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Natural neighbors: Indigenous landscapes and eco-estates in Durban, South Africa

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Abstract

In South Africa, new gated communities have begun branding themselves as “eco-estates,” “game estates,” “nature estates,” and “forest estates.” This is indicative of the way in which the marketing and consumption of nature has become prominent in the production and consumption of gated communities. A particular emphasis is placed on the use of native or indigenous plant species in landscape design. Suburbanites seeking to escape the increasingly mixed and threatening post-apartheid city are offered a chance to reconnect with nature in eco-estates. Where largely white elites often feel a precarious hold in the new South Africa, natural heritage offers attachment to place. These natural landscapes are highly selective engagements with the local. Nature-oriented gated communities offer spaces which exclude problematic plants and people alike. Yet, while attempting to capitalize on this new gardening trend, developers have risked alienating conventional gardeners of exotic horticultural plants. The result has been the strategic accommodation of different material expressions of landscape.

Key Words: Elites, Gated Communities, Landscapes, Nature, South Africa

> It is not enough to call yourself an African because of a geographical accident of birth. Sometimes I find myself despising white people who speak of their love for African landscapes, sunsets, African wildlife – but never the African people, not *the people*. Africa is not a film set! (Johnson 2006, 188)

> Home to a pair of Crowned Eagles nesting in a Marula Tree, Blythedale Coastal Resort offers a rich heritage of natural flora and fauna … Find your future. There is nothing wrong with living in the past. Not if it means having space to grow in a place where old-worldly values still ring true. (Blythedale estate, no date)

Since the transition to democracy in 1994, South Africa's urban landscape has been transformed by the advent of gated communities. Where new homes for the middle classes and elites were once built in racially exclusive suburbs, they are increasingly built in private estates. The overriding motivation to invest in these new neighborhoods is generally held to be a fear of crime. A raft of studies, as well as regular newspaper reports and television documentaries, indicate higher levels of fear among South Africans than most other countries, including high levels of fear associated with home and the night (Dirsuweit 2002; Roberts 2008). Alongside the desire to escape crime, gated communities can be seen as a spatial strategy to deal with less tangible anxieties of social change (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002; Ballard 2004a; Durington 2006; Lemanski 2006). Those elite, mostly white, South Africans who have felt socially and politically alienated from society have engaged a variety of spatial practices in order to resolve their dissonance. Alongside emigration, gated communities can be seen as a kind of geographical escapism. They attempt to restore feelings of safety and control that were enabled by the earlier state-led spatial strategy of apartheid. With their assured purchasing power, relatively affluent people have invested in developments that promise to ensure not only their material but also existential comfort.

As in similar developments around the world, gated communities require security features such as hard walling, razor wire and fortified motifs (Ellin 1997; Caldeira 1999;

Low 2005). In South Africa these designs are sometimes taken a stage further through the "security park" (see Hook and Vrdoljak 2002). Yet developers hoping to attract more affluent buyers cannot afford to produce generic cluster housing and have sought various ways to create a sense of place through architecture and landscape themes. In Durban, the reproduction of rural or pre-industrial European landscapes such as Tudor, Cotswold, Tuscan for example, is pregnant with neo-traditionalist symbolism (see Jacobs 1996; Duncan and Duncan 2004). However, the attempt to deploy the familiar idyll of rural pre-industrial gentrified Europe (Williams 2005, 82) seems to offer an overly Europhile motif for many of those seeking a more local sense of place. A little truer to the history of the region is the use of "Natal colonial," "veranda," "Victorian," and "farm cottage" architectural styles which hark back to a period of paternalistic sugar barons (cf. Bunn 1996) and agricultural landscapes. Alongside these local references, the scramble for a distinctive identity by developers has resulted in the successful deployment of novel styles unrelated to the region including "American Colonial" and "Bali." In our interviews, the consumers of these various styles find them functionally conducive to their desire for neat and presentable neighborhoods, but with many claiming to be indifferent to the symbolism of European gentry or colonialism from Natal or America.

This indifference seems, at first blush, to be paradoxical. Elite households appear to be moving in significant numbers to live in new residential arrangements, spending considerable amounts of money and often trading down in terms of property size, with little appreciation of the architectural or design symbolism. We explore some of these issues in a separate article (Jones and Ballard no date) but here wish to argue that it is nature which offers a more direct and less contestable route to an appealing sense of heritage. South Africa's rich diversity of plants and animals has long been enjoyed recreationally by suburbanites in their escapes from the city. Recently conservationists have succeeded in persuading many of these suburbanites to bring more of this nature into their domestic spaces by gardening with native or indigenous plants. Developers have seized on this trend as a way of inviting affluent urban residents to purchase "a reconnection with the land," to borrow Swart's wording (2008, 204). These new residential communities deploy the environment in the production of communities and

place by offering landscapes that have been produced with indigenous plants and have preserved original forests and grasslands. In one estimation, “eco-estates” went from being a virtually unknown concept to numbering more than 50 across South Africa within just a few years (Koblitz 2006). Many more estates that do not adopt this label do nevertheless make extensive use of nature in design and marketing.

In this article we offer an analysis of the role of nature in the production and consumption of elite gated communities in South Africa. From 2006 to 2008 we conducted interviews with 29 people, including residents of gated communities, developers, a chair of a board of trustees, an estate manager, a landscape architect and an environmental activist. They were associated with 9 different estates in the Durban region. In addition to interviews, we examined online marketing material and housing industry and real-estate publications, some of which referred to estates in other parts of South Africa. We are also informed by material from our longer term research on whiteness and integration in Durban. In examining the advent of nature-oriented gated communities, we argue that it is important to consider some of the relationships between whiteness and landscape. This is not to say that identification with such landscapes is a necessary or exclusive property of people who get included in the enduring colonial-apartheid category of “white”. As a greater range of people beyond this category buy eco-estate homes, more work on class, race, landscape and taste is required. What we are able to do here is consider the legacy and evolution of European landscape practice in South Africa in relation to these new kinds of development and in so doing contribute to part of the explanation of their appearance. The search for “a psychic accommodation with ‘the land’” has been central to European’s search for belonging in processes of South African Nationhood (Foster 2008, 2). Now that white minority rule has been consigned to history, we consider, along with Hughes, how it is that whites continue to enlist nature in order to “[enter] postcolonialism feeling at home” (2006, 837).

