Park, which, in many instances, enabled unexpected and unusual environmental encounters. One afternoon, for instance, we visited Bahia at her home in Oribi Court.[57] As Stacy and I got out of the car, some children that live in this court, and who had become very fond of her, came running towards us. One boy had an old glass bottle holding two small garden snakes, which he had caught a few days ago. Stacy immediately called all the children to form a circle around her. She took the bottle from the boy and asked everyone to imagine that they were these two snakes. Would they like to be kept captured with no food or water for so long? Would they like to be shaken around like this?

All the children went surprisingly quiet and studied the snakes. One girl tapped against the glass bottle and Stacy explained that, for the snakes, even that small tap might sound like a loud bang adding that one needs to be sensitive in working with them. She then asked some of the children to go find some leafage and a small container to hold water. After this was placed in the bottle, Stacy took the snakes out and carefully handled them, explaining to the children how to recognize their gender and whether or not they were poisonous. Yet, the effectiveness of these encounters in terms of conservation and convincing the children to protect this non-human entity involved other complex dimensions. Stacy tried to explicate it to me:

[57] One of the council apartment buildings now synonymous with parts of the Cape Flats and which was built during the forced removals that took place during the apartheid planning era.

> *There are kids that I don't even know that I have developed in an environmental sector that have probably just seen me...Vieana that lives opposite Bahia...her grandson came up and hugged me the other day...I don't know what it is, but now I am starting a connection with him and it's a loving connection. You know, you must show your love to the environment and you must show your love and attention to that kid for them to actually change their mindset and become environmentally minded. So...that is what kids want, they want to mean something to someone. So you can't ask them to mean something to the environment and to change their behaviour if they don't mean anything to anyone.*

As far, Luzann's, Dale's and Stacy's understanding of conservation not only entailed the protection and conservation of nonhuman lifeworlds, it also seemed to be rooted in a relational ontology in which conservation was situated as development and as a dialectical and reciprocal process between self, others and the environment. For Stacy, in order to be an environmental educator, she had to care about the place and the people and she had to show others that she cared through being there, as part of their everyday. Working with Stacy, I realized that this often entailed her just hanging out and letting her presence be felt in Hanover Park.

Hinchliffe (2008:95) has argued that "conservation and care involves attention to the details of the lives of others, to understanding that those details matter, even of and especially when why they matter is an open question". However, as a public official working within a state institution and being tied to orthodox ways of doing environmental education, Stacy's unprompted way of working was not easily incorporated into professional structures of accountability at ESNR, and often caused internal conflict.

Moreover, evident from Stacy's way of working, as well as from my conversations with Luzann and Dale, is that convincing people to change their behaviour and the "constitution of ecologically rational individuals" was not just a matter of "rational explanation but also moral and aesthetic motivation" (Brand 2007:623-626). Such sensibility was also reflected in some of the other environmental education excursions I observed, as the following anecdote illustrates.

During my research I also visited Macassar and Wolfgat[58] – two reserves at the edge of False Bay next to Mitchells' Plain and Khayelitsha – two other Cape Flats neighbourhoods - where I accompanied Jerome, the people and conservation officer, on an educational outing where a visiting school was taken for a short hike. At one point during the walk, the children were gathered beneath the cool canopy of a Milkwood tree. Selwyn, a "community" partner, began by telling them the name of the trees and that they were indigenous. Looking into the entangled branches above him he continued to explain that, unlike people, trees have very few choices. When the sun bakes down on them they can't

[58]These two reserves were also part of the CFN partnerships' pilot sites. (See Figure 3)

move to a cooler place, but we as people can come and cool down in their shade. So what would happen if we removed all of these trees? Selwyn looked at them soberly: “You can come here for new energy and new thoughts. We as people have many choices”.
Before the children moved on, Marianne, another partner, also spoke. Once again a tree was used as a metaphor for the lesson she wanted to communicate:

