

Editorial

Water Enclosure and World-Literature: New Perspectives on Hydro-Power and World-Ecology

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Abstract: This editorial introduces the special issue, ‘World Literature and the Blue Humanities’. The authors articulate the commonalities and tensions between world literature, world-ecology, blue humanities, and hydrocultural approaches. Taking megadams, water pollution, and the blue revolution as baselines, we offer short analyses of works by Namwali Serpell, Craig Santos Perez, Jean Arasanayagam, Paul Greengrass, Wyl Menmuir, and Emily St. John Mandel in order to articulate how culture can both contest and normalize water enclosure. The piece ends with a brief summary of the contributions to the special issue.

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The Blue Humanities is a field that, by definition, seeks the dissolution of terrestrial bias in critical outlooks and methodologies. Scholarship in this area tends to emphasise the ocean’s lively materiality, outlining how concepts of flow, fluidity, and mobility can oppose strategies of imperialist containment and hegemonic enclosure. The adoption of an oceanic lens has proven fruitful for inspiring new theorisations of world history and culture. Famously, [Linebaugh and Rediker \(2000\)](#) detail the ‘Revolutionary Atlantic’ of the long eighteenth century, when ship-driven globalisation offered new perspectives and practices for a seafaring proletariat that rejected the tyranny of land-based enclosure. More recently, in her critical text, *In the Wake* ([Sharpe 2016](#)), Christina Sharpe filters the material, transoceanic histories of loss, dispossession, and transportation across the Atlantic into the critical practice of ‘wake work’ that reckons with the continued racial and imperial violence suffered by Black lives. In a Pacific context, Karin Amimoto Ingersoll emphasises the role of ‘seascape epistemologies’, those modes of knowing that are drawn from an indigenous and ‘embodied literacy of the *‘āina* (land) and *kai* (sea)’, which contest presumed oceanic knowledge structures that are tethered to ‘the Western institutions of statehood, capitalism, and ecologically challenging development’ ([Ingersoll 2016](#), p. 3). As these text demonstrate, navigating intersecting geographical and temporal scales has been central to comprehending the ongoing reconfigurations by which the ocean operates as a physical and symbolic force.

The Blue Humanities has retained a distinctly saline focus to date, with critical examinations of ‘hydro-power’ concentrated on oceanic iterations of ‘energy, force, militarism, and empire’ ([DeLoughrey 2019](#), p. 26). Yet, as recent hydrocultural research has illustrated, the rendering of freshwater as an extractable resource is equally underpinned by colonial logics, patriarchal formations, and financial adjustments that strip local communities of their historical water rights, and naturalise conditions of scarcity and drought ([Boast 2017](#); Cahillane, this issue). Through the idea of ‘extreme water’, Sharae Deckard has called for an examination of the cultural ‘representations’ that respond to and mediate how both salt and freshwater become extractable resources and cheap energy in the neoliberal era

(Deckard 2020). World-literary forms such as hydro-poetry and hydro-fiction absorb¹, pattern, and even co-produce those modes of enclosure that perpetuate ‘undemocratic, inequitable, and non-renewable’ forms of water relation (Deckard 2020). Indeed, the enclosure of water manifests in myriad forms: through the material structures of megadams, container ships, desalination plants, and pipelines; through the territorial strategies of Military Exclusion Zones and international sea-lanes; through the legal grammars of offshore extraction regimes; as well as through neocolonial discourses of privatisation that seek to naturalise water-as-resource. Drawing out how such forms of violence are not simply *linked* to ecological degradation, but are *inherently* ecological, is central to the world-ecological approach that informs many of the articles collected in this special issue.