In Part A, we situate the recent uptake of indigenous landscaping by housing developers in the relationship between nature and gardening in general and in the South African context. A broad tension emerges between, global and hybrid models of nature in which

landscapes are substantially altered by human intervention, and purist local models of nature which idealize original landscapes. In South Africa, nature in its ostensibly unaltered form was enjoyed widely amongst white people as rural game reserves, while the kind of nature that characterized living spaces tended to be substantially altered. Gardens generally consisted of global horticultural plants rather than an attempt to preserve or reproduce the pre-development landscape. More recently, however, idealized nature has been brought into the domestic sphere of the garden far more explicitly by a growing indigenous gardening movement. This, we argue, has open ended political implications with some of its advocates linking their project to racial reconciliation and others more conservatively positioning themselves as stewards of the environment in contrast to what they believe to be the environmentally damaging poor black population.

Part B examines the uptake of indigenous landscaping and nature motifs in gated community marketing material and the enjoyment of nature by residents who have moved in. In selling estates to the middle class and elites, a specific notion of nature has rapidly become a crucial element in security-lifestyle packages. For those who buy in, gardening aesthetics are aligning with nature enjoyment aesthetics and conservation ethics. In this way the production and marketing of nature becomes an essential tool for developers to capture their slice of the lucrative elite housing market. This finding echoes research on developments in other parts of the world (e.g. Guterson 1992; Till 2001). In the context of the post-apartheid city, however, it amounts to a new element in the repertoire of a "politics of aesthetics" (Duncan and Duncan 1997, 170) where class and, for some, race are marked through landscape taste (also see Lee 1995). The content of this aesthetic is itself metaphoric. Anxieties over mixing of plants exist in parallel with anxieties of social mixing and political change. Indigenous landscaping represents a certain kind of localism and attachment to place amongst a group of people who feel in many other ways "displaced." Furthermore, fears that sophisticated climax ecologies being threatened by unruly weeds echo a dread that the achievements of modernity and civilization are now being undone in post-apartheid South Africa. The ability to channel vast resources into the production and maintenance of indigenous landscapes allows residents to attempt to

reassert control over what they consider to be deteriorating social and natural environments. Social and botanical communities are thus co-defined and policed.

Yet, as our empirical case shows, the legacy of European relationships with nature has resulted in various competing landscape aesthetics, and many consumers of gated community homes have not converted to the indigenous fashion. Only some purist estates were successfully able to apply an exclusively indigenous planting rule. In other cases, such attempts backfired. The atmosphere of one community we visited had been negatively affected by a dispute between indigenous gardeners and those who wanted to plant exotic horticultural plants. Other developers had carefully steered a course between the two fractions by claiming the ethical capital of indigenous gardening but, in practice, using large numbers of "non-invasive" exotic plants "for color." Equally innovatively, they have used indigenous plants to landscape English country gardens. The paper explores some of these tensions and accommodations between different ideals of place making.

Part A: "Bring nature back to your garden"

Within the myriad of ways in which humans and non humans come into relationship with one another, gardens are significant for the density of intimate relations between people and constellations of invited and uninvited "companion species" (Haraway 2008, also see Swyngedouw 1996; Chevalier 1998; Bhatti and Church 2001; Head and Muir 2006; Longhurst 2006; Bhatti, et al. 2009). Gardens are the sites in which living nature is enlisted in domestic consumption, production and reproduction. As well as being endogenous domestic enterprises, they serve as connections to the greater social and natural environment. Given their symbolic and material importance, people often have passionate feelings on the constellations of plants and animals they encounter within their home space. As a result, gardens are at some level managed spaces that rely on technology such as hybridization, mass plant production, chemical control, and mechanical and human labor. These might serve idiosyncratic preferences or they might be intended for more public consumption by friends and neighbors, gardening peers and

future buyers of the home. Gardens convey particular identities and can simultaneously display aesthetic, social and market values.

While gardens are clearly cultural artifacts, they cannot simply be positioned as the antithesis of natural wilderness (Palmer 2004). Regardless of gardeners' "sense of control over a small patch of earth," gardens remain subject to the vagaries of nature (Francis and Hester 1991, 6). Not only are gardeners aware of the fact that elements of the garden are going to do their own thing, but many derive much pleasure from this unpredictability (Hitchings 2006). Pesticide averse gardeners hope that their gardens will be used by insects, birds and animals (Dawson 1991) and that ecological processes will occur there such as composting, carbon absorption and oxygen production. Yet for some, the presence of plants and animals, and the agency of nature itself, are not enough to make gardens natural. As we are reminded by a book produced in Durban advocating indigenous gardening called *Bring nature back to your garden* (Botha and Botha 1995), there is long held view that conventional suburban gardens are anything but natural, and amount to little more than green deserts. Not only is this concern held by some gardeners but has occurred frequently in the literature. Lewis Mumford argued that developers of American suburbs accentuated the conformity of landscape and planting, in line with the social, economic and aesthetic conformity that resulted in a "low-grade environment" (Mumford 1961, 486). Indeed, both in the mimetic of the "garden city" and the platted developments of the US and Canadian mid-West city the chemically sustained lawn and monotonous planting at the expense of indigenous flora are synonymous with the suburb (Jackson 1987; Robbins and Sharp 2003)[1].

In reaction to what is seen as the environmental poverty of suburbia, conservationist gardeners and landscapers have advocated closer adherence to the form and content of unaltered nature (Trieb 1999). Hitchmough and Dunnett (2004) call for the inclusion of more ecological processes in gardening. This, they say, would require a value shift from wanting to exaggerate nature in gardens by creating more "colour and drama" to an appreciation of the more mundane appearance of semi natural planting (Hitchmough and Dunnett 2004, 4). Elsewhere, gardeners are encouraged to be holistic, considering the

needs of plants rather than treating them as merely ornamental (Hill 2001, 50). The idea of living "in harmony with pristine settings and endangered species" has become integral to new urbanist communities in the United States (Till 2001, 225). These more ecological treatments of gardening can be contextualized within the long held disquiet amongst conservationists of humanity's role as "improvers of nature" and the romantic longing for unaltered nature (Williams 2005, 78). These ecological discourses privilege "groundedness in place, and intimacy with one's immediate surroundings," a search for "homeliness and rootedness" (Clark 2002, 105).

