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### Introduction

*Conceptualizing Hinterlands*

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Conceptualizing Hinterlands

*Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, Sarah Nuttall,  
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In March 2021, the Ever Given, one of the largest container ships in the world, blocked the Suez Canal for seven days, causing severe delays in global supply chains, constituting a major disruption to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and leading to an estimated \$54 billion in trading losses (Lee and Wong 2021). This event exposed the hinterland as much more

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than it is commonly taken to be: “a mere backstage ‘ghost acreage’ that supports the putatively front-stage operations of large population centres” (Brenner 2016, 123). The Suez Canal, ever important but usually taken for granted, suddenly—hauntingly—became hypervisible in its capacity to disrupt the world economy.<sup>1</sup>

Developed by French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps and opened in 1869, the Suez Canal was, from its inception, a deeply colonial project, designed to enhance the efficacy and hence the profitability of global trade. Until its nationalization by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1956, it was operated by a concessionary company with mainly British and French shareholders. As one of the major transport nodes of the world, through which 13.5% of global trade passes (Lee and Wong 2021), it exemplifies both how “logistics maps the form of contemporary imperialism” (Cowen 2014, 8) and how this mapping often still follows colonial routes. The *Ever Given*, its name perhaps fitting to the thematics of colonialism, capitalism, and climate this volume explores in relation to hinterland thinking, in its turn embodies how global inequalities enshrined by late capitalism’s neocolonial thrust take shape in the present: the ship is owned by a Japanese company, operated by a Taiwanese shipping company, managed by a German company, and manned by a fully Indian crew (Lee and Wong 2021), the latter remaining invisible and largely unconsidered as events unfolded.

Attention was focused on the hinterland’s key role in keeping global supply chains moving by the globally mediated spectacle of the enormous ship, carrying countless containers full of consumer goods, stuck astride the Canal with a growing queue of stalled ships behind it as frantic attempts were made to refloat it (using machines made to look like toys by the scale of the *Ever Given*). Most mainstream media reports were solely concerned with the economic effects of the blockage, while some activist media explored the global shipping industry’s environmental impact and

<sup>1</sup>The importance of the Suez Canal for the global economy is underlined by Notteboom: “The global container shipping network now primarily relies on the equatorial route in which the Suez Canal is a key maritime passage. 6852 container vessels transited the Suez Canal in 2010, an increase of 46% compared to 2001. ... About 646 million tons of cargo passed via the Canal in 2010. ... Total container volumes reached an estimated 33 million TEU in 2010 compared to 20 million in 2004. Nearly 93% of these container flows are related to the Europe–Asia trade routes. North America (East Coast)–Asia trade represents about 5.3% (figures Boston Consulting and Suez Canal Authority)” (2012, 165). Notteboom also notes the Suez Canal’s “single-lane character” as an important vulnerability (2012, 175).

exploitative working conditions.<sup>2</sup> However, there was not much interest in looking closely at the specific geography of the Suez hinterland, which comprises not only the waterway itself but also the mix of rural and urban settlements bordering it. Nor did people consider how its materialities, people, and life forms would be affected by the refloating effort, which was led by the Suez Canal Authority and a Dutch salvage company, and involved the removal of “more than 20,000 tons of sand and mud” (Lee and Wong 2021, 7).<sup>3</sup> This affirms Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis’s assertion that, despite the hinterland’s status as a crucial support for global capitalism, “the hinterland itself has remained something of a ‘black box’” (2020, 26). In the end, even as the global capitalist system’s fundamental vulnerability to disruption in and from the hinterland was briefly exposed by the Ever Given, the successful and relatively speedy unblocking operation allowed the idea that the hinterland is meant to serve the capitalist center at any cost and, as such, needs to be looked at only *from* the presumed center through the lens of that center’s interests to persist.

## DEFINING THE HINTERLAND

This instrumentalist, outside-in view of the hinterland pervades the academic field that has most consistently engaged with it. Taking up George G. Chisholm’s use of “hinderland” as referring “to the backcountry of a port or coastal settlement” in the 1888 *Handbook of Commercial Geography*,<sup>4</sup> transport geography made the hinterland an integral part of analyses geared toward understanding how ports function and compete,

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <https://www.corpwatch.org/article/suez-canal-aftermath-time-question-environmental-and-social-impacts-our-megaship-mania> and <https://www.climatechange.com/2021/04/01/took-suez-canal-crisis-highlight-scale-polluting-shipping-sector/>. The degree of oil and heavy metal pollution in the Suez Canal has been documented by, among others, Abou El-Megd et al. (2020) and Sharaf and Shehata (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Niroumand-Jadidi and Bovolo (2021) show how “the blockage of the Suez Canal and subsequent dredging caused an abrupt increment (+400%) in the concentration of TSM moving north from the ship’s location.” Total Suspended Matter affects light penetration, which, in turn, can change the underwater ecosystem. Although the increment in this case was temporary, longer blockages or structural increases in dredging to prevent further blockages could have consequences for water quality and the fishing and tourism industries along the Suez Canal.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/science/hinterland>.

and how their efficiency may be increased.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, different kinds of port-hinterlands were distinguished and questions of delimitation (of where a port-hinterland ended and on what basis—geographical or functional—this should be determined) and of overlapping (of hinterlands serving multiple ports) were much-debated (Sdoukopoulos and Boile 2020). The 1960s saw the advent of containerization, which enabled “spatial de-concentration” and brought about “the transition towards network and corridor-shaped hinterlands” (Sdoukopoulos and Boile 2020, 4). The ensuing logistics revolution has meant that port-hinterlands have become more extended, more discontinuous, and more varied, and relations between ports and inland regions more complex and multi-sided. Despite this, most transport geographers still do not consider hinterlands relevant beyond the ways in which, by their definition and function, they impact port development and competition. They are not interested in doing what this volume seeks to do: thinking and looking *from* the hinterland to its landscapes, life forms, and livelihoods. What they also miss is that the port-hinterland extends not just over land but also, increasingly far and deep, into the sea. As Isabel Hofmeyr so aptly puts it in *Dockside Reading*, “port cities aim to pave the ocean and assert sovereignty over the conjuncture of land and sea” (2021, 4).

In this book, we consider the concept of the hinterland as crucial for understanding the global and planetary present as a time defined by the lasting legacies of colonialism, increasing labor precarity under late capitalist regimes, and looming climate disasters. We offer it as a lens to attend to the times and spaces shaped and experienced across the received categories of the urban, rural, wilderness, or nature, and to foreground the human and more than human lively processes that go on even in sites defined by capitalist ruin and political abandonment (Tsing 2015; Neel 2018).