The world-ecology paradigm, pioneered by environmental historian Jason Moore, presents an understanding of capitalism as an ‘environment-making’ process that organises relations between ‘human and extra-human life’ (Moore 2014, p. 165). For Moore, capitalism is not only an economic system that acts ‘upon’ nature, but is bound to a larger nature-society nexus in which the contradictions of the mode of production periodically manifest in ecological decline. Moore positions ‘nature’ and ‘society’ as ‘real abstractions’ that conceal the often bloody history by which capitalist appropriation regimes function, with those on top operating as members of ‘society’, and the rest definable as disposable ‘nature’, including large swathes of humanity (Patel and Moore 2017). Rather than interpreting nature as something external to humanity, therefore, world-ecological perspectives read “relations between environment-making and relations of inequality, power, wealth, and work” as inextricably bundled together through the web of life (Moore 2014, p. 169). The popularity of Moore’s paradigm in literary studies and the environmental humanities more broadly is not surprising since it enables an approach that considers culture, not as a reflection of ‘society’, but constitutive of its abstractions and violences and, perhaps, indicative of its faultlines and contradictions (Hartley 2016). In its focus on language and form, as well as evocation of structures of feeling, literature can be a particularly powerful tool for not only comprehending the logic and epistemologies that naturalise ‘capitalist modes of organising nature’, but cultivating alternative modes of relation and imagination that look beyond capitalist enclosure.

While thinking with water can certainly engender more ‘capacious frames of analysis beyond the nation state’ (Price 2018, p. 45), the adoption of a world-ecological perspective necessitates that we consider the extent to which the capitalist world-ecology has itself conditioned transnational imaginaries of water. In their capacity to harness and regulate the supposedly ‘unlimited and free’ flow of water (Swyngedouw 2015, p. 196), hydraulic regimes prompt us to examine how the geophysical transformation and enclosure of water impacts the organisation of both power and meaning. The range of (infra)structural relations examined in this special issue enables us to contend with the mechanisms of enclosure that characterise hydraulic regimes, which not only govern water, but consolidate the experience of inequality, exploitation, and unevenness that characterises the capitalist world-ecology. Where literary narratives can be said to evoke structures of feeling, so too can hydraulic or oceanic infrastructure hold ‘sway over the imagination’ by tapping into a ‘sense of desire and possibility’ (Larkin 2013, p. 333)². Emerging in tandem with these (infra)structural forms of organisation are those symbolic modes of enclosure that regulate and encode water relations at the level of aesthetics, genre, and form. In their respective discussions of ‘Offshore mysteries’ (Pitt-Scott, this issue), the ‘Water

¹ As recent work by Boast (2020) and Deckard (2019) has argued, hydrofictions manifest water crisis at the level of content, form, and aesthetics. Understood as a form of ‘resource fiction’ (Macdonald 2013, p. 13), hydrofiction is a category that corresponds to ‘our era of “hydromodernity” in which vast hydraulic engineering schemes—including dams, regularised rivers and drinking water infrastructures’ have come to fundamentally shape social structures, relations, and subjectivities (Boast 2020, p. 3). This editorial extends the critical purview of hydrofiction and hydro-poetry as literary modes that align directly with hydraulic infrastructures that either transform water into potable commodity or produce water as energy. It also considers the ways in which cultural texts distil a wider array of ‘hydro-power’ that is not delimited to containment technologies (DeLoughrey 2019, p. 26).

² For more on the critical imaginaries and political aesthetics of infrastructure, see Larkin (2018), Barney (2018b), and Boyer (2018).

Wars novel' (Boast), the 'Oceanic Weird' (Deckard and Oloff), world-literary 'hydrofiction' (Cahillane, Waller), and the 'Blue Sublime' (Menozzi), our authors examine how cultural production makes evident, naturalizes, or challenges particular hydrological regimes.

In this opening editorial, we are concerned with examining how narrative form registers the spatial strategies and geopolitics of water enclosure, and offer a range of readings on the material and symbolic structures that regulate and contain water for capitalist and colonial ends. Such an approach enables us to contend more directly with those systems of unevenness and inequality that have historically determined the rising, tempestuous, and toxified waters of our current epoch. By thinking and reading critically with water, we demonstrate how cultural forms percolate and condense those strategies of enclosure and accumulation that have historically determined water relations within the capitalist world-ecology. In questioning how the geophysical transformation of water systems draws to the surface new structures of feeling or conditions of socio-ecological revolution, we consider the extent to which narrative forms—from hydropoetics to the Hollywood blockbuster and the historical epic—may be limited in their capacity to co-produce alternatives to dominant resource imaginaries. We do not only consider the ways in which these forms sustain dominant hydrological regimes, but how they anticipate alternative epistemes and imaginaries of water.