One of the main results of the ecological or naturalist gardening lobby has been to re-value plants on the basis of their origin. Many plant collectors over centuries have prized specimens precisely because they are from elsewhere. In the metropole this tied into ideologies of exploration and colonialism. In the colonies, gardening could reproduce landscapes from home (Anderson 2003; Longhurst 2006). Yet as that home was defined through its relationship to its empire, a globalised stock of plants and animals could be deployed in the production of these new nations (Draper 2003, 70; also Veracini 2007, 272). As the objective of design in the production of outdoor domestic spaces grew, the origin of plants mattered less. Gardening manuals and nurseries frequently provide a menu of globalized horticultural plants of no specific origin, organized by their landscaping function, color, size, hardiness, or sun tolerance. By contrast, ecological gardeners have reintroduced an interest in determining whether a plant belongs to a place. Broadly they argue that local plants are more useful to local fauna and facilitate functioning ecology rather than decorative, sterile and out of place horticultural plants. Furthermore, some exotic or non-native plants have been highly damaging to the environment. This alien vegetation, undisciplined by natural predators, swamps delicately balanced local plants and animals (Clark 2002; Head and Muir 2006; Waitt, Gill and Head 2009). The result, it is feared, is the loss of local diversity, extinction, and the homogenization of the environment into "one giant mongrel ecology" (Hettinger 2001, 216). The resulting ideal is a kind of eco-essentialism, in which nature is facilitated by returning to the kinds of plants, animals and landscapes that existed locally before human induced alteration.

Gardening and nature in South Africa

> English [immigrants] … always persist, with homesick pigheadedness, in trying to grow "an English garden," instead of drawing upon the immense resources of the native flora – a weakness upon which your born South African looks with absolute sympathy; after all, were not the oaks and roses, the apples and pears of his pride brought originally from Europe? (Cran 1927, 48)

Marion Cran, a gardening travel writer, published *The Gardens of Good Hope* in 1927 based on two visits to the Union earlier in the decade. She hoped to tell "England, the garden land, that there *are* gardens in South Africa!" (Cran 1927, 5), despite her own expectation of "drought and dust, or deserts of sand and cactus" (Cran 1927, 134). She reported that varieties of roses were being hybridised to survive in the warmer climates of Australia and South Africa. Cran also wrote enthusiastically of the potential of local plants: "Ankle deep in violets; knee deep in arum lilies; waist high in wild gladioli. So one wades in Africa – as one wades here in England among the buttercups in the May meadows" (Cran 1927, 134). Cran's text is useful not only for highlighting the colonial relationships with imported and local plants, but also for her comments on the owners of those gardens. Unlike the "emasculated folk" of overpopulated European cities, she found in South Africa a courageous, likeable and hospitable people creating a new nation (1927, 174). She felt it appropriate to devote attention to settlers in a book about gardening because she "thought that the transplanting of people is a kind of gardening too" (1927, 174).

The health of the colonial environment in contrast to the polluted and overcrowded cities of the metropole was a major attraction for migrants and performed an important role to placate concerns of disease and tropical malaise (Anderson, W. 1997). Abundant space allowed for both the enjoyment and exploitation of nature. The land was being improved by the migration of people, plants and animals (Anderson 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff

2001; Clark 2002; Draper 2003; Swart 2008). While many colonists considered the increasing alteration of the landscape to reinforce their dominance and transcendence of nature (Anderson, K. 1997), concerns about environmental deterioration were evident in the South African colonies from early in the 1800s. Blame was attributed variously to African populations for removing trees and to the rapid transformation of the landscape as a result of colonial agriculture and development (Grove 1989). In Natal, sugar and timber plantations resulted in rapid enclosure and clearance from the mid 1800s. The consequences of degradation were thought to be drought, loss of hunting grounds, and by the more botanically minded, a loss of valuable plant habitat. As Grove explained, early conservationists in Southern Africa argued that the preservation of nature was a virtue of civilization, although this boast disguised the more anxious search to regain control over social and natural environments. To preserve forests and buffer expanding colonial agriculture and African populations, game reserves were established in the Cape in 1856 (Grove 1989). In Natal Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves, were proclaimed in 1895 initially with a strong interests in preserving hunting grounds (Brooks 2005; Draper 2000) and subsequently were responsible for saving the white rhino. The later establishment of the Kruger National Park in 1926 to the North promoted the access of rural spaces by rail as an antidote for urban life on the Witwatersrand.

The designation of game reserves and the all indigenous National Botanic Gardens in 1913 were key to the project of white nationhood (Foster 2008). These spaces also informed an increasingly urban industrial population's relationship with wilderness. Reserves functioned "as an imaginary repository of value forms lost in the process of modernization" (Bunn 1996, 38, also see Draper 1998). They were nostalgic spaces that were thought of as existing outside of or predating industrial time (Brooks 2000). They distilled nature and separated it from culture, although the enjoyment of nature became increasingly important to suburban culture. While parading as unaltered wilderness, they were spaces that were actively produced in order to offer an idealized pre-human Eden which could be enjoyed by nature lovers (Draper, Spierenburg and Wels 2004, 343). Notably, the reserves required the relocation of many subjugated people and their cattle in order to create idealized African landscapes (Brooks 2005).