But what exactly does the hinterland (derived from German *Hinterland*, “the land behind/to the back of”<sup>6</sup>) entail? The main definition of “hinterland” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, like that of Chisholm, first and foremost binds it to water but then broadens its geographical reach: “The

<sup>5</sup>Transport geography is “a sub-discipline of geography concerned about the mobility of people, freight, and information and its spatial organization. It includes attributes and constraints related to the origin, destination, extent, nature, and purpose of mobility” (Rodrigue 2020).

<sup>6</sup>For an overview of how the term was used in German from the 1840s, see Brahm and Rosenhaft (2016, 4).

district behind that lying along the coast (or along the shore of a river); the ‘back country’. Also applied spec[ifically] to the area lying behind a port, and to the fringe areas of a town or city.” That the relation between the coast, river, port, town, or city and the hinterland has never been one of mere spatial distribution on a local scale, as we implied earlier, is signaled by the quotes used to illustrate the term’s meanings and usage. These quotes, the earliest of which is from 1880, almost all evoke capitalist trade (with the hinterland providing resources, products, labor, or consumers), colonialism (with the hinterland exemplifying its appropriative and extractive reach across continents), and climate concerns (given land’s dependence on rain, sun, and water to be suitable for growing crops). The hinterland’s intimate connection to all three Cs—capitalism, colonialism, and climate—appears most plainly in a *Daily News* quote from 1891 that reads: “Lord Salisbury even recognizes ... the very modern doctrine of the Hinterland, which he expounds as meaning that ‘those who possess the coast also possess the plain which is watered by the rivers that run to the coast.’”<sup>7</sup>

Godfrey N. Uzoigwe contends that the doctrine of the hinterland not only was crucial to the late nineteenth-century Scramble for Africa, but also played an important role in the earlier colonization of North America in the form of the “principle of contiguity or continuity or ‘manifest destiny’” (1976, 194). He emphasizes the indefiniteness of the hinterland’s scope, which meant that whole swathes of the African continent could be claimed as the hinterland of a single port settlement. Similarly, Louisiana’s hinterland was taken to extend as far as Oregon. All solutions proposed during and after the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference to the problem of competing colonial powers claiming the same areas as *their* hinterland proved ineffective. This underlines how the hinterland was not in fact limited by the reach of a river’s fertilizing waters and thus not at all a “‘natural’ sphere of interest” (Brahm and Rosenhaft 2016, 5). In theory, it could be stretched out to match colonialism’s boundless greed; in practice, in an era of fierce colonial competition, it almost always needed to be inscribed on the land and its multiple life forms through “effective occupation” (Uzoigwe 1976, 196).

<sup>7</sup>As Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury (1830–1903) pursued British colonial expansion during the initial phase of the Scramble for Africa (1881–1914).

## COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL HINTERLANDS

The demarcation of the hinterland was a bone of colonial contention between Britain and Germany especially. Matthew Unangst describes how, originally, the hinterland doctrine held that a colonizer's "territory should extend into the interior of the continent along the same lines of latitude or longitude as its coastal possessions" up to where a natural border was encountered (2022, 496). Upon this view, propagated by the English jurist Travers Twiss, the interior was regarded as *terra nullius* or empty land that could be claimed before it was explored or even laid eyes on. As a new colonial power, Germany challenged this physical delineation of the hinterland and sought instead to circumscribe it based on the inland reach of economic and military activity, which would limit the territory of more established colonizers like Britain and invalidate claims to sovereignty by African rulers lacking (extensive) coastal possessions.

This new definition of the hinterland, which allowed colonial powers to "justify territorial expansion as merely turning an existing economic region into a political one" (Unangst 2022, 508) won out and more generally shaped not just the colonial but also the postcolonial world order. As Unangst explains, the economic hinterland was taken up in the late twentieth century by newly independent nations to assert themselves as an alternative geopolitical force. At the 1970 meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Lusaka, "a union of the 'littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean'" was established, linking Africa and Asia across the ocean as a "cosmopolitan space pre-dating European expansion" capable of challenging Portuguese and British control over these waterways (Unangst 2022, 497, 498). That this union, despite defining hinterlands as "States whose main access to the sea is the Indian Ocean," included China, which has no such access, makes clear that the hinterland easily lends itself to political uses (of various kinds, including colonial, postcolonial, capitalist, and communist) by laying equal claim to spaces of both land and water on the basis of ambiguous, shifting principles that allow these spaces to be strategically expanded and constricted (Unangst 2022, 512).

In other cases, wherein the concept of the hinterland is invoked in an indistinct manner, bordering on the metaphorical, crucial aspects of particular hinterlands and their politics can become invisible, and the hinterland may end up too tightly bound to particular geographies. This is the case in Gerhard Ens's *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of*

*the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century*. The book's main title seeks to express how the 1870 Manitoba Act led the Metis—people of mixed Indigenous and European descent whose involvement in the fur trade made them part of “the world of European mercantile capitalism” (Ens 1996, 5)—to no longer consider the Red River area (now part of Canada) as their homeland. Forced to return to subsistence agriculture after losing their “occupational niche in the fur trade,” the Metis, according to Ens, found themselves facing failed harvests and high mortality rates, leading many to move elsewhere (1996, 175).

Ens uses “hinterland” only in the title of his book and that of one of its chapters. The term is never defined but rather suggested to denote the falling fortunes of the Metis. This brings about a twofold obfuscation. First, it clouds how the Metis “homeland” was already a colonial hinterland, initially expropriated from Indigenous peoples by the Hudson's Bay Company. Second, it obscures how the Manitoba Act consolidated this hinterland status by facilitating “the rapid influx of Canadian settlers” from Ontario and “the introduction of large-scale commercial agriculture to the West” (Ens 1996, 175, 158). Thus, while the position of the Metis did indeed change significantly after 1870, this change occurred *within* a persisting hinterland: for the Metis, from a hinterland experienced as a homeland, Red River became a hinterland of abandonment. In other words, hinterlands and homelands always hold within them complex relations. This is obfuscated when Ens links the hinterland to the “re-pastoralization” of the Metis after a period of “proto-industrialization” that folded them into the capitalist world market, thus placing it outside or before colonialism, capitalism, and climate change (1996, 173). What his own research clearly shows, however, is that the dispossession of the Metis after the Manitoba Act was in fact due to the *intensification* of capitalism-colonialism in the Red River area that the Act facilitated. In this volume, Luregn Lenggenhager and Giorgio Miescher discuss the Lower Orange River/Garib area that straddles the border between South Africa and Namibia, between the eighteenth century and the present, as variously experienced as central and peripheral in relation to multiple, shifting centers, while Rila Mukherjee traces the changing contours and cultures of the far and near hinterlands of Kolkata, during and after colonialism. As such, these contributions underline the need to specify in what way(s) and for whom a certain area is or was a hinterland, and of what kind.