1. The Form of Hydro-Power

In 1955, the construction of the world's largest dam by reservoir volume, the Kariba Dam, began on the banks of the Zambezi River. Built with financing from the World Bank in order to provide power for copper mining in what was then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe), the dam's construction is mired in turbulent histories of deluge and displacement. Its development was far from straightforward, with its construction besieged by two record-breaking floods in 1957 and 1958 that threatened the viability of the project, and resulted in the death of several workers. When the dam wall was finally completed in 1958, the resultant flood submerged over 5500 km² of land, and resulted in the forced evacuation of 57,000 Tongan-speaking inhabitants of the Gwembe Valley. In recent years, prolonged periods of drought have threatened the constancy of flow in the Kariba reservoir, with the resultant rolling blackouts disrupting not only the provision of power across the city, but associated narratives of hydraulic sovereignty and nationalist ascension³. The extractivist histories and uncertain futures of the Kariba Dam present us with an interesting case study to examine the ways in which water enclosure organises social, economic, and political power while also configuring 'meanings and relationships' (Haiven 2013, p. 215). To put it another way, a megadam controls not only the flow of water, but the flow of meaning-making. By reading dams as a 'cultural text' (Haiven 2013, p. 219), we can gain access to the otherwise 'submerged structures of dependence' (Nixon 2010, p. 66) and social imaginaries that underpin the instrumentalization of water⁴.

The megadam actively produces water-as-resource through a vast network of channels, conduits, pipes, and reservoirs that work to transform river-waters into a commodity that can be pumped, stored, and directed in the service of capital. In turn, the capitalist water imaginary generates dynamics of superfluity and overflow through the production of 'surplus' or 'disposable' populations that are relegated to 'little more than human-as-waste, excreted from the capitalist system' (Yates 2011,

³ In December 2019, the water levels of the Kariba Dam reached a record low, where due to ongoing droughts across Southern Africa, the reservoir capacity fell to 8.36% of the requirement for power generation. The region experienced rolling blackouts for up to 18 hours per day. See <<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146068/water-levels-keep-falling-at-lake-kariba>>.

⁴ As Nixon notes, 'the megadams of the South depended on vast loans (typically from the World Bank, the US or the Soviet Union) that shackled new nations with high debt loads' (Nixon 2010, p. 66). Between 2002–2014, the World Bank invested \$8.8 billion in hydropower projects (Rex et al. 2014, p. 2), and as of February 2020, over 2100 hydropower projects are currently in the pipeline to receive Clean Development Mechanism funding under the Kyoto Protocol (CDM Pipeline, 2019). Within these financial structures, the uneven realities of hydroelectric megaprojects become veiled in the language of sustainability, energy security, and climate mitigation. While these discourses promote the sustainability and 'greenness' of hydropower, these projects are made attractive to non-traditional investors through large estimated returns on investment (between 7–25%), where the presumed constancy of flow aligns with 'steady growth opportunities' (Ahlers 2020, p. 406).

p. 1680). The enclosure of the Zambezi thus intersects with racialised logics of expulsion and waste as both ecosystems and populations are rendered disposable by the rising tide of progress. Upon their excretion, these populations and spaces are subjected to new political and territorial configurations that fundamentally change water users' 'ways of belonging and behaving according to new identity categories and hierarchies' (Boelens et al. 2016, p. 7). Where the epic scales of the megadam correlate with imperialist fantasies of mastery over nature and national development, these monolithic structures effectively concretise asymmetrical power relations and underdevelopment.