In urban areas too, nature played a key role in the establishment of a white nation. European immigrants who had made their fortunes in Johannesburg sought to constitute their relationship with their adoptive land through specific architectural and landscaping styles. On the Parktown Ridge, the celebrated architect Herbert Baker built grand unadorned houses using local rock and naturalistic gardening style at times incorporating indigenous plants or unaltered part of the veld (Foster 2008: 168). However this was something of an elitist exception. The dominant style was Victorian gardenesque, which was calculated to look distinct from natural growth through the use of exotic plants. In poorer suburbs of Cape Town, neat cultivation of gardens served as a symbol "of successful whiteness" (Teppo 2004, 147). As suburbanization accelerated, the veld was leveled and replaced with bungalow houses surrounded by lawns, nonnative trees and global horticultural gardening plants such as azaleas, hydrangeas and roses.[2] Gardens primarily served outdoor lifestyles. As a gardening manual (circa 1980), listing almost entirely exotic plants, insisted that

> Landscaping, once considered a luxury of the wealthy, is a necessity today. The increased pace of living has resulted in a need to "get away from it all" – and what better place to do it than your own back yard. Today … gardens are becoming extensions of the home … Patio and barbecue areas are virtually outdoor livingrooms. Because of our wonderful climate and love of the great outdoors, South Africans spend more time in the garden than practically any other nation on earth. (Kirsten no date, 11).

In different ways, therefore, cultivated gardens and unimproved rural landscapes offered escapes from urban life.

In recent decades, convergence of these ideals has come in the form of a resurgent indigenous gardening style. Enthusiasts have developed varying degrees of technical expertise on plant identification and propagation. Field guides to local flora doubled as references books for gardeners. Elsa Pooley's guides won many over by pointing out that

there are 750 tree species indigenous to the Eastern Region of Southern Africa, which is 11 times greater than the whole of Europe (Pooley 1993, 9), and that "SA has over 23 000 plants, the richest temperate flora of an area of comparable size in the world. With more than 16 500 endemics, it is the largest flora in Africa" (Pooley 1998, 16). Local newspapers have carried columns promoting the indigenous plant of the week. Workshops have been held in order to share knowledge of indigenous gardening. Particular success in the western area of Durban was achieved with an annual open garden weekend in which five show gardens were opened up to the public, receiving up to 2000 visitors. While some of these show gardens demonstrate the potential for using indigenous plants with conventional gardening aesthetics, some departed more sharply from the convention. The African bushveld, was now being cultivated in suburban gardens. Plant stock was distinctive, with flat topped trees such as *acacias* and *albizias*, along with succulent plants like *aloes* and *euphorbias*, acting as iconic "African" plants. Lawns were rolled back in order to create bird and insect-friendly "bush clumps." Areas of thigh-high wild grasses were encouraged and weathered sandstone rocks, gravels, and dead wood used as accessories in order to achieve a striking *African* look. Indigenous gardening became a form of conspicuous consumption amongst the fashion conscious. Suburbanites who were ecologically inclined and sufficiently well resourced commissioned landscapers to convert their gardens. In response, a thriving landscaping industry emerged and innovative techniques developed. Grown trees were transplanted in order to give the garden an established appearance. Nurseries that specialised in indigenous plants emerged and garden centers began offering a larger array of indigenous plants.

Underpinning the shift to indigenous planting was a fear that exotic plants and animals constituted a threat to delicate local ecologies (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Farmlands and the bush were being invaded by exotic weeds that had either been deliberately introduced by gardeners or plantations, or had taken hold through the unintentional importation of seed. Nature reserves and game reserves, which were supposed to resemble the landscape prior to human transformation, were now being spoiled by runaway plants. Thirsty Australian *eucalyptus* or gum trees could consume large amounts

of water a day, and rivers were drying up. When fires moved into a stand of exotic plants, they burned much hotter than the natural veld fires and therefore destroyed the soil and killed seeds. The need for vigilant weeding has resulted in government public works programs to clear "alien invasives." These publicly played out anxieties rapidly shifted the definition of good plants to those that were *from here*, as against bad plants *from elsewhere*.

For our research respondents, the indigenous gardening style registered as a recent development: "indigenous plants has only really come into fashion I'd say in the last ten years. Everyone suddenly started talking about 'indigenous'. Before that nobody cared really. You just got what you fancied" (Interview, Tracy, 2006; and Plate 1). Indigenous gardening has not displaced more conventional horticultural or cosmopolitan gardening. Staunchly conventional gardeners claim the right to produce the most attractive garden with all available plant stock, regardless of origin. As in other contexts (Longhurst 2001), indigenous and exotic gardeners in South Africa have clashed on the issue. Conventional horticultural gardeners think of indigenous plants as weedy, thorny and colorless. Indigenous gardeners contemptuously describe roses as "icing sugar", and exotic gardeners as vectors of weeds. Yet the definition of "indigenous" is itself vague. Some indigenous gardeners draw their stock anywhere from the Southern African region and others confine themselves to extremely local plant distributions, anxious that plants from just 500 kilometers away could become weeds in areas where they were previously not present. The simple conceptual binary of indigenous/exotic does not accord with a loose understanding of area of origin in practice (see Woods and Moriarty 2001).

[INSERT Plate 1] Plate 1: Suburbs and Older Gated Communities, such as Augusta, planted with combinations of exotic and indigenous plants, with the former prominent.

People and Plants

The turn to indigenous gardening, and the associated anxieties about exotic plants, take on particular significance in the post-apartheid context. The political transition in South Africa shifted moral gravity from things foreign and European to things native and African. In one sense, therefore, it functions morally as a kind of politically correct gardening in which people try to behave in socially acceptable ways towards the environment. In more substantial forms, indigenous gardening aspires to reverse some of enormous environmental transformations which have occurred. Where 19th century Europeans in South Africa took the success of exotic tree species as a Darwinist validation of their own success over other people (Grove 1989), conservationists aspired to a more harmonious and less dominating relationship with nature. Some also hoped that an appreciation of the local environment would play a positive role in social progress in South Africa. In the foreword to a popular field guide (Gibson 1975), Adolf Bayer, Professor of Botany, stated that

> The intrinsic natural beauty of our veld is one of nature's most wonderful gifts. Helping people to recognise, to understand and to appreciate this gift … is one way of fostering a feeling of intensive love for our country, a feeling which could become a powerful solvent of most of our present social and racial difficulties and dissensions. (Gibson 1975)

Recent books such as *Medicinal Plants of South Africa* (Van Wyk, Van Oudshoorn and Gericke 1997) and *People's Plants* (van Wyk and Gericke 2000) suggest that an interest in plants may also provoke an interest in various kinds of people's relationships to those plants.