## CONTEMPORARY HINTERLANDS

In relation to contemporary hinterlands, too, it is important to carefully parse their specific characteristics, functions, and potentialities, and to recognize both what links them to historical hinterlands and what sets them apart. Most insistently, contemporary hinterlands seem to materialize as increasingly widespread and densely layered “sacrifice zones” for capital (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 28) and of the climatic, with clear (neo)colonial overtones. The ever more generalized system of extractivism that characterizes today’s global capitalism operates through “imperial networks (or platforms)” that “not only *link* already-existing spaces of poverty and richness; they also *create* new spaces or instances of poverty” (Ye et al. 2020, 164–165, emphasis in original). In other words, these networks, which comprise industries like mining and intensive agriculture, but also logistical infrastructures crucial to sustaining and speeding up global trade including data farms, distribution centers, and waste processing plants, produce further hinterlands to be exploited and, upon exhaustion, abandoned in a state of “barrenness” (Ye et al. 2020, 157).

In their 2020 article “Operational Landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene,” Brenner and Katsikis point out that 70% of the earth’s surface is now “used area” and that hinterlands should therefore be taken far more seriously in thinking about “the contemporary urban problematic” (2020, 24). For us, truly taking hinterlands seriously means contesting the urban bias that pervades much of even the most innovative work on hinterlands. Brenner and Katsikis themselves, for instance, tellingly restrict the hinterland to “the diverse non-city landscapes that support urban life” (2020, 24).<sup>8</sup> As Eugene Van Cleef already made clear in his 1941 article “Hinterland and Umland,” the trade center served by a hinterland does not have to be a city or town, but can also be a village (1941, 308). Looking to present-day hinterlands, moreover, Phil A. Neel (2018) stresses that they may very well be found in or near cities: protracted industrial areas, slums, sprawl, and rust belts full of ghost towns proliferate across urban, rural, and wilderness spaces. What contemporary hinterlands support, then, is less an exclusively urban life than a form of globalization that includes what both Neel and Monika Krause (2013)

<sup>8</sup> See also the collection *The City’s Hinterland: Dynamism and Divergence in Europe’s Peri-Urban Territories* (Hoggart 2016), which makes the urban bias explicit in its title.

have termed *ruralization*, where the hinterland does not peripherally serve as a “metabolic input” for a given city (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 25) but functions as a central process in its own right. Neel, referring to “places like northern Wisconsin—once imagined to be a great industrial complex, now reduced to an essentially rural existence” (2018, 112), links ruralization to extreme decline, in a way that resonates with Ens’s description of the Metis’s journey from homeland to hinterland as a regressive one from proto-industrialization to re-pastoralization. Krause, however, recognizes ruralization as a potentially (re)generative force, for example, in the form of urban farming—discussed in this volume as an ambiguous hinterland practice by Ruth Sacks (in relation to a community project in Johannesburg) and Becca Voelcker (in Agnes Denes’s 1982 artwork *Wheatfield*, which saw a field of wheat grown in central Manhattan, New York City).

As we indicated earlier, such processes of ruralization remain largely invisible in discussions of the hinterland. Despite wanting to challenge the “urban-age metanarrative,” Brenner, for instance, ends up making the rural disappear altogether in his proposal for “an urban theory *without an outside*” (2016, 120, 124, emphasis in original). He also maintains a rigid distinction between *hinterlands*, defined as “historically inherited [spaces] in which various ‘free gifts’ of nature embedded in the land (materials, energy, labour, food, water) are appropriated to produce primary commodities,” and *operational landscapes* “consolidated through the active production of colossal urban-industrial spatial configurations that have been reflexively designed to accelerate and intensify the accumulation of capital on the world market” (Brenner 2016, 125–126). We instead argue that the two cannot be so easily distinguished and that a new conceptualization of the hinterland is needed that allows for rural and urban realms—and the processes of urbanization and ruralization unfolding across them—to be theorized as entangled (Nuttall 2009), as emergent in their difference from a dynamic process of intra-action (Barad 2007). In doing so, we emphasize the continuities between the hinterlands inherited from the (colonial) past and the operational landscapes of today by calling both hinterlands, as for the cases of South Africa’s fading ostrich industry and border-crossing energy companies described in, respectively, Pamila Gupta’s and Sindy-Leigh McBride’s chapters.

LOOKING *FROM* THE HINTERLAND

There are critical perspectives that recognize the importance of looking *from* the hinterland and reading *for* the affectivities of the hinterland, both those associated with the destructive demands that Anthropogenic capitalism-colonialism places on it and those afforded by the hinterland despite and in excess of these demands. Such perspectives examine the contemporary hinterland's historical intertwinement with warfare and imperialism, as well as the dispossessing effects on the hinterland of the way contemporary logistics “suture[es] a form of calculative reason premised on system-wide optimization to the reconfiguration of physical and social landscapes” by means of a “universalizing logic of rational flow” (Chua et al. 2018, 618, 617; see also Tsing 2009, Cowen 2014, and Danyluk 2018). Moreover, they recognize that this flow, even if carefully calibrated and securitized, remains susceptible to interruptions, both accidental, like the Suez Canal blockage, and deliberate, like the strikes, protests, and forms of sabotage that have unfolded in hinterlands across the world, including around the newly planned Mexico City airport, as explored in this volume by Luciano Concheiro San Vicente and Xavier Nueno Guitart. Such interruptions mark hinterlands as “sites of vulnerability and potential emancipation” (Chua et al. 2018, 623), where reclamations may—literally—gain ground.

The individual chapters of the book seek to map where contemporary hinterlands are located, how and by whom they are contested, and how they challenge rusted notions of the urban, suburban, rural, and wilderness as easily distinguishable both geographically and in terms of the functions they are assigned by colonialism, capitalism, and climatic conditions. While interventions like Neel's *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict* (2018) and Milica Topalović, Martin Knüsel, Marcel Jäggi, and Stefani Krautzig's *Architecture of Territory—Hinterland: Singapore, Johor, Riau* (2013) have been crucial to our own thinking, they have also tended to concentrate on hinterlands in a single defined regional context. What we offer is a multi-sited and multifaceted engagement where new light is shed on the escalation of necropolitics (Mbembe 2019) into a regime of brutality that, across divergent spaces, functions as “a vast enterprise of occupation of territories, capture of bodies and imaginaries, disassembly, disconnection and demolition” (Mbembe 2020, 14,

our translation<sup>9</sup>). An important recent consideration by Jennifer Wenzel has recognized the hinterland as a prime terrain for brutalist experimentation where “waste lands are transformed into wasted lands and wasted lives—lands and lives *laid waste*” (2019, 142).<sup>10</sup> In our book, building on this, a conceptual architecture of the present is made visible by thinking together hinterlands across the Global North and South—and hinterlands that traverse social spaces, cultural imaginations, and more-than-human worlds—from a range of theoretical and (inter)disciplinary perspectives across the humanities and social sciences.