However, the dam is not the only 'cultural text' that filters the waters of the Zambezi. The local Tonga population reportedly understood that the extreme floods that plagued the Kariba's construction were the result of the local river deity, Nyami Nyami, who was 'invoked in a spirit of resistance [as] it was widely believed that the river spirit disapproved of the construction of the dam and would destroy it' (Chikozho et al. 2015, p. 255). The deity, depicted with the body of a serpent and the head of a fish, is central to Tongan cosmologies, and is said to protect riverine communities and ensure the sustainability of the Zambezi (ibid, p. 254). Imbued with the non-linear power of storm and surge, the deity offers an alternative mode of figuring water that is sensitive to its innate capacities for disruption. In highlighting the power of river-waters to sabotage capitalist infrastructure, the tales of Nyami Nyami absorb the new hydrological realities of extreme drought and flood across the Zambezi basin, and actively contest capitalist imaginaries of water as 'simple or automatic "flow"', instead characterising water through notions of 'friction, resistance, and uncertainty' (Campling and Colás 2018, p. 779).

In his analysis of the similarly disruptive capacities of Caribbean and West African water deities, Michael Niblett has argued that these violent and vengeful figures are useful motifs 'for capturing the felt experience of neoliberal restructuring of the world-system as this has unfolded in peripheral regions' (Niblett 2019, p. 90). For Niblett, rather than simply reproducing the violences of imperialist domination and neoliberal financialisation, the water spirit motif 'recasts violence in a different social logic, one resistant [. . .] to the reifying thrust of capitalist development' (Niblett 2019, p. 89). Furthermore, as Thomas Waller's contribution to this special issue argues, where local and indigenous water epistemologies hold the capacity to disrupt dominant neo-extractivist imaginaries, their 'other-worldly or supernatural figuration' may indirectly reinforce those modes of socio-ecological relation that read rivers and oceans as 'a limitless and magnanimous other-worldly frontier'. Where aesthetic forms have the capacity to dilute or erode dominant structures of knowing and meaning-making, they can also stabilise, bolster, and regulate them. To read critically with water necessitates humanities scholarship to investigate how cultural forms hold the capacity to both resist and reinforce those modes of socio-ecological relation that determine the shape of water.

Namwali Serpell's epic novel, *The Old Drift* (Serpell 2019), is a suitable case study for opening out some of the above relations between water enclosure, narrative form, and world-system. The text filters the tensions between the transformation of culture, capital, and climate into a multigenerational narrative that follows the colonial enclosure of the Zambezi in the 1870s through to the demise of the Kariba Dam in 2023. While the historical organisation of the novel follows the usual pattern of megadam narratives that correlate with ideas of development, energy sovereignty, and national ascension, in the closing third of the novel these narratives begin to stutter and stall in relation to a range of turbulent and unruly water-borne entities. Storms, droughts, malarial swarms, and grassroots political movements override the impetus of imperial infrastructure, which seeks to 'trap' and tap the Zambezi in the name of progress (Serpell 2019, p. 78). In the closing chapters, the emergence of the activist group, 'SOTP' (named after a misspelled STOP sign), pushes Zambia into a tentative post-hydro-capitalist future. The main directive of the group is to 'insert errors into the system. Not with activism but with the *inactive*: the loiterers, the shitters, the unemployed—the idlers who jam the circulation of money and goods and information' (italics in original, p. 428). In a scene depicting a political rally, the gathering together of these excreted lives is likened to the gathering of water in a reservoir: 'there was still some motion within [the crowd] but no longer that of a gushing flood or

a river breaking its banks—it was the shimmering of a dark pensive lake’ (p. 538). The rebellious potential of the waste population is activated through the arrival of the radical figure Matha Mwamba (recently released from jail after bombing a government clinic) and her followers who enter the crowd like ‘[a]n undulating serpent of bodies ... all women’ (p. 539). Emerging as a female incarnation of Nyami Nyami, the women’s chanting of ‘*A Luta?*’ ‘*Continua!*’ (p. 540)⁵ energises the crowd through a revolutionary spirit that is directed against the neocolonial operations of the multinational ‘Sino-American Consortium’ that has monopolised the hydraulic infrastructure of Zambia to power everything from copper mines to public health clinics and state surveillance systems (p. 518).