> *Further down the path stands an oak tree. One day when I came here the tree was completely cut down. Someone came to cut it down. It was very sad. And who ever looked after this tree? Nobody. But each time I came here I could see it growing. Without getting any water or care from anybody is was growing. Just like this tree you should also grow and keep growing. Maybe your parents are using drugs or are alcoholics...or your brother or sister. But you must just be strong and focus on making positive choices in your life. You must grow just like the tree that never received any water.*

Later Jerome presented an educational session on food webs and chains. At one point, in order to demonstrate the idea of a food web, he used a roll of string. Each child got a card with a certain type of animal or plant on it. The string was tied to the card and a web was formed. He then asked the children what would happen if there were no more snakes for example – and asked the person holding the card with the snake to drop it leading the web to collapse.
Through my research I recognized that the relational knowledge that emerged through the CFN partnership was rooted in an understanding that it is not only rational choice that drives action and the will and capacity to conserve, but also ethics – self-reliance, self-preservation, personal growth, mutual care and responsibility. Consequently, in order to work towards long term viability of biodiversity conservation and to create sustainable collectivities, what was required was to work *with* others, in a slow process of shifting people’s relations towards their immediate environments, towards others, and their own potentialities. Moreover, the Cape Flats “natures” and conservation practices in this context was conceptualized as a powerful tool in the remaking of moral communities. As Stacy expressed it in her reflections on doing urban conservation:

> *Besides showing them you are not bounded...you are not bordered by Hanover Park...that you can get out and you can achieve as much as you want anywhere else. Just because you are from Hanover Park doesn’t mean that is what has to keep you there...it’s not your [self] definition. Besides that, I think that I also showed them how everything is interlinked. I mean I lived through the same process. When you explain to someone what a life cycle or an ecosystem is...you realize how interrelationships, or relationships that are not even there...you can’t even see that they are linked...but oh, my word! How intensely they are linked by the smallest thread. It makes a huge difference and it could collapse an entire ecosystem, if there were no links. And I think that translates really well into growing up and defining where you are in the world and how you can fit in and assist in the world.*

As the above suggests, at ESNR and other reserves that were involved with the CFN partnership, the making of "urban conservators" was rooted in a particular conservation ethic imagined through the metaphor of "growing together" - an ethic construed through the lens of ecological systems theory and thus entailing valuations of interconnectedness, interdependence and difference yet simultaneously embedded in a placed-based mutual ethic of care. This ethic though was also in continual conversation and dialogue with a particular neoliberal rationality, a rationality placing much emphasis on self-reliance, on being autonomous and responsible for one's own development and choices. As Marianne expressed it: "You must grow like a tree that never received any water".

Democratizing nature?

I attended my first Champions Forum during the first month of my research. Present were the managers and "community partners" from Wolfgat/Macassar, Atlantis, Harmony Flats and ESNR[59] – all reserves that were pilot sites for the CFN partnership. ESNR's partners were Christine, Dale, Ma Gladys, Willie and me. Also present were Luzann and Stacy. Everybody gathered in the ESNR hall, with about seventeen people in total.

Willie was a retired school teacher and a founder of SEEP (School Environmental Education Programme) who worked with ESNR during the CFN partnership – which had helped to fund their "enviro-hikes". This involved taking children from schools in the Cape Flats to the Wolfgat/Maccasar reserves on the False Bay coast alongside Khayalitsha and Mitchells Plain, or to Kogelbay, a relatively secluded beach approximately 40km from Cape Town. Prior to the hikes, the children came to ESNR where an urban conservator gave them an educational session. Willie explained to me:

> *I mean our children live…and I don't know to what extent you have travelled through the Cape Flats...it's a pretty bleak physical environment that the kids live in. And uh...and we as teachers in those areas we got a pretty good idea of the serious impact - social and psychological - that just the living conditions, the bleak environment under which these kids grow up, the damage that it was doing to them....and we thought that it would benefit the classroom work and the discipline and the relationships between teachers and children and other adults if we take them out on a wholesome environmental excursion where nobody is excluded on the basis of money.*

Sometime later Luzann said she was keen to reinstitute the partnership with SEEP again because:

> *You get to take them (the children) on these hikes and you debate with them and you talk with them about things and uhm, that is important, how*

[59] See Figure 3.