However, support for the conservation of biodiversity does not necessarily translate into concerns about broader social justice. Cock (2006) suggests that the environmental movement in South Africa is fragmented, with mainly white middle class conservationists concentrating on apolitical "green" issues of biodiversity and sustainable development, and mainly black poorer activists mobilising around "brown"

environmental justice issues such as pollution and water provision. Moreover, some conservationists are politically and socially conservative people who feel alienated by the transition. Where faith in the democratically elected political elite and those who elected them is low, ecological patriotism arguably substitutes for nationalism as a mechanism for achieving an attachment to place and claims to autochthony (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Ballard 2005; Head and Muir 2006; Foster 2008). The post-apartheid government itself and the needs of large numbers of the urbanized poor black population are cast as a threat to the environment. A speaker at a seminar to promote indigenous gardening in 1999 opened her presentation by arguing that it was necessary to take action to conserve the environment with indigenous gardening because "We cannot rely on AIDS to solve all our problems." This Malthusian sentiment evoked the apartheid-era notion that environmental problems are caused by black population growth (for further examples see Ballard 2004b, 82).

Conservationists frequently express the concern that the post-apartheid government places development ahead of the environment. In a contribution to an email discussion group a botanical enthusiast expressed his dismay at the environmental destruction taking place as a result of a low cost housing development west of Durban: "Apart from being another example of redistribution of capital from those who create it, to those who merely consume it, this is also a fine example of bad spatial development and ratepayer/taxpayer funded trashing of a rich natural area" (Posting to Plantchat discussion group. 2001/02/01 "State-sponsored environmental thuggery inland of Durban"). The black middle class is also seen to fall short environmentally. An indigenous landscaper proposed that black upwardly mobile people are "aspiring to what we [white indigenous gardeners] are trying to get away from. They're aspiring to the exotic, the typical landscapes that they have been … shown for the last 20 or 40 years … they're not interested in indigenous at all" (Interview, indigenous landscaper, 1997).

Part B: Gated nature

South African suburban housing has for many decades been diversifying away from the ideal of detached houses to include cluster accommodation. Political, economic, and social transformations following the advent democracy in 1994 have given new impetus to this trend. Many residents of open suburbs have responded to urban changes such as crime and diversity by seeking out more secure and controlled neighbourhoods. Average prices of middle and luxury housing increased by 295 percent nationally between 2000 and 2007 as a result of sustained economic growth, personal tax relief, the easy availability of mortgages, and the reduction of lending rates (Du Toit 2007). This unprecedented purchasing power and demand opened up major opportunities for owners of land within commuting distance of cities. Not only could they realise good value but in doing so they could avoid problems such as land claims, land invasions, and unreliable agricultural commodity prices. The result has been 1 435 walled estates nationally appealing to a variety of market segments (Watt and Loos 2007, Lemanski, Landman and Durington 2008) and ranging in size from just a few homes to new towns of thousands of units. Nature features prominently in many of these developments.

To illustrate, Judy and Brian had been the owners and sole occupiers of 32 acres of land west of Durban since the early 1980s. The land was zoned for agricultural use and had a large stand of Eucalyptus. They set about transforming the land as a result of their love of nature:

> We go away to game reserves quite a lot. When we get to a game reserve, we might sit in a place that's far more humble than our home and say "isn't this absolutely amazing?" And what we are looking at is indigenous trees, natural grasslands and it's all so harmonious that we actually love it, so we love all the experiences we've had in the bush. (Interview, Judy, 2006)

Given their concern that "invasives are taking over our natural vegetation" they removed the Eucalyptus and planted "thousands" of indigenous trees. The result, they said, was that "our dam filled up ... And we've actually seen what all of this has done in our lives.

In April you see butterflies all over this garden. We see trees, the birds coming into this garden. It is so rewarding" (Interview, Judy, 2006).

After the political transition Judy and Brian felt increasingly "vulnerable" because the government had introduced legislation to make evictions difficult. To preempt the possibility of squatters moving on to the land, they resolved to surround themselves with a community of their choosing. They were granted permission to rezone from agricultural to residential land use. They set up infrastructure and in 2001 put just under 40 plots up for sale. Individual buyers would build their own homes using specified standards and conforming to a "Natal veranda" style with green roofs and red face brick. A low density layout accommodated large plots of 2000 square meters and a 12 acre conservation area with "indigenous grassland, trees and bushes". Gardens would also be indigenous. An environmental consultant drew up a 40 page environment management plan including plant lists, and this was included in the sale agreement.

[INSERT Plate 2]
Plate 2: Some communities have landscaped with indigenous plants, in this case while maintaining the internal organization of the village.

Alongside Judy and Brian's small scale neighborhood on their restored land, nature has been central to much larger and more commercial development projects (Plate 2). A landscape architect explained that developers are often opting for indigenous landscaping even though this is more expensive to meet market demand.

> …people are becoming more and more indigenous conscious, that's also a good selling mechanism because indigenous sells … the word "indigenous" has become a marketing tool. And it sells. It's become fashionable, to keep up with the Jonses, saying "I live in an indigenous [development]"... It's probably only

> picked up in the past 5 or 6 years where the whole … indigenous movement has picked up. (Interview, Landscape architect, 2008)

An eco-estate developer explained that "[t]his is a particular lifestyle: it's not for everyone, but for people who enjoy the outdoors and being close to nature" (Koblitz 2006). Promotions for estates almost invariably describe enticing detail the possibilities for living with nature:

> Simbithi Eco-Estate has been planned with one thing in mind, to give you the opportunity to reconnect with nature and embrace a lifestyle in harmony with your natural environment. Away from the chaos of the concrete jungle … is a natural, coastal paradise with dense, indigenous riverine vegetation, lush valley wetlands, undulating hills and distant, breathtaking vistas. It is a way of preserving nature, as much as it is a way of preserving a lifestyle. (Elan Group, no date)

Another estate similarly offers "an uninhibited reconnection to nature that has been lost through excessive urbanisation" (*Sunday Tribune* 2008b). Wildlife plays a complimentary role in creating a sense of nature. Phezulu Game estate, for example, prohibits pets and fencing around individual houses as "[w]e already have Giraffe, Zebra, Wildebeest, Impala, Blesbok, a variety of Duiker, Bush Buck, bush pig and approximately 160 species of birds" (Phezulu Game Estate, no date; Plate 3).[3] For jaded suburbanites, a move to a Simbithi eco-estate offers the thrill of the frontier:

> A women was sitting on her verandah ... and this leopard walked past. And so she called the security guy and he saw it … But nobody else has ever seen it. … And then they are saying that there was a carcass of a buck found … and they got the vet and all the wildlife fundis [experts] in to check it out and they say it definitely is a leopard, the spoor was a leopard spoor. … We're all waiting, we're all looking now. Every time we drive around here we're looking for the leopard (Interview, Tracy, 2006)

The excitement of encountering wildlife within the community is carefully arranged by developers. Banks of condominium units overlook watering holes where animals come to drink in the evening, bringing a sense of the "game reserve" into the development, the animals complimenting the "sundowner" cocktail (Plate 4). Moving a few hundred meters toward the main clubhouse and restaurant a wetland sanctuary offers another opportunity for nature watching, again combined with the possibility of an evening drink or party gathering (Plate 5).

[INSERT Plates 3, 4 & 5]

Plate 3: Phezulu incorporates a tribal authority area and promotes itself as a game estate. But note a Eucalyptus to the far right.

Plate 4: Units in Simbithi are landscaped to overlook a watering hole. Note the indigenous grasses and gardener to foreground.

Plate 5: Simbithi includes a bird watching hide overlooking wetland

Three mechanisms are used to produce indigenous landscapes. The first is to remove plantations of sugarcane, eucalyptus, or pine and to landscape the area with indigenous plants. These are often common areas such as golf courses, equestrian facilities, gateways and verges. The second is to encourage or insist on the use of indigenous plants in individual gardens within the development. As we shall see below, this has had a mixed reception amongst residents. The third is to claim previously uncultivated land as an indigenous forest, bushveld, or grassland. Generally such patches of land were not cultivated as they were too steep or otherwise unsuitable. Having been of little value in agriculture they now become prized assets in residential developments. Often, being steep, they are not used for residential areas but function in effect as internal public spaces with walking trails. However in some particularly elite coastal developments, houses are inserted into forests with the actual shape of structures fitting around large Milkwood trees.

The landscapes that emerge are extremely diverse, resulting not only from the diversity of ecologies but also a somewhat elastic application of the indigenous brand. Residual coastal forest adjacent to the beach has been used to great effect so as to achieve a forested residential environment. However, aside from the coastal hills and steep or riverine areas, much of the region would naturally have been grassland or more open bushveld. Some estates have attempted to adhere faithfully to the plant range that would have been found on a site prior to cultivation. However, not all indigenous developments, strive for an authentic reproduction or preservation of local ecologies. A development of 680 homes for the "active over 50s" aimed to create a botanic garden with indigenous plants. Landscapers were commissioned to create a waterway running between the houses which lead to an open wetland complete with bird hide. There are 30 ponds each of which has a theme such as the "the birds of a feather pond, where plant species create a safe haven for birds and waterfowl" and "the protea pond, surrounded by the national heritage flower" (Richards 2006). The result is scenes that reference landscapes found around the country but do not claim endemic authenticity. Finally, some estates who adhere to indigenous planting policies have entirely dispensed with the intention of creating African wilderness. Cotswold Down, which has more than 800 units on a 300 hectare site, is aiming for an English landscape. Their landscape guidelines explain that:

> Our philosophy for Cotswold Down will be to reflect what is historically characteristic to the Cotswold Country-side region in the United Kingdom. We will however, be using a predominantly indigenous plant palette to adapt this character to South Africa. (Uys and White 2006)

Developers are therefore harnessing the indigenous brand to achieve a variety of different kinds of landscapes, ranging from approximations of what the land might have looked like before human alteration, to the production of scenes that replicate distant places.

Ethical estates

Not only do gated communities offer a mechanism for nature lovers to access plants and animals, but they are told that their purchase of a home in a community will help rehabilitate and preserve the environment. Promotional material for one estate explained that the land owner "watched the decline of the Valley of a Thousand Hills [a peri urban area west of Durban] as the invasion of the alien vegetation swept through it. He … devised a plan to save the valley. He knew that there were lots of families who would love to preserve the Valley whilst having their own secure, private game reserve." (Phezulu Game Estate, no date). Another estate claims the "conversion of an ecological desert (previously cane lands) into an abundant coastal climax grassland community, interspersed with coastal forest environmental corridors, lakes and wetlands to attract as much biotic diversity that the carrying capacity of the site can support" (Simbithi, no date). In a context of limited public funds for nature conservation and increasing pressure from urban sprawl, developers boast that by setting aside land they are able to protect indigenous coastal forest "ad infinitum" (Koblitz 2006). Buying property in an indigenously landscaped estate is thus a form of ethical consumption. Estates commit to a triple bottom line approach, "focusing equally on profit, people and the planet" and delivering "more overall value with less environmental impact" (Hooper 2008). Golf course designers claim to "listen to the land" and insist that "in many cases, developers actually improve the environment and uplift the area" (Nevill 2004). In a few cases, fair trade trademarks and 14001 certification are used to endorse environmentalist credentials (Nevill 2004; Hooper 2008).

This search for credibility is in part a response to an image problem experienced by property development. Gated communities have been criticized by many, including the former state president, Thabo Mbeki, for reinforcing social inequality (Mbeki 2005). The re-branding of gated communities was therefore important to their greater social credibility. Through the use of indigenous plants, golf courses and horse paddocks make the transition from elite indulgence to virtuous landscapes. Yet claims of environmentalism have themselves been challenged. An environmentalist lodged a complaint against the use of the word "eco-estate" with the advertising standards

authority (Interview, Harold Witt, 2008). He argued that marketing enormous energy-hungry houses built to accommodate long distance highway commuters constituted false advertising. Estates require infrastructure such as sewerage processing which local government is not always able or willing to provide. Golf courses themselves are notoriously thirsty, require chemicals, and depend on fairways and greens of exotic grass types.[4] Furthermore, one of the defining features of an eco-estate is said to be very low housing density (Koblitz 2006). At one such estate, building coverage can only be only 35 percent of each plot. For residents at least this creates an enjoyable living environment as one explains:

> the plots are nice and big and spaced out, and they've left a lot of areas open for our animals, which is lovely, so that appealed to me. I wouldn't want to live ... [in estates where you have huge houses on small pieces of land] I like to have bigger plots and more spaced out and leave little bits in between of natural vegetation. (Interview, Tracy, 2006).