In its exploration of the ways in which modes of cultural resistance and political friction co-emerge with the production of water-as-resource, the novel progresses towards a speculative future that centres on the radical redistribution of water. The final action of the novel orientates itself around the sabotage of the Kariba Dam as the SOTP group decides to ‘interrupt’ the hydraulic state-system by clogging the dam’s sluice gates. While the group’s intention is to enact ‘slow moving’ (Serpell 2019, p. 528) sabotage⁶, their action results in the dam’s total collapse as the group fails to properly take into account the new reality of extreme weather that has resulted from ‘The Change [that] brings new cycles of drought and flooding’ (p. 521). The resultant flood displaces thousands from their homes as the unleashed river-waters drown the capital city of Lusaka. While the scale of flooding effectively reproduces the same strategies of dispossession as the original colonial project, the total collapse of the dam correlates with the collapse of a particular mode of organizing relations between humans and the rest of nature. The dam’s demise gives way to a new energopolitical order that looks beyond hydro-capitalist enclosure and colonial extractivism, and towards the (re)emergence of small-scale subsistence communities that are ‘*egalitarian, humble*’ (italics in original, p. 563). Most significantly, the collapse of hydro-capitalist infrastructure aligns with the disintegration of specific narrative modes and the formal constraints of the historical epic⁷.

In the final chapter, the novel moves beyond the focus on heroic individualism and adopts a pluralised narrative perspective that emanates from within a weird swarming mass of cyborg mosquitos whose collectivist organisation offers a structural alternative to the preceding omniscient and genealogical narratives. In opposition to codifications of water as an easily governable, ‘abstractable flow resource’ (Clarke-Sather et al. 2017, p. 335), the swarm espouses the as-yet unrealised potential of water’s structurally and socially transformative capacities through a shared ability to ‘deviate, drift [and] digress’ (Serpell 2019, p. 562). Led by this choral collective, the novel’s progression into a radically redistributed ‘*warm, wet future*’ (italics in original, p. 563) overrides preceding logics of containment and enclosure—both infrastructural and formal—pointing to the emergence of alternative systems of relation and organisation that have begun to surface in line with the rise and redistribution of water and the associated dissolution of extractivist economies. Thus while the novel acknowledges that rising waters may spawn forms of social uprising and socio-ecological revolution, it recognises that these modes of resistance *must* be rooted in ideas of collective action, democracy, and environmental justice to ensure that transition to a post hydro-capitalist future does not reproduce colonial violence and capitalist dispossession.

By exploring the confluences between the transformation of geophysical systems, socio-ecological relations, and narrative form, *The Old Drift* offers a rich basis from which to examine the intersection

⁵ The Portuguese phrase translates as ‘The struggle continues’, and was used as a rallying cry during the Mozambique independence movement. It has since become a slogan for various anti-imperial political movements and student protests across Nigeria and South Africa.

⁶ As theorised by infrastructures studies scholar, Darin Barney, sabotage should not merely be understood as targeted acts of destruction that satisfy ‘the appetite for immediate, local, and temporary relief from the symptoms of capitalist exploitation’, but must be understood more broadly as ‘the strategic disruption of established regimes of accumulating value and power by subtracting from their efficiency’ (Barney 2018a, pp. 14–15).

⁷ As Christine Okoth argues, the destruction of the dam signals ‘the end of the enclosure of the Zambezi river but it is also the end of a kind of narrative enclosure that cannot be maintained beyond the event of the dam’s collapse’ (Okoth forthcoming).

between world-literature and water enclosure. In particular, the novel's mediation of the relationship between water, infrastructure, power, copper, and capital points us towards the ways in which water imaginaries correspond with shifts in the capitalist world-ecology. Through its 'pluvial' critique of colonialist hierarchies and masculinist modes of organising nature (Nuttal 2020), *The Old Drift* shows how culture can provide a response to enclosure as a continuous process, dismantling western modes of containment that would otherwise deny the viability of radically new formations.