> *we do education, and how we are doing our hikes, are important, because we are engaging the kids to think past what they have been brought up with. In that engagement, they start seeing the environment differently, and they start seeing themselves differently...and that is about behaviour change...behaviour change is not about teaching someone for three hours and giving them a paper to take home and fill in...that isn't it...and that is the kind of project that I like working with.*

As mentioned, the CFN partnership's conservation practice had engendered a conviction that to conserve Cape Town's biological diversity, a change of internal belief and values needed to occur. Also already indicated is that, through the ESNR's staff's practice, a shared understanding had emerged that such a change could be effected through engaging with people and by exposing them to diverse "natural" spaces and perspectives. As Luzann pointed out, through these different embodied and guided encounters and relationships, people began to value themselves, their potentialities and their environment differently and consequently potentially change their behaviours. Yet, as several informants made evident, within the context of the Cape Flats, peoples' valuations of urban "natures" were often situated in relation to lived-experiences of disconnection, trauma, violence and present and past injustices and poverty. There was a strong social developmental discourse emphasizing peoples' participation in the re-making of the urban commons - in order to effect both the transformation and reconciliation of the social and ecological (Also see Ramphele and MacDowell 1991).

However, in order to create the space and time for participation at the ESNR, partnerships had to be established – formalized relationships from which, ideally, both sides benefited. The Champions Forum was meant to enable a space where this could be negotiated. At the start of the Champions Forum I attended, four of the needs articulated by the community partners at the previous Forum were written on the board. They included sustainable development, an understanding of ordinances, firefighting training and skills exchange. After the welcome, Levine, Wolfgat/Macassar's on-site manager, passed around pieces of paper for everybody to add additional needs and priorities. The needs listed then, included funding for the reserves, weekly law enforcement on the reserves, community co-management of education centres, first-aid skills training and project proposal writing skills for community-based structures. This was followed by a series of deliberations and debates. At one point, a member of the Harmony Flats Working Group interjected:

> *The whole thing about nature conservation is that it should include the community. Each household can be able to help, even if it's just the awareness...especially around sustainable development...Because it is*

about the way you live. That Smart Living Handbook[60]....maybe we can get access to that and take it further.

Several people nodded in agreement while Dale added that there should also be an inter-reserve exchange. Levine responded:

Just so that I can have a clear idea...when we talk about the exchange of programmes, we are talking about those that have happened before and about the community partners going to the different places to see and to learn?

People concurred. Other suggestions were discussed similarly. Levine then asked everyone to identify their top three needs. After further discussion and re-phrasing, the following three emerged: environmental education training between the CoCT and the "community", appointment of community co-managers and law enforcement training.

After the partners' needs had been articulated, Gert[61], from the Table Mountain Fund (WWF) was called to speak. This fund was one of CFN partnership's main financial supporters. After the demise of the partnership, the fund managers thought "how can we do more to support and encourage urban conservation and the lack of community partners?" Some funds were left over from the CFN budget but they nonetheless decided to make more funds available for community partners already involved with the various reserves. This fund would be a "small grants fund". According to Gert, the fund's reference group would have to be in continual contact with the site managers who in turn could recommend funding for a community-based organization or project. Explaining that communication about the application process would also happen through the site managers, he added that although it would be an open access fund, it would not support any project not designed to support the specific reserves' site management plans.

The CoCT's Biodiversity Branch's communications' manager then presented plans for the rest of the year – the main thing being the upcoming Regional Champs Forum – the first of its kind for the Branch and a means to strengthen relationships between the varied reserves in the area known as the "south".[62] Discussion focused on communication between the existing network members. Selwyn, a partner with Macassar/Wolfgat who had recently embarked on an eco-tourism initiative that makes use of the reserves, looked frustrated, complaining that he wanted to see some kind of progress rather than just talking.