This certainly succeeds in surrounding the few residents and visitors able to access the estate in more greenery than in a city. The production of low density natural living environments for elites gets conflated, therefore, with service to the environment (cf. Duncan and Duncan 2004, 140). While there is little doubt that some developments have made substantial investment in environmental "best practice," many have also sought to evade such investment. There is resistance in others to excessively close regulation by the state (Koblitz 2006), and in one spectacular case the bribery of a provincial premier to overlook environmental concerns (Nevill 2004).

Contesting indigenous landscapes

Marketing of eco-estates appeals to those who treat nature as a hobby or a passion. Some of the residents we spoke to were indeed persuaded to buy in as a result. Anna said that "they are starting a bird club here and we are going to join, and I'll get back into my birding and all the things I enjoy" (Interview, 2006). To varying degrees, then, eco-

estates are appealing to those who would enjoy nature reserves and game reserves. Indigenous gardening is seen as a mechanism to "bring the bird life and the wildlife back" (Interview, Mary, 2006). In addition, indigenous landscaping had the benefit of fitting into residents search for country landscapes: "it's not too starched with these formal kind of plantings which I don't like. I like the happy relaxation of the indigenous planting" (Interview, Anna, 2006). Similarly, Mary said "I don't like the prissy little gardens, that look, you know, terribly neatly edged" (Interview, Mary, 2006).

While the indigenous pitch has, therefore, worked to a degree, there is not always an easy transmission of purist ideas from environmentalists to a broader middle class housing market. In open suburbia the use of autonomous domestic spaces are largely determined by individuals. Although there are municipal by-laws, these largely do not refer to questions of taste. However private residential estates aspire to be collective domestic endeavors which introduce much greater potential to regulate and police the architectural and landscaping choices of residents. Some of the most up-market developments forbid the planting of any exotic plants. However the stipulations of developers and trustees are not always well received by class-empowered and individualistic residents who until now have not been dictated to in this way.

Assuming that purchasers of houses on the new estate would agree with this method of gardening, the developers are mortified that some seek more freedom to garden with exotic plants. Returning to the case of Bruce and Judy's development, both the developers and other residents reported tensions on the issue of indigenous purism.

> We've got some people who have bought into it, but by and large, many people don't actually understand indigenous ... In fact it's a very contentious thing, incredibly. I mean there are people that we don't get on well with at all. They've bought and now they want to continue planting whatever they want to, and we've said, 'no you can't … We want it to remain fully indigenous' and there are people who don't see it that way … it's lack of understanding, knowledge, education in terms of indigenous planting … and some lack of integrity …, the lady up at the

> top there who likes miniature [exotic] conifers so she's got 30 or 40 miniature conifers which we say are not plants that we want you to put on the property. … They want standard roses (Interview, Bruce and Judy, 2006)

For their part, the new neighbors who are introducing exotic plants show considerable understanding of the value of indigenous. However they would like some flexibility to draw from the familiar palette of gardening plants which have been part of their gardening practice for much longer than the more restrictive current fashion:

> Margy: But the trend now is to indigenous planting, because it saves water and as you know, the country is becoming very conscious of the lack of water. And I think the reason for the indigenous, and it's also good for birds, and wildlife, not that ordinary gardens don't attract birds and bees, but I think indigenous planting goes hand in glove with a normal garden as well, because you can mix and match.
>
> Richard: But you like to have a bit of freedom as well?
>
> Margy: Well this is it. What we've found here is that as time has progressed, the restriction on the indigenous has got to a stranglehold, where people now are just putting their backs up. You know what it's like when a gun is held to your head, … In many ways it's a fashionable thing having indigenous, and fashions change, so you cannot lay down rigid rules that you can expect to last twenty or thirty years, because fashions will change again. (Interview, Margy, 2006)

The developers recognize with disappointment that their creation of a residential estate has brought people into their lives who "don't follow the vision" (Interview, Bruce, 2006).

Some less personally invested developers in other estates have been more willing to turn a blind eye to transgressions. Having sold their plots using the indigenous brand, it was immaterial to them whether individuals adhered to this norm. A resident of one such development of 120 homes observed:

> When we first started … they said ‘we encourage indigenous gardening’, which is the big thing here these days, that you try and plant indigenous. But it wasn’t enforced like Zimbali for example where they have to plant only plants that would have naturally grown there in the old days. So quite a few people have got fairly indigenous gardens but there are quite a lot that have been landscaped totally without a single indigenous plant in them. … With the style of the house, that’s not the sort of garden they wanted. (Interview, Pam, 2006)

Other residents in the same community explained their dislike of the indigenous style and other difficulties they experienced with the pressure for conservation. They said that a show house within the development “had an indigenous garden and it looked more like a weed field. It wasn’t nice … They gave you a list of plants [and] they recommended you plant … indigenous, … and we said ‘no’ … we wanted a bit of color. So we got a bit of everything. We’ve got both” (Interview, Liz, 2006).

Therefore, while indigenous gardening has become a widespread claim in new property developments, it does not have universal appeal. Landscape consultants shrewdly build in a compromise from the outset, recognizing the need to keep as many people happy as possible. For example they stipulate the use of 70 percent indigenous plants, but allow 30 percent non-invasive exotics (Uys and White 2006). One developer, who’s estate predated the trend toward indigenous gardens, felt that “the greeny’s take it too far. … there are so many beautiful trees in this country that are not indigenous. … And one hopes of course that they are not going to destroy [them]. There are some lovely trees here which along the outside road, just going down to the main gates. They’re not going to have those taken down.”[5] (Interview, Developer, 2006)

Conclusion: protecting endangered species

This article has explored a case in which new representational and material engagements with domestic natures helps to explain elite engagements with nature, society and itself in

the post-apartheid context. The contemporary elite gated communities in South Africa offer to insert suburbanites into indigenous natural spaces. We have attempted to suggest that this appeals to a conservationist ethic which valorizes "original" landscapes. Domesticated plants and animals are jettisoned in favor of a supposedly more authentic local nature. The focus on the production of and relationship with domestic natures presumes that environmental ethic is demonstrated by an intimate relationship with nature. Yet this passionate commitment to nature largely ignores the environmental and social costs of middle class accumulation and consumption (cf. Hinchcliffe 1997). In more than one way, these developments naturalise inequality and exclusion.