Our central premise is that in order to understand how hinterlands, while functioning as sites for brutalist experimentation and active laying waste (sometimes quite literally, as in the case of the plastic waste industry in Chinese hinterlands examined by Emily Ng), are also characterized by survival, endurance, refusal, fugitivity, and even resistance, the conceptual, aesthetic, and affective registers and forms in which hinterlands are generally conceived need to be reworked. An important starting point for this theoretical and cultural work lies in recognizing how the hinterland’s meaning as denoting any space—whether figurative or literal—“lying beyond what is visible or known” (OED) tends to overwrite the hinterland with the assumption that it is unmapped, backward, and therefore not worth knowing about, or safely beyond the reach of even surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019). Taking our cue from Wenzel’s abovementioned work on the role of the cultural imaginary in how climate change is thought and attended to emotionally, we ask how the hinterland has “*become* unimaginable, beyond the capacity to be imagined” except in very restricted ways: “What representational processes, through which images are framed and stories get told, shape and limit the capacity to imagine” the hinterland (Wenzel 2019, 18, emphasis in original)?

Perhaps the most important limit on the capacity to imagine the hinterland in all its facets is the idea of the hinterland as an untouched “back country” that is assumed to wholly feature traditional rural ways of life. In Ens’s study, this idea appears as a projection negatively associated with regression, but it is more widespread in a positively valued form that is

<sup>9</sup> French original: “Une vaste entreprise d’occupation de territoires, d’emprise sur les corps et les imaginaires, de désassemblage, de déliaison et de démolition.”

<sup>10</sup> Wenzel’s definition of wastelands as “the original raw material of capitalism and colonialism awaiting transformation into arable, cultivated, revenue-producing land” (2019, 142) identifies them as what this volume calls hinterlands.

akin to the rural idyll, where the hinterland promises an escape from the pressures of globalization. A characteristic example is Gestalten's 2016 coffee-table book *The Hinterland: Cabins, Love Shacks and Other Hide-Outs*, which, according to the publisher's cover blurb, "explores architecture and design approaches to creating the refuges that refresh and revitalize amidst the beauty of nature." The hinterland as sanctuary also surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw many in the Global North, at least initially, exchange cities for places such as "Croatia's hinterland," which were perceived as safer, as offering refuge from contagion and contamination.<sup>11</sup>

Like the material and ideological risk of idyllic renditions geared toward offering urban audiences escapist fantasies (Peeren 2018), there is also a clear risk in the idealization of the hinterland's material, discursive, and social ruination (Stoler 2013). Certain genres like the gothic lend themselves to bringing out the ways in which landscapes in "the hinterland remember death," especially in relation to the plights of first nation people under settler colonial regimes (Blackadder quoted in Doolan 2022; see also Doolan 2019). However, when such genres overly romanticize abandonment and decay in the hinterland, they can run the risk of glorifying what is actually a structural setting of imperial ruination (Stoler 2013). Kate Woodward's contribution to this volume, in taking up the drowned hinterland of Capel Celyn in Wales, makes clear that gothic elements can encourage the remembrance of the (socially) dead of the past and reconfigure nationalist imaginaries in ways that are more inclusive, generative, and globalized. In turn, Catherine Lord's reading of Patrick Keiller's experimental film *Robinson in Ruins* shows how a biophilia that refuses to indulge in nostalgia but seeks to re-operationalize anti-capitalist rebellions from the past in the present may be conjured in the hinterland by infrastructural markers and life forms like lichens that are not generally deemed aesthetically appealing.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.dw.com/en/croatias-hinterland-a-dream-destination-in-the-pandemic/av-59130581>. Of course, as the pandemic progressed it became clear that hinterlands were not immune to the virus and harbored population concentrations (in, e.g., prisons and meat processing plants) particularly prone to spreading it while lacking health services and especially intensive care beds. In addition, the origins of Covid-19 are likely to lie precisely in the "sources of capital and economic geographies" that are part of China's so-called hinterlands (Wallace 2020, 79).

## PART I—MATERIALITIES: EXTRACTION, LOGISTICS

As a counterpoint to the flattening out of the hinterland's multivalent material and affective charge by idealizing or romanticizing imaginations, we highlight, especially in the first part of this volume, how, from the nineteenth century to the present, what has primarily characterized the hinterland is precisely its function as a catalyst for the global spread of the capitalist-colonialist-climatic assemblage.<sup>12</sup> The continuing expansion of this assemblage means that the hinterland can encompass areas belonging to and running across vastly different geographical and conceptual typologies inclusive of the urban, suburban, rural, and wilderness, and of multi-species co-habitation. Breaking free of the rigid boundaries often put between these categories, we emphasize how hinterlands may, in fact, be situated on land, water or ice, during sun, rain or wind, and warm or cold temperatures, in the air, or even in outer space. That the hinterland underwrites and *sustains* the capitalist-colonialist-climatic assemblage, moreover, indicates that it should be considered as central rather than peripheral to this system and can in no way be considered as separate, as an outside where one can retreat from global modernity.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Arguably, this role of the hinterland goes back as far as the formation of the early Mesopotamian states in the Tigris-Euphrates region from roughly 3100 BCE. In *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (2017), James C. Scott engages the hinterland (a term he only uses once) through the notion of “the barbarian zone,” where “barbarian” is a tongue-in-cheek way to highlight the ecological and cultural diversity and complexity that existed outside the “agro-ecology of the State” (33). Whereas the State is structured by the confines of the domus complex, where people crowd together within enclosures and work on monotonous tasks “strapped [...] to the metronome of a major cereal grain” (20), the barbarian zone features “hunting, slash-and-burn cultivation, shellfish collection, foraging, pastoralism, roots and tubers, and few if any standing crops. It is a zone of physical mobility, mixed and shifting subsistence strategies: in a word ‘illegible’ production” (33). The contrast, as Scott himself admits, is exaggerated and tends to romanticize pre-pastoral communities, but we find it nonetheless helpful for thinking the ecological specificity and agency of the hinterland in a dynamics of state regulation and economic regimentation.

<sup>13</sup>The hinterland, then, is not equivalent to the periphery of world systems theory. Whereas “the periphery is the backwater of the world system” (Klak 2013, 101), a zone of exploitation “in which are concentrated low-profit, low-technology, low-wage, less diversified production” (Wallerstein 1976, 462), and from which surplus value flows unidirectionally to the core, hinterlands “may take an active part in global relations” (Epple quoted in Brahm and Rosenhaft 2016, 5). Hinterlands may be located in what for world systems theory are core countries and are increasingly likely to feature high-tech and high-wage jobs (for example in the offshore oil industry, but also in agribusiness).