Luzann responded that everyone had to be sure that what happens at the reserves needs to be connected to how the "Champs" events might influence such progress. For her, that

[60] She was referring to a publication and resource printed by the CoCT's Department of Environmental Management on sustainable living that could be found at reserves.
[61] Pseudonym
[62] See Figure 3

required coordinated communication. Yet, the problem, she said, is one of responsibility: who takes responsibility to manage and organize? Dale asserted that it was time for the "Champs" to take form. Luzann concurred that the "Champs" had now to evolve into something, so that when they – as "community partners" – confront the CoCT, they are sure that "ok, this is what we want our partnership and identity to look like". To which Dale added: "yes, you have to stop hanging onto the City and become self-sustaining".

Once a Champions Award System draft form had been circulated for comment, reserves' representatives got a chance to introduce themselves and their activities. The Harmony Flats Working Group described the creation of a boardwalk at their site and an on-going successful project of alien-clearing and tortoise counting. The Macassar/Wolfgat reserve's projects included a waste-wise and a wetlands week programme, supervisor training for partners, alien-clearing and soon to be commenced building of an environmental education centre. When it came to Atlantis, one of their champions got up and, full of energy, introduced himself:

> *I am a self-educated philosopher and I'm a Khoi and I am working to ensure that by 2013 all households in Atlantis will have vegetable and medicinal gardens. I am also creating a new neighbourhood watch made up of "universal rangers"; an environmental cooperative.*

Everybody applauded, after which Luzann described some of what were happening at ESNR – a highlight being the gang peace talks.

The Forum having ended, Luzann asked everybody to go and wait by the amphitheatre. Normally, the reserve hosting the Champions Forums took participants on a guided tour of the place. Instead, Luzann decided rather to narrate the ESNR's story. Standing in the middle, with everybody else forming a circle around her, she spoke about the hard challenges that she, Levine and Sharlene – two other on-site women managers that worked at the CFN pilot sites – had experienced whilst being managers, how they had to struggle between the conflicting demands placed on them by the Environmental Management Department and the CFN partnership-project.

In re-enacting ESNR's social history, Luzann situated "nature" conservation within the political and social processes that characterized the formation of the reserve and its "nature". She also reflected on how this had in turn impacted on the formation of her own selfhood, on her and others becoming public managers. The enactment created an atmosphere of shared experience and intimacy, of collective belonging, and it allowed Luzann, through her reflections, to dissociate herself from conflicting institutional politics and to emerge as a re-constituted urban conservator.

Through creating decentralized forms of environmental governance, the CFN partnership had resulted in new forms of relatedness between the state and urban localities that were

still being negotiated. At this Forum, urban "nature" conservation was enacted as a democratic forum for the formation of reciprocal relationships between the Biodiversity Branch and "community partners". Partners articulated a collective desire to be empowered by accessing knowledge, skills and resources through their relationship to the Branch in order to become and to help others become "urban conservators" – even to the extent of enforcing laws.

Yet, in partnering, the CoCT, Dale and Luzann as well as other Branch employees wanted "community" partners to become self-sustaining and autonomous, and to articulate a collective identity separate from the Branch – a difficult task given that the "community" partners not only came from disparate places across Cape Town but also belonged to a plurality of different "communities". Most of them, moreover, struggled immensely with inherited structural constraints and poverty. Thus, despite being enacted within the ideals of collectively addressing questions of livelihoods and conservation, negotiations over emerging state-locality relations were also rooted in a rationality in which responsibility was individualized or displaced onto the "community".[63]

My attending this forum and my research made it evident that, in order to be a "Champion" and thus to be able to become part of the network and possibly access knowledge and resources, a person had to be involved in some form of activity such as tortoise counting, alien-clearing or volunteering at one or more conservancy sites, practices which take time and which potentially affect people's sense of themselves and their relation to their immediate environment. As one of the ESNR volunteers explained to me:

> *…now that I am on the nature's side, I live a different lifestyle, truly, to me and my home. Very seldom will I throw things away now. I have changed my lifestyle since I started to volunteer - saving energy, saving water, saving everything.*

Alternatively, in order to be a "Champion", one had to be involved in a locally-based organization or project able to demonstrate either a clear link to so-called "environmental concerns" or show how one's objectives might benefit such concerns. In other words, in order to be part of the network and thereby possibly access resources, one had to fashion oneself and ones' organization in such a manner to resemble an environmentally

[63] Although the term and idea of "community" was often uncritically used by the staff and the partners at ESNR, already during my first week of research Dale and Luzann had informed me that if I was interested in "community" conservation I need to understand that "community" is not a homogenous group of people and that it is political. Despite this, I was often struck by the use of this collective noun and the way in which it erased the specifics of the practices, uncertainties and complex politics entailed in coming-into-community, coming-into-collectivities and how this politics is always based on practices of inclusion and exclusion, on the remaking identities in relation to others – both human and nonhuman. Sadly, space constraints here preclude me developing this important topic, one which continues to bedevil many develop efforts/initiatives.

conscious subject, an “urban conservator” (Agrawal 2005; Grove 2008). However, what this entailed exactly was contingent upon particular situated ethical practices and, as I have shown, at ESNR, they were rooted in a particular “conservation ethic”, an ethic valorising connectedness and interdependence whilst simultaneously emphasizing the importance of self-reliance, self-responsibility and autonomy for the attainment of personal and societal development and environmental preservation.

When I attended the subsequent regional Champion’s Forum some months later – the first of its kind – I saw how it accentuated the different and competing ideological convictions that underpin conservation practice in Cape Town. I also experienced the relatively marginal position occupied by the newly-constituted “urban conservators”. What was strikingly evident, immediately as I arrived, was that there were many more people present wearing green uniforms than there were so-called “Champions” – with seven partners at most between all the “south” reserves. Representing ESNR, apart from Ma Gladys, Christine and Dale, was another woman from Hanover Park, Rene, who had recently agreed to head the re-establishment of a Greening Forum. Not all of the reserves there had been involved with the CFN partnership and two of the reserves were situated in a more middle to upper class neighbourhoods and thus had different histories from places such as ESNR.

The Forum began with a PowerPoint presentation by the area manager of all the “south” reserves. It comprised detailed statistics, graphic representations and biome mappings of the state of Cape Town’s inherited biological diversity. To dramatize the problem, the manager had compiled a set of spatial images from fifty years previously to the present. With colour-coded areas signifying the different biomes, the images showed that, as the years progressed, the areas shrank significantly, whilst black dots signifying urban development grew, expanded and encompassed almost all of the erstwhile distinct ecologies. The manager then explained what was need to ensure the conservation of biodiversity, and how much work still needed to be done on the Cape Flats. Once the “nature” to be conserved had been established, the Forum continued with two other memorable activities.

Everyone received a piece of cardboard with a string attached to hang around their necks. Written down on these boards were positions within the Branch’s bureaucracy. Once each person had a piece of cardboard, we were instructed to line up against the wall according to the chain of command. On the one side the partners had to line up, facing all the city employees, who had identical cards. In mirroring each other, the Biodiversity Branch had hoped that the partners could conceptualize more fully the process through which decisions had to be processed before taking form. From the point of direct contact with the on-site managers, decisions had to go through another ten or more people. In other

words, despite the articulation of their needs at the first forum, what became evident here was that, in order to mobilize much needed support from the state, partners were required to navigate a complex set of technocratic and bureaucratic requirements. Also evident, albeit implicitly, was that bureaucratic structure was to be treated as more salient that either "community" needs or "nature".