In environmental terms, there is no doubt that the conversion from plantations to a more diverse mix of indigenous plants and offers greater prospect for rich functioning eco-systems. However, this is not done for the sake of the environment alone but also constitutes an investment in nature as a step in its commodification. The execution of landscape designs through civil engineering and mass planting means these "natural" spaces are created through intense intervention, or what Harvey calls "the market provision of constructed authenticity" (1993, 12). Natural does not mean, for consumers of these landscapes, that nature is left to its own devices but rather that it is channeled in the direction of a pre-industrial ideal. The outcome is no less a cultural artifact, but is one which now seeks more explicitly to produce domestic wilderness. With nature too transformed by past land use and alien invasives to restore itself, creative agency is attributed to developers and managers who are required to restore and defend nature. As Williams reminds us,

> There is more similarity than we usually recognise between the industrial entrepreneur and the landscape gardener, each altering nature to a consumable form: and the client or beneficiary of the landscaper, who in turn has a view or a prospect to use, is often only at the lucky end of a common process, able to consume because others have produced in a leisure that follows from quite precise work. (Williams 2005, 81)

The inclusion of wild nature in domestic life is something of a rupture with past styles of gardening. For descendants of European immigrants, it demonstrates a strong commitment to the local, and a rejection of the practice of reproducing generic landscapes or landscapes explicitly from elsewhere. This passion for nature is not intrinsically conservative and offers a moment of potential openness to a more general re-valuation of the local including kinds of people previously considered inferior. However its uptake in eco-estates suggests the distillation of certain liked elements of the local to the exclusion of those things less liked in the post-apartheid milieu. By rewinding the landscape in this way, developers are, in effect, enticing buyers to (re)colonize *terra nullius* (cf. Palmer 2004; Waitt, Gill and Head 2009), or to return to the garden of Eden (cf. Till 2001). Wilderness itself functions as the heritage hook for creating a sense of place.

The jurisdiction of the eco-estate performs a metaphoric function in this regard. Where game reserves were developed as spaces in which nature would be protected and enjoyed by visitors from modern cities, developers have gone one step further by creating pseudo nature reserves and inviting elites to join nature behind the protective fences. Weeding reinforces the importance of the perimeter fence and the likely response to its transgression by the wrong plants, people and behaviors (cf. Bauman 1993; Cresswell 1997). These estates assure freedom from both botanical and human “invasives”. Eco-estates produce landscapes, therefore, which claim to protect two different sets of vulnerable assets. Common cause is struck between people who feel threatened by crime and uncontrolled urban mixing, and sensitive ecologies under threat from weeds, agriculture, urbanisation, and overpopulation.

The study suggests that indigenous gardening might function, as any landscape, in the “reproduction of a class or status group” (Duncan 1992, 40). A certain kind of ethical and nature loving person is able to invest in the preservation of nature and display this compassion to others. What the case shows, however, is that there is little consensus within this single “status group” as to whether a purist indigenous landscape is the desirable material or symbolic environment. Gardeners who learned to garden with a

variety of global horticultural plants are reluctant to abandon these entirely, although they recognise the ecological virtues of indigenous plants and the possible dangers of runaway weeds. This divergence in gardening aesthetic can be unsettling to people who attempted to create utopian communities on the assumption of shared values, but are now barely on speaking terms. Some attempts to build private communities of like minded people in response to a threatening post-apartheid society have not always provided the comfort of home so anticipated. In many other cases, developers creatively traverse these categories to accommodate seemingly contradictory ways of feeling at home.

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Notes

[1] Antagonism between urbanism and wildlife is well documented historically, and periodically resurfaces with concerns for sightings of mountain lion in West Coast US cities, measures to control alligators in Florida, crows in Japanese cities, pigeons, foxes, rats and squirrels just about everywhere (see Baron 2004; Davis 1999). As often, the presence of indigenous wildlife may go unnoticed by most. In a Nevada suburban community, Guterson (1992) recounts how a nine year old informant rejoiced in the presence of lizards, rattlers, chipmunks, lions, black widow spiders and scorpions in the most bland urban environment possible.

[2] Indigenous plants were present in many gardens as they contributed well to the production of a landscaped horticultural garden. Individual species of indigenous plants such as agapanthas, zantedeshia (arum lily), gladoli, geraniums, gerberas, strelitzia (bird of paradise flower) were recognized as gardening plants the world over. Other plants such as cycads, clivias and orchids were also prized and sometimes taken from the wild. Others still may simply have been 'planted' there by birds or other non human means and become incorporated into the garden. Distinctively local trees such as Acacias and Albizia and plants such as aloes certainly featured in many gardens alongside imports, signifying a rather complex combination of international and local references in gardening. However, only a fraction of local species entered the gardening pallet and most would have been weeded out.

[3] Phezulu estate has leased 300 of its 630 hectare estate from a tribal authority in order to secure a large area of undeveloped land as a nature reserve (Interview, Phezulu staff, 2006). This entailed a process of moving a Zulu family out of the reserve and providing him with a new house and access to water and electricity which they did not have before. The surrounding Zulu community will have access to the land.

[4] A civil society group called 'guardians of the garden route' has organised in the southern Cape to oppose rapid enclosure of land and monopolisation of water resources by elite groups in new developments (Cape Argus 2005)

[5] There have been various panics, including a particularly effective April Fool's joke, that conservationists are going to succeed in removing all jacarandas whose blue flowers define the spring landscapes of towns such as Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg. In fact the official policy is to remove those that have escaped from controlled settings into the wild (Independent Online 2001, and Montgomery 2001).