Part I focuses on how past and present hinterlands may be designated for but should not be taken as fully exhausted by processes of extraction and the logistics revolution. In the opening chapter, Emily Ng discusses Wang Jiuliang's 2016 documentary film *Plastic China*, which follows two families working in a small-scale plastic processing factory in Shandong province in north-east China. Viewers travel with the incoming plastic waste (mostly from Western countries) from ship to port to a small processing factory in the hinterland. In Chinese, hinterland is "belly land," Ng tells us, connoting "not only a storage space but also themes of digestion, the vulnerability of the viscera and an inner centrality." The chapter reflects on how, in the official cut of the film, "ecocritical momentum" is produced through an aesthetics of the "toxic sublime," yet Ng also comments on what is deemed an "undigested scene" within a "global capitalist metabolic system": in the hinterland of the recycling factory, the way the camera frames children playing in mounds of toxic waste plays up to the notion of the white western savior and risks "reproducing developmentalist-humanitarian chronotopes, geontological divides, and Sinophobic tropes." An alternative cut of the film, Ng contends, makes clear that this hinterland, and the lives lived within it, can be read through other, more enabling affective and political registers.

Like Ng, Becca Voelcker focuses on an artwork that has been received as a critique of capitalism's reliance on extractive hinterlands. She takes as her focal point the spectral *Wheatfield: A Confrontation*, produced by artist Agnes Denes in the year 1982, when she and a team of agriculturalists planted and harvested two acres of wheat in a then landfill (now Battery Park) adjacent to Manhattan's Wall Street over a four-month period. The work has been consistently celebrated as "environmentalist" by Denes and art critics alike, both then and now, some 40 years later. Yet, as an artwork it contains the seeds of its own ambivalence, asserts Voelcker. As bringing a hinterland into the "citadel" of New York City (Denes's word), it works not only as a confrontation, exposing the metropole for all its extractive imperialism, but also as a "pleasure" (Voelcker's word) in that the wheatfield's pastoral beauty possibly bolsters the very patriarchal capitalism that it purports to expose, including essentialist notions of nature and femininity. Voelcker's ecofeminist study is guided by hinterland diagramming, as enabling a looking at the artwork's behind-the-scenes production. In this way, she arrives at a more careful assessment of the artwork, taking in both *Wheatfield's* achievements in exposing the hinterland as *of the city*, essential

to its functioning, and its complicities in affirming the hinterland as a classed and gendered escape from the metropole.

Not only can hinterland materialities be invested with multiple, contrasting meanings and affects, as Ng and Voelcker make clear, they are also subject to constant change as a result of ever-new extractive processes, developments in global capitalism (from the logistics revolution to financialization), and advancing climate change. A river acting as a dividing line between Namibia and South Africa becomes the focal point for connecting and complicating hinterlands in a chapter by Luregn Lenggenhager and Giorgio Miescher. The Lower Orange River (or Lower !Garib) region has been the site of marginalization, extraction, and displacement (of the Khoi and San specifically) over the *longue durée* of colonialism (both British and German), apartheid, and postcolonial governmentalities. The river's layered history of occupation is one of alternating remoteness and centrality as it featured agricultural small farming, settler-owned farmland of game and livestock, a hardened colonial border, a strategic military base, commercial sheep and irrigation farming, a diamond deposit and industrial mining, and, finally, annexed territory. Showing the Lower Orange River to be a simultaneous space of inclusion and exclusion with characteristics of both center and periphery, the authors map out a nuanced historical geography of the Southern African region from the perspective of its riverine past, present, and future.

Hinterlands are becoming “increasingly unstable” as land reclaims the sea for development purposes and becomes ever more “amphibious,” Rila Mukherjee argues in her contribution. Kolkota, once a port city, is now a megacity with 15 million people. Parts of the Sundarbans mangrove swamps and many islands have become part of Kolkota's municipalities. The “up” and “down” islands of the Sundarbans are its near and far hinterlands, featuring different ecologies and infrastructures, but also distinct forms of religious syncretism, as the “up” islands become more intimately connected to the urban center, while the “down” islands are more and more abandoned. The management and transformation of Calcutta in the nineteenth century into a “concrete space” is, moreover, increasingly challenged by massive cyclones, storm surges, and extreme flooding, also written about by Amitav Ghosh. Mukherjee describes the impact on especially the far hinterlands of Kolkota of the sweeping away of land bridges and other infrastructures of connection thus: “as the far hinterland's economy sinks into obscurity, and as embankments collapse time and again, its people will live as they have always done, with ever present danger.”



Luciano Concheiro San Vicente and Xavier Nueno Guitart take up this concern for how turning hinterlands into logistics spaces affects hinterland communities in their discussion of the construction of a new airport for Mexico City in the lakebed of Texcoco, for which planning began in the early 2000s. The idea was to build the airport on reclaimed land and thus to expand the city into its wet hinterlands. The airport construction was meant to invent a new kind of (dried-out) hinterland which would also be an “architectural emblem of global Mexico,” the authors argue. But this “global Mexico” was to stand on muddy and unstable ground. When communities who lived on the land contested the construction vigorously, it was decided to build the Texcoco Ecological Park instead. What locals consistently argued was needed, however, was neither an airport nor a park, but a lake. The chapter asks: if the accumulation of wealth generates dispossession in the hinterlands, how do the hinterlands push back? Not just local communities but the lakebed itself, and thus the reclaimed land, is shown to resist rapid appropriation by economic interests.

Historic and enduring hinterlands of colonial forestry and extractive mining industries (of gold and diamonds) in the Cape Colony of South Africa lie at the heart of the chapter by Sindy-Leigh McBride, which closes the first part of the volume. Here, the magisterial yet oxidized statue of Cecil Rhodes that stands today in the Company Gardens in Cape Town becomes a starting point to expose the twining of colonialism and climate always and the broken afterlives of imperial dreaming in South Africa today. The metaphorical and material hinterland are mutually reinforced in the body of this chapter: the first half reflects on the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference held in Glasgow during the month of November 2021 to expose the hypocrisy of fossil fuel corporations thinking with Anthropogenic social responsibility; as both bankrollers of climate-concern conferences and drivers of climate change, they engage in a form of greenwashing that renders the destruction and abandonment of hinterlands invisible. The second half of the chapter focuses on how coal-fire power production is creating new hinterlands destined for barrenness by way of a case study of two South African energy companies (Sasol and Eskom) in operation today across Southern Africa. In the end, McBride asserts, the colonial dream to control climate gestured by the Rhodes statue stands as an ongoing hermeneutic injustice reliant on the notion that hinterlands are there to lay waste to and blind to the fact that this laying waste will ultimately also ruin the center.