After this exercise, everyone was directed towards a table filled with a multitude of colourful plastic toys, crayons, clay and stickers. On another table, each reserve's representatives had a large white page waiting for them. Each of the partners present was asked to imagine what they want for the respective sites and to use the provided toys and stationary to try and create their different visions. The site managers were only permitted to be present and to observe. ESNR's partners imagined the place as having a flourishing tourism business co-managed by the "community", complete with a restaurant, a museum, horseback guided tours and a recreational area. Striking about ESNR in comparison to the other reserves, were the large presence of buildings, people, and activities. The other reserves focused on more generic ideas of a "nature" reserve, with lots of animals, plants and green open spaces. Moreover, the entrepreneurial imaginings for ESNR had come mostly from Dale, who tended, in the vision-construction exercise, to dominate her peers.

Where the first forum had entailed contestations over the role of the state, the positionality and responsibility of partners and the distribution of knowledge and resources; the second focused on educating partners in relation to bureaucratic processes and scientific "facts". In this context, urban "nature" conservation was enacted as being underpinned by an already constituted "nature", as a manifestation of a scientific fact (Lie and Law 2011), justified to be conserved for its "intrinsic value" (Robinson 2011:959). Moreover, science supported by bureaucracy was re-enacted as the main custodian of knowledge of the "natural" heritages of Cape Town and thus conservation of biodiversity was represented as being possible mainly through preservation of surviving and intact quantifiable samples of biomes. Evident at this second Forum was the ways in which the structure and content was determined one-sidedly by the state and the almost de-politicized atmosphere - despite the final exercise of re-imagining city reserves, which to me seemed to be more paternalistic than a creative practice in democracy (Ferguson 1990). Clearly the dominant approach to "nature" conservation within the CoCT remains what Ernstson (2012:5) has explained as:

> *…an expert-based Cartesian practice of controlling space, embodied in the form of expert-managed nature reserves and biodiversity mapping techniques that calculates the "value" of green areas by counting the number of species they contain. Green spaces that fall outside of nature reserves or that rank low on its potentiality to sustain biological diversity fall of the map of this practice, receiving less funding and attention.*

Such spatial and temporal imaginaries of Cape Town's valued nonhuman lifeworlds ignore the multiple relationships, continual connections, flows, mobilities as well as inherited structural legacies that characterize life in urban landscapes. As illustrated so far, the "natures" of Cape Town have always been in flux and are continually made and remade through ongoing and intimate entanglements between humans and nonhuman lifeworlds.

Yet, through the CFN partnership project, and as different places within the metropole have been incorporated into the Biodiversity Network, different and more diverse sensibilities of what it means to conserve and to be practicing conservation, as well as what people desire to conserve have emerged, challenging older practices and shaping the politics at and around reserves. Consequently, despite legislated mandates and the dominant practices outlined by Ernstson (2012), ESNR has come to be managed differently due to the context within which it is situated, the sensibilities of the on-site manager as well as the staff's past and current involvement with different partnerships across institutional, geographic and ontological boundaries. Thus, these state-managed reserves, rather than only being spatially-bound and controlled spaces are also emergent places, encompassing diverse "lines of movement and processes of becoming" (Dovey 2010:23;Whatmore 2002:5) and are leading to the formation of particular "knowledge communities" (Robbins 2000).

Conclusion

The dominant view amongst many Cape Town city planners, architects, managers and scientists continues to be rooted in an understanding that urban "natures" are not related to apartheid and colonial histories, and that the "built" and "natural" environment can be imagined as historically, culturally and spatially distinct entities. Yet, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, urban "natures" are emplaced and therefore intimately interwoven and entangled with the political, cultural and economic histories and the politics of the plurality of places that constitute them. Moreover, as I have argued, micro-practices of conservation (the caring for particular nonhuman lifeworlds) are also deeply embedded in the making and unmaking of particular moral communities, in the practice of particular ethical sensibilities and in the co-constitution of people's identities and selfhood.

