

PART II

Fluid Identities

WATER, IN ITS MANY FORMS—FLUID AND FIXED, culture and nature, substance and abstraction—is entangled in a wealth of scholarship exploring meaningful relationships between bodies both human and aquatic. Water is intimately tied to collective identities at different scales, including ethnic, national, and imperial (Blum 2010; Bose 2016; DeLoughrey 2007), and is an especially productive medium for exploring how cultures travel and transform (Dawson 2018; Gilroy 1993; Somerville 2012). Water’s own identities are also in flux. It is at once an essential component of the human bodies and cultures that it constitutes and mirrors, while also powerfully exceeding them (Linton 2010; Helmreich 2011). Oceans, for example, can be simultaneously construed as social spaces (Cusak 2014; Steinberg 2001) and alien domains (Helmreich 2009). The very boundaries between land and water can be tools of settler colonial power, as the elemental categories of Western ontologies are enlisted in extractive regimes (Sammler 2020). Or, in Stacy Alaimo’s (2012) oceanic conceptualization of transcorporeality, material boundaries are permeable and to be understood as exchanges connecting bodies of humans, animals, and beyond, in relationships that cannot be disassembled (476).

The three chapters in this section deal with how the presence or absence of water is powerfully entangled with ethnic, national, and imperial cultural identities, highlighting the interconnectedness between human and material worlds. Chapter 4 brings the agency of water into conversations of identity. Ignacio López-Calvo and Hugo Alberto López Chavolla look, from the perspective of new materialism, at Peruvian and Colombian Indigenous worldviews in relation to water in the novels of two non-Indigenous authors. Swelling montane rivers have

agency to serve as a role model for emancipation to subdued Quechua communities in the Andes; music and dance inspired by water remind the novel's protagonist about the deep Indigenous roots of his nation; rivers even converse with characters in troublesome ethnic identitarian crises and lead the way to survival through dry seasons. Explorations of literary representations take on material and political significance in the existential survival of ethnic groups such as the Wayuu, in La Guajira Peninsula of Colombia, where extractivism and the neoliberal policies of international mining corporations, in collusion with local authorities, have been damaging the health, morale, and self-esteem of Indigenous groups for decades. The lack of drinking water after the corporation takes over the river drives young Wayuu people to move to the cities or to work for the very corporation that is destroying their ancestral way of life. And, once they leave their ethnic communities, the danger of forgetting their own language and traditions is dramatically increased. Both novels incite the reader toward praxis, toward a decolonial activism against Criollo oppression in the first case, and against international, neoliberal, predatory extractivism in the second. Both novels likewise promote Indigenous ethnic pride, solidarity, and unity as a way to overcome sociopolitical and economic adversity, as well as to preserve, recover, and promote endangered cultural identities.

In chapter 5, Penelope K. Hardy focuses on the identities assigned to the ocean by cartographers whose priorities when attempting to map the global seabed tended to coincide with the commercial and political interests of empire. Hardy explores the intricate connections between ocean travel and global imperialism, particularly through the process of naming sea features as a mark of possession. As she explains, after Germany's defeat in World War I, German scientists, realizing that they had lost all their colonies where fieldwork used to be conducted in a friendly environment, saw in the bottom of the ocean a new area where they could conduct prestigious research experiments as well as an area that could be symbolically claimed by Germany. The author points out: "German oceanographers used their technologically derived knowledge of the ocean bottom to assert their—and their nation's—continued membership in the top tier of science and thus their continued claim to be a Great Power." Decidedly terrestrial practices for naming and claiming land are imposed onto seascapes, comingling their identities in the pursuit of empire.

In the closing chapter of the section, Kale Bantigue Fajardo studies how water is being enlisted in transforming the national imaginary in the Philippines. Focusing on the city of Malolos, considered the birthplace of the nation in 1898, Fajardo shows how its identity since independence has been reoriented away from land-based imaginaries and toward water-based ones. Cultural production, tourism, and urban development are shifting the focus beyond inland colonial architecture to include maritime images of canoes, rivers, estuaries, coasts, and islands. This process presents a more-than-human precolonial and decolonial counterpoint

to hegemonic nationalism. Indeed, the ethno-linguistic roots of Tagalog are decidedly aquatic, meaning “from the river.” Fajardo celebrates this move toward “aquapelagic” narratives, together with the historical archiving of the area, particularly in light of the possibility that climate change may one day bring flooding to the area.

Together, these three chapters contemplate how water, from mountain streams to oceanic depths, affects human identities and survival. Human relationships with rivers and oceans over the centuries have transformed ways of being in the world in dramatic ways. Water, after all, is a fluid reminder for some populations—who sometimes see water as sacred rather than as a commodity—of their Indigenous roots. For others, the existence of rivers is equated with the survival of entire cultures threatened by drought and neoliberal extractivism. Thus, fighting against altering the course of a stream or river may be seen as a struggle against internal colonialism. Powerful countries see in the oceans and seabeds possibilities for national pride, scientific prestige, and even imperial expansion. And water is, of course, also framed as a tourist attraction to improve local economies while concomitantly being considered a destructive threat under climate change conditions: a city always imagined as a site against colonial domination may begin to be conceived in ecological or touristic terms. Different disciplinary approaches, such as literary studies, history, cartography, ethnic and urban studies, join forces to answer key questions about cultural identities amidst environmental uncertainties. This section, therefore, moves from theoretical approaches to policy change recommendations, including engaged literature and pro-Indigenous activism that attempts to provide a voice for subaltern groups.

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