## PART II—AFFECTIVITIES: ABANDONMENT, DREAMING

In the second part of this book, the entangled materialities that make up contemporary hinterlands—their molecular substances, infrastructures, and their human, animal, and vegetative bodies—are linked to affectivities. One way to do this is by taking recourse to what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, in her study of West Virginia’s coal-mining hinterland, refers to as “the space on the side of the road,” which “emerges in imagination when ‘things happen’ to interrupt the expected and naturalized, and people find themselves surrounded by a place and caught in a haunting doubled epistemology of being in the midst of things and impacted by them and yet making something of things” (1996, 4). Focusing on this space moves the concept of the hinterland beyond the analysis of situations of discursive, economic, material, and political disavowal that utilize either an existing or fabricated spatial remove to effect a demarcation of certain places from what counts as civilization. Rather, this section of the book asks “what happens if we approach worlds not as the dead or reeling effects of distant systems, but as lived affects with tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits, rogue force fields...?” (Stewart 2011, 446). The lived affects that circulate in the hinterland worlds discussed in the chapters in this section range from desperation, exhaustion, indignation, and hatred to defiance, hope, and joy. This indicates that, despite its assigned function as a realm of extraction, a wasteland to be wasted, the hinterland is capable of exceeding (if never fully escaping) its instrumentalization by the capitalist-colonialist-climatic assemblage. At the same time, the chapters in this part show that the politics circulated through the affective economies of the hinterland range widely and are not guaranteed to be progressive or without their own blind spots.

Pamila Gupta explores “hinterland thinking” in relation to the small town and the township in South Africa, as refracted through Rob Nixon’s *Dreambirds* (1999) and Jacob Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia* (2009), both memoirs and fragments of political becoming via visual, sensorial, and sonic recollections of childhood. Hinterland as an act of writing, a “contiguous folding” of the material and the metaphorical not so easily demarcated into rural and urban, is also explored here, as is the idea that each memoir may be the hinterland of the other. Places like Oudtshoorn, which Nixon writes about, are spaces of “pivot globalizations,” in Gupta’s term, home to fleeting industries such as ostrich farming and to fleeing migrants, as well as imaginative oases linking to bigger worlds. As Nixon writes:

“South Africa’s hinterland abounded in such towns.” These are stories “of extraction and dreaming both,” Gupta elaborates. Dlamini’s Katlehong, a township that was poor but not poor in life, is read for its sociability, its connectedness to elsewhere, its informality, and its radio stations. It is in these registers that Dlamini parses this hinterland’s geographical adjacency to the big city as productive of enabling affects, dreams, and political and writerly consciousness.

The swampy hinterlands of Louisiana are where Maarten Zwiers locates his chapter. The Deep South is shown to be a neglected site for looking at the rootedness of larger American political machinations, one where wetlands and authoritarian politics come together through a connected history of white supremacy with oil drilling. One early twentieth-century masculinist figure stands out: plantation family man, segregationist strongman, and rightwing political campaigner Leander “Judge” Perez, who was in control of Plaquemines Parish, a site of oil and natural gas extraction. He managed to keep this “watery empire afloat” (Zwiers’s words) over a long political career that spanned 40 years (1920s–1960s), to the detriment of this bayou’s natural environment and inhabitants, both human and non-human. Although the wetlands were also a site of refuge, for runaway slaves and, later, the Underground Right to Vote Movement and Black fishermen, the idea of a marshland given to extraction twined with corrupt and racialized politics remained dominant. It eventually traveled North to become the blueprint for the now infamous Republican jingoist cry of “drain the swamp” that heralded Republican Donald Trump’s presidential bid in 2016. Here, the hinterland, turned toxic by economic and political machinations, functions, materially and affectively, as a harbinger of things to come—environmental disaster and far-right populist insurrection.

Tjalling Valdés Olmos reflects on ways of responding to capitalist ruination and abandonment in the far hinterlands of the American West via a reading of Neel’s *Hinterland* and Chloe Zhao’s 2020 film *Nomadland*. If Neel tends to rely on modes of resistance such as riots, rebellion, or class war, as well as on binaries of far and near which reify the rural-urban binary and privilege the more recognizable modes of resistance of the peri-urban, Valdés Olmos suggests that *Nomadland* portrays more ambivalent forms of resistance—and repetition—that draw upon affective sensoria and economies. Neel, he argues, “vacates the far hinterland politically,” at least for the left, but if one turns to the interruptions and “glitches” that Lauren Berlant identifies, one can read Zhao’s film as interrupting the

frontier narratives of the classic Western. While referencing this genre's tropes, the film also questions the capitalist, heteronormative, and settler colonialist fantasies it conjures, Valdés Olmos argues. And yet, ultimately, *Nomadland* does repeat the ideals of rugged individuality and “strenuous subjectivity” this terrain offers to white people, here a woman, Fern. Black and Indigenous modes of communal survival, world-making, and resistance in this hinterland, which rely on very different imaginations of its materialities and affective affordances, thus remain invisible to the film’s purpose.

If hinterlands are often read for stasis and political impasse, then we can re-evaluate these assumptions via the fiction of South African-born writers Alex La Guma and Zoë Wicomb, Andrew van der Vlies suggests. Both writers create protagonists who find in the hinterlands, particularly far ones, latent “energies of revolt” that can be turned into forms of active resistance to the apartheid status quo, personal and collective. In La Guma’s *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End*, the urban-peripheral spaces or near hinterlands of Cape Town are sites of apathy, while the novel’s ending and dedication, in Van der Vlies’s words, propose “a revalorization of the hinterland not as sleepy rural station-sidings . . . but sites of future resistance . . . and political (and personal) actualization.” Similarly, he argues, Wicomb’s female protagonist in *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) finds in the “far fringes of the far hinterland” a connection with place that is “neither circumscribed by nor has its significance prescribed by” apartheid or whiteness. In fact, the latter carries the potential for her to become a writer, including via the materiality of the hinterland—the fynbos and proteas of the Gifberge—itself. Van der Vlies thus urges that we consider the reanimating energies to be glimpsed in or behind the “stasis” so often foregrounded in depleted hinterlands and overly economic readings, in order to revalorize this stasis as potential.

The disruptive local, national, and transnational ghosts emerging from a “lost” hinterland, in the form of a village that was purposely submerged under water to make way for a reservoir, are the focus of Kate Woodward’s chapter. She looks at how three recent filmic and televisual representations of the 1965 flooding of Capel Celyn in Wales portray it as a hydropolitical event that remains in the Welsh consciousness. Despite mass objections at the time, the Tryweryn River was dammed, flooding the small village and its surrounding farmland to produce a reservoir to service nearby Liverpool and the Wirral. This patterned act of flooding in (colonial) Wales was equally one of displacement and destruction, affecting 48 people, 12

houses and farms, the post office, the school, a chapel, and a cemetery. That this drenched village was one of the last Welsh-speaking areas in Wales is the reason that its cultural memory and landscape as a national icon endures and is powerfully etched in art, music, literature, television, and film. The fate of Capel Celyn showcases how a sodden and mythic Wales functions as a hinterland in the larger geography of the United Kingdom—alongside Patagonia in Argentina, where Welsh nineteenth-century migrants were sent on the promise of a new homeland, thus becoming colonizers themselves (as explored in one of the filmic representations under discussion). While the sacrifice of this peripheralized agricultural village to ensure the smooth flow of water to urban settlements could not be stopped at the time, the television series and films, in Woodward’s reading, envision the material and emotional disruption it caused as pressing upon the present in the form of water-born ghosts that refuse to let the interconnected “drowned postcolonial haunted hinterlands” of Wales and Argentina be forgotten.