Throughout this dissertation, I have delineated some of the ways in which practices of conservation and different ways of knowing and valuing "nature" co-constitute each other. In doing so I have aimed to foreground some of the power relations at work within the context of Cape Town and, more specifically, the Cape Flats in determining what the "nature" is that is to be conserved, for whom and through which practices. By focusing on ESNR specifically, I have shown how, "natural" heritages in Cape Town remain entangled with the ecological and epistemological legacies of colonialism as well as the inherited socio-spatial inequities engineered through colonialism and apartheid. Yet, these legacies are contested and continually re-made within contingent and situated urban political ecologies.

Although the ecologies within which ESNR is embedded have come to be layered with multiple spatial- temporal relationalities, my story of the place began with Miss Edith Stephens, and the rare fern, *Isoetes Capenis,* that she discovered and named scientifically. I did that to illustrate the evident ways in which their chance encounter led to this seasonal wetland and later, the larger piece of land that surrounds it, being imagined and constituted as a space for "nature" conservation. Yet, in tracing the ways in which Miss Stephens' conservation practices were connected to wider networks of knowledge and to distinct collective cultural practices as well as to the rationalities of the state, I have illustrated how social agency is always relationally distributed and how particular ways of knowing and of valuing "nature" – that of the botanical and natural sciences - became valorized due to the extent of its networks, rather than through an inherent truth value.

The recent shift towards the discursive framework of biodiversity conservation was easily institutionalized within the context of Cape Town by building on the already existing networks between the state and specific scientific institutions. The shift however resulted in the shaping and managing of Cape Town's inherited "natural" heritages in ways that perpetuated ethnocentric ideas of what comprises valued "nature". Moreover, state

conservation interventions rooted within a hegemonic scientific understanding of biodiversity conservation have often come with an assumption that valued and especially endangered nonhuman lifeworlds need to be fenced off, preserved and protected *from* people in order to ensure their continuity and survival. This assumption has been based on ideas of people acting as purely rational and self-interest driven individuals, who would, for their own benefit, misuse or over-harvest these "resources" obtainable from nature or engage in illegal dumping unless they are "properly educated". As I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, there are multiple other situated ways of knowing and valuing "nature", which in turn shape conservation practices in different and important ways. Moreover, despite the dominance of the botanical and natural sciences and expert knowledges within urban conservation, as I have shown in this thesis, these knowledges, when mobilized by the state in order to manage nonhuman lifeworlds, are always mapped onto and translated within places enmeshed in complex cultural and historical contingencies.

Despite being state managed, in having been a convergence space – a place that lived through the coming together of radically different understandings of what "nature" conservation entails - the material and discursive practices at ESNR have come to be energized by a different sensibility of what it means to practice conservation. Through specific spatial practices of the state that made and remade it into a hybrid landscape, the involvement of particular scientific institutions, the global shift towards anxieties over biodiversity loss and importantly, the socio-material realities of the Cape Flats, ESNR was selected as one of the CFN partnerships' main pilot sites and became the home base of the CFN partnership's activities and management. The result was a mapping of the biodiversity discourse onto ESNR in particular if not unique ways. For one, it led to the subsequent valorisation of relational and inter-subjective knowing for practices of urban conservation; a recognition of the crucial importance of the forming of relationships for shifting people's way of knowing and valuing urban lifeworlds.

This knowledge is based on an understanding that, in order to conserve biodiversity, what is required is a process of engaging *with* people to effect a change on the level of internal belief systems and values and to create a city of urban conservators. From such an understanding then what was at question was not a "nature" to be conserved, but the question of affecting a relational shift towards particular ways of being-in-place and being-in-networks (Escobar 2008) with both humans and nonhumans. This imagined and practiced relational shift was articulated through the discursive framework of biodiversity conservation that had been re-imagined through an understanding of difference *as* "socio-ecological systems" and it led to the foregrounding of valuations of interdependence and interconnectedness between nature and society (Pitt and Boulle 2010; Katzschner 2012).