The potential for cultural imaginaries to use particular aesthetic and affective registers to draw attention to forgotten histories of not just hinterland losses but also hinterland rebellions, and to envision new hinterland futures, is also addressed by Catherine Lord. She looks closely at an experimental political film that centers on a radical main character named Robinson (after Defoe’s famous protagonist), who fights against capitalist extraction in London’s hinterland at the time of the global financial crisis of 2008. Patrick Keiller’s wondrous *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) is read for its portrayal of still very active British post-industrial wastelands, including cement mines, ruined churches, and sixteenth-century country estates such as that of Hampton Gay, with its history of worker rebellion. What also appears in this filmic far hinterland, lingered upon by the camera for minutes at the time, are lichens, flowers, fences, and government gas markers (GPSS). Often overlooked as they “hide in plain sight,” they mark the hinterland, Lord argues, as a place where organic and non-organic matter works in symbiosis with humans (including displaced agricultural workers, the underpaid, and the poor) and the land itself (in particular, resilient lichens and flourishing flowers). Keiller’s hinterlands are, on the one hand, places of derelict ruins, abandoned military bases, class oppression, and accelerating global warming. On the other, they are sites of wildness, of potentiality to dismantle late capitalism and forge a socialist community agenda that involves building eco-homes and a commons under public ownership. Cinematic biophilia as an affective modus

operandi is achieved through the attention drawn by the wandering character of Robinson—a cameraman, landscape photographer, and stand-in for Keiller, the filmmaker—to the sightly and unsightly elements that symbiotically give form to the hinterland and that suggest ways of life beyond capitalist enclosure.

### PART III—ECOLOGIES: CARE, TRANSFORMATION

The chapters in the third and final part of the book point to the alternative ways of living together and new forms of care, including for non-human life forms and the planet, that may if not altogether flourish then at least persist or be imagined as persisting in hinterlands, literally by the road, to recall Stewart, or in other unlikely, seemingly inhospitable places, as well as under trying conditions of drought, flooding, raging winds, or pestilence. Such ways of living need not be progressive, as Part II also demonstrates. The fragile, tentative forms of care, for self and others, located in the hinterland often emerge from strategic mobilizations of the tension between the hinterland's status as an accessible space harboring resources whose availability for exploitation is taken for granted and its association with that which lies beyond what is visible or known. This part also emphasizes how hinterland ecologies are lived differently by their human, animal, vegetal, mineral, and other (including cyborg) constituents and how these differences may offer terrains, however fragile, for imagining hinterlands beyond the capitalist-colonialist-climatic assemblage.

Hinterland ecologies are not necessarily landbound, Esther Peeren shows, in her analysis of Ben Smith's 2019 novel *Doggerland*. The story is set on a deteriorating windfarm on the North Sea, maintained by a "boy" and an "old man" in a dystopian future where both capitalism and climate are depleted. Besides setting the hinterland literally at sea, the novel also identifies it as a desolate "milieu that leaves its human inhabitants reduced to necessary but interchangeable labor, affectively at sea," Peeren writes. Animal life does not fare any better, as no birds or fish remain in this "faltering" logistics space. Yet, there are fissures in the "capitalist-colonialist net" that allow the men to care for each other and find beauty in the polluted sea and that cause certain species (jellyfish) to thrive. In addition, by invoking water's "endurance through deep time" the novel seeks to "summon a beyond-the-hinterland," a future after capitalism-colonialism and after the human. Here, though, Peeren argues, the novel's vision of water's resilience risks "underplaying the hinterland's destructive force," for

water, at the molecular level, “does not persist unaffected by the hinterland at sea.”

Sarah Nuttall re-reads J. M. Coetzee’s novel *The Life and Times of Michael K* for its conditions of pluviality (rain that causes flooding) and dryness, showing how they are crucial to the novel’s registers of extraction, abandonment, and care in its looped hinterlands from the port city of Cape Town to the uplands of the Karoo. In the near and far hinterlands, Michael K is an exposed and largely abandoned subject reduced to the labor he can provide. Yet the novel explores, too, the possibility of living outside (or, in a more complex vein, within) these hinterland regimes—beyond the terms of “camp life” in a “time of war.” Crucial to the undoing of the terms of K’s multiple confinements as a raced, classed, and disabled subject, however, are questions of water, wetness, and dryness, pluviality and deep drought, in which rain or the lack of it can save or destroy life as well as the smallest project of personal freedom, Nuttall shows. Thus, it is in the colonial-apartheid matrix of power that the looped hinterland becomes a site of extraction and small abundance, with Coetzee incorporating registers of both in K’s quest for “self-possession, subsistence, and regeneration.”

In her chapter, Marrigje Paijmans explores such difficult tensions between extraction, abuse, self-possession, and the imagination as a line of flight in the context of animal husbandry in Marieke Lucas Rijneveld’s 2020 novel *My Heavenly Favorite*. The Netherlands is the second largest exporter of agricultural products, after the United States. While the presence of large-scale livestock farms remains almost invisible in the Dutch countryside, Paijmans draws forward this obscured space as a hinterland of extractive capital. Rijneveld’s novel, much like the ones explored by Peeren and Nuttall, explores the interstices of the extractive hinterland by focusing on how it fosters a girl character “becoming animal” in Deleuze’s sense. By taking imaginative flight, via physical proximity to farm animals and via pop culture, the girl takes to the animal hinterland of the village she lives in to escape the predatory gaze and actions of a pedophile vet. This is not an unambiguously anthropomorphic novel, as animal agency is drawn in at the level of affect: the “forces and feelings” that “connect and divide bodies within sensual experience” allow the animal hinterland, on Paijmans’s reading, to emerge as “neglected and exploited, yet at the same time morbidly attractive and regenerative.” She explores, via the novel, how a society which routinely harms animals produces harmful relations

among humans as well and how this entanglement, foregrounded in the novel, is what opens the animal hinterland to analysis.

The hinterland as “a necessary, if unseemly, supplement to named ‘lands’” invites the compound focalization approach taken by Murray Pratt in his chapter on literary hinterlands and the planetary. Writings from Amitav Ghosh and Achille Mbembe are summoned with a sense of urgency as forms of reparation and renegotiation with Earth, and as a way forward, a method for anthropogenic thinking and working with three contemporary novelistic vignettes of hinterlands in three distinct locations: a fictional conglomerate Indian city in Deepa Anappara’s *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2020); the Glaswegian suburb of Pithead, featuring an “abandoned mining heap,” in Douglas Stuart’s *Shuggie Bain* (2020); and a dystopic fantastical future Chinese waste-sorting settlement named Silicon Isle in Chen Qiufan’s *Waste Tide* (2013). A defining characteristic of hinterlands, “their salvage punk proclivity for juxtaposition and *bricolage*,” is mobilized to offer a new reading of neglected and disadvantaged lives set amongst fractured fictional terrains imbued with exhaustion and exploitation. Yet these subaltern lives—human and, in Chen’s science fiction, cyborg—are also afforded agency by these three novelists, by way of focalizations that highlight how linguistic inventiveness; the power of storytelling, poetry, and dance; and the repurposing of dwellings and environments (of body and mind) to make sense of one’s worldview are able to unsettle dominant logics, attain affective value, avert disaster, and bring forth planetary justice. Hinterlands are thus productively seen as both the “bruise left by brutalizing capital” and the “promise of recalibrated relations with the world that sustains us,” in Pratt’s words.

Forms of care suggesting potentialities for the transformation of the hinterland beyond the extractions and abandonments inflicted upon it by the capitalist-colonialist-climatic assemblage are not only envisioned in literary texts. Ruth Sacks discusses Johannesburg’s inner-city hinterlands in terms of planting and plant histories in contexts of growing food shortages. She highlights two edible plants, blackjack and maize, as instances of small-scale growing and piecemeal farming in and around the city. A plant-oriented reading offers us a clearer understanding of the grown food system, she suggests, and assists in working out what “better food futures” might look like. The Greenhouse Project in central Johannesburg, the focus of her analysis, points to the blurring of hinterland and city as inequality and climate change escalate. The exploitation of “captured soils” in the city’s desiccated hinterlands historically produced ecological



upheaval and hunger, but now offers a “potential salve to uneven food distribution.” A reframing of colonial categories of “botanical value and class-based sustainability” points to the future gains of “slower, smaller, and healthier loci of growing, harvesting, and living.”

In the final chapter, Jennifer Wenzel discusses the “hinterland underground,” specifically the economic and ecological hinterland metabolisms constituted by “dynamic subterranean flows and stocks of matter and energy whose effects profoundly shape what might seem like stable ground.” She turns our attention to the “sub-surface,” and specifically the subsoil, also known as the “overburden”—the layers of soil, rock, vegetation, and water that must be excavated in order for mining operations to get to the ore and minerals below. The subsoil is offered as a subtle sub-verticality, a crucial material membrane, just under what we see when we look horizontally. Wenzel shows that the search for subterranean fossil fuel energy “broke with the territorial as broad surface” as it shifted downward via the shaft of mining extraction. Do hinterlands, Wenzel speculates, become “forgotten backwaters” particularly when the loci of supply “shift underground”? How are horizontal and vertical hinterlands related materially and metaphorically? Linking histories of mining and agriculture—questioning long-standing associations of agriculture with improvement and horizontality and of mining with extraction and verticality—Wenzel shows how both “mined” (disturbed and radically transformed) the subsoil, so that when farmers used steel plows to pull up the grasslands in what became the Dust Bowl on the North American Great Plains, the subsoil, so crucial to the ecological sustainability of the region, dried up and blew east in massive dust storms. Wenzel reads the subsoil-turned-dust as Mary Douglas’s “matter out of place,” as the hinterland arrives as portend and warning in the cities of the east, and situates subsoil as a site of care going forward.

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Together, the three parts of the book draw on a multiplicity of genres, disciplines (sociology, history, anthropology, literary studies, art history), and locations across the Global North and South (United States, England, Wales, Scotland, Netherlands, South Africa, China, India, Mexico), as well as being attuned to both land and water, the terrestrial and the oceanic, and human/plant/animal relations. Collectively and cumulatively, they make clear how a focus on hinterlands reveals anew the impasses flowing

from the entanglement of the haunting afterlives of colonialism, the changing infrastructures of global capitalism, and the impending threat of environmental collapse. In doing so, the book aligns with Dipesh Chakrabarty (2021), who argues that our analyses must necessarily now explore their terrains from two perspectives: the global and the planetary. The two, he notes, have for a very long time been addressed separately. If the globe is a human-centric construction, a planetary perspective irrefutably draws in non-human worlds, linking human histories to the planet as such. To echo a term used by Jennifer Wenzel in her chapter, the earth can no longer be taken as “stable ground” on which to project human-engineered purpose. Nigel Clark notices how scientific facts can never entirely displace the “visceral trust in earth, sky, life and water” (quoted in Chakrabarty 2018, 5) that humans have come to possess, yet observes that all four terms are under duress today. The “uneven histories” of extraction (as well as combustion and emission) shape the present and future in material form, writes Wenzel, and so it is that “one cannot tell this expanded story of globalization without acknowledging the environment as its condition of possibility and its product” (2019, 5). The formerly colonized world is thus “indispensable, not marginal, to this history,” and the task for those writing now is to decipher how capitalism, colonialism, and the climatic function through “continuity and rupture” (Wenzel 2019, 5–6).

If a “rescaling of attention” (Wenzel 2019, 4) is needed, the question of the planetary must attend to complex questions of time.<sup>14</sup> In Chakrabarty’s sense, this involves a calibration of our critical attention to include shifts in the earth as system and not only changes to “the extent we are recognizing human influence” (2018, 9) on that system. Or, in other words, what both Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2003) and Debjani Ganguly (2020) have referred to as an alter-global conceptualization.<sup>15</sup> The planetary is not just a matter of reach or scale alone but suggests itself

<sup>14</sup>For Chakrabarty, we need to factor in geological timescales that are registered across millions of years and in which “human history” makes a mark, but ultimately a small one. Thus, we cannot focus only on “the extent we are recognizing human influence on the planet”—even where the latter is acknowledged as the “impact that ushered in a new period in the planet’s history” (2018, 9). Climate justice scholars emphasize the uneven distribution of “human” influence on the planet while focusing less on geological time scales or Earth system geo-alterities.

<sup>15</sup>Spivak wrote that “the planet is in the species of alterity” (2003, 72) and Ganguly has referred in her work on planetary realism to “geoalterity” (2020, 445).

as a mode of being and thinking. Crucial to the planetary then is learning to apprehend, write, and live differently in a world “that isn’t quite what we thought” (Wenzel 2019, 20). It is for all these encompassing reasons that we title this book *Planetary Hinterlands*, as we explore the conditions of extraction, abandonment, and care in multi-sited hinterlands of vulnerability, harm, and re-constitution today.

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