At ESNR such relational knowledge was translated into the everyday managerial and educational practices of the staff. It also led to the formation of public partnerships and an orientation towards building relationships. Moreover, through forming relations and situated ethical practices, a certain "conservation ethic" came to animate the politics and poetics at ESNR. It was an ethic rooted in a relational ontology in which the self, others and the environment exist in a continual dialectic and understands that in order to conserve "nature", one needs to first effect a change at the level of one's relationship to one's self and to others in such a way that enables the nurturing of reciprocal relations. What exactly this change entailed and how it was to be effected seemed to vary between staff and was never articulated in a shared vision. Rather, it seemed to be rooted in peoples' past experiences, especially those ones that had been pertinent to the formation of their selfhood and personhood (Fore 2012).

Through my research and my conversations with Dale, Luzann and Stacy, as well as their "community partners", it seemed that this "conservation ethic" was rooted in valuations of diversity, interconnectedness and interdependence, reified through a situated ethic of mutual care. Yet, simultaneously, this ethic was also in continual dialogue with valuations of being self-responsible, self-reliant and autonomous – a sensibility reflective of the demands and pressures of neoliberal urban socio-material realities. Furthermore, conservation practice within the ESNR setting came to be enacted as being about conserving a particular social history, of re-integrating "natural" heritages into people's heritage and vice versa. It was a conception of conservation as a practice that does not separate the intangible from the tangible, which permits and encourages materialities to emerge from the multiple relations that define them and give them meaning. Even though dominant state agencies and scientific organizations want to perhaps ignore its development, such an understanding of conservation *as* development, has re-situated it within the urban context as an explicitly political and ethical practice; as a practice continually contested, negotiated and strongly determined by local actors, both human and nonhuman.

Appendix 1: The German heritage of the Cape Flats

During the time that Miss Edith Stephens encountered the fern much of the land in the Phillipi area was being used for agricultural purposes and large tracts of it were owned by descendants of the German immigrants that settled on the Cape Flats during the period of 1880s. During my fieldwork I visited the German Settler Museum just further down Lansdowne road, next to Hanover Park. The museum explains that during 1883 over six hundred German farmers were given allotments of land the size of 40 acres for less than 10 shillings as well as free passage from their "Fatherland" by the colonial authorities of the Cape Colony. This was seen as a way to boost the "white" population of the colony whilst at the same time ensuring that the ever-expanding needs of the growing urban population could be met by "importing" white labour to work and till the land and create "market gardens". The museum contains a large array of personal articles and artefacts yet most strikingly are a few photographs and old paintings depicting what would seem to be the German farming landscape of the Flats before the onset of urban sprawl. One of these pictures is of a farm called Manenberg – which ended up being the land where the now current Manenberg neighbourhood is situated. Similarly Hanover Park is named after Hanover in Germany. This history, as well as the narrative of Miss Edith Stephens, illustrates but a glimpse into the multiple processes of territorialisation and re-territorialization that made and re-made the urban political ecology of the Cape Flats and some of the material and symbolic legacies that structure the current spatio-temporal relationalities.

Appendix 2: From Yaseen's garden wall

Do not judge

Don't find fault with the man who limps
Or that stumbles along the road…unless
You have worn the shoes he wears
Or struggled beneath his load there maybe
Tacks in his shoes, that hurt though hidden
Away from view….of the burden he bears
Placed on your back might cause you to
Stagger too, don't sneer at he who
Is down today unless you have felt the
Blow that caused his fall or felt the
Shame that only the fallen know
Don't be harsh with the man who sins
Or pelt him with words or stones
Unless doubly sure that you have
No sins of your own

What to give

The best to give
To your enemy. Forgiveness -
To your opponent. Tolerance -
To a friend. Your heart –
To your child. A good example -
To a father. Obedience -
To your mother, conduct -
That will make her proud of you
To yourself. Respect –
To all men. Charity –

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