2. Privatisation, Enclosure, and Containment in the Pacific

From bottle to beachhead, poem to blockbuster, we argue that there are a range of material, discursive, and cultural enclosures that underwrite the uneven access to, and distribution of, water in its myriad forms. Take, for example, bottled water, a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of capitalist appropriation regimes, that has engendered (and been engendered by) 'new forms of branded exchange, and new practices of drinking' (Hawkins et al. 2015, p. 3). You can purchase a bottle of water that promises electrolyte-enhanced hydration, or indeed, water enriched with spring minerals from Fiji, the Scottish Highlands, and other peripheries. Through these commoditised forms, we can begin to see how the logics of containment intersect with broader systems of colonisation that transform water into a conduit for the accumulation of both capital and territory. Many of the imaginaries of the untouched, unspoiled Highlands come from a history of clearance, enclosure, and forced emigration⁸. Equally, while the surfing and sandy beaches in Viti Levu are reserved for tourists from high-income countries and backgrounds, local city beaches have been decimated by chemical runoff. Water, its bottling, and its branding have thus become a mode of enclosure writ small, embedded in discourses of paradise and good health that depend upon the exclusion of local populations. Meanwhile, the ecotone is overtaken by pollution from effluent, garbage, and chemicals that run into seawater that is already teeming with microplastics (Dehm et al. 2020).

The case of water in the Pacific is instructive for considering the broader implications of claiming a new approach to Blue Humanities. Indeed, it reminds us that much of the Blue is not that new. The context of Pacific Studies has long been attentive to those forms of hydro-power that sustain histories 'of production and destruction through [. . .] colonialism, patriarchy, militarism, Christianity, nationhood, development, tourism, literacy [. . .] and other forceful modes of modernity' (Ingersoll 2016, p. 32). By centering indigenous and anti-colonial responses to forms of accumulation and enclosure, Pacific Studies makes legible the submerged histories and geographies of hydro-colonialism, and elucidates those strategies of survival, disruption, and resistance that have risen in their wake. As Craig Santos Perez attests in his contribution to this special issue, there is a distinct need for critical ocean scholars to rigorously engage with 'the traditional knowledge and emerging scholarship of indigenous Pacific Islanders who have not only lived with the ocean for millennia, but who have been *already been here* theorizing how the ocean shapes our knowledge and literature'. Along similar lines, Steve Mentz and James Smith argue in their essay, 'Learning an Inclusive Blue Humanities', that if white Western scholars are to engage with traditional knowledges and indigenous scholarship, they must actively confront those 'habits of appropriation' that might, and frequently do, plague such critical ventures. If there has supposedly been a critical 'turn' towards the ocean in recent years, Perez, Smith, and Mentz prompt us to question precisely who is doing the turning.

The discourse of water privatisation has always operated in tandem with colonialist projects, and is a central theme across many of our contributions. In his poetic works, Perez has long drawn out the dialectics between the marketisation and militarisation of Pacific waters, where the occupation of oceanic territories through naval operations and military build-up finds its corollary in tourist

⁸ The link between the expropriation of clan communities across the nineteenth century in Scotland—known as the Highland Clearances—and its relevance to new rounds of accumulation is particularly well captured in John McGrath's play, *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (McGrath 1991).

economies and market logics that colonise and commoditise. In his collection *from unincorporated territory: [saina]* (Perez 2010), Perez aligns the occupation of hotel rooms with the occupation of territory across his home island of Guam. In the sardonic sequence, 'ginen: all with ocean views', he employs a bricolage-like technique that recycles materials from travel magazines, holiday brochures, and news articles from the Guam news network⁹ to expose how the tourist fantasy of clean, pure waters overlies the reality of military occupation and contamination. Lurking beneath the idyllic images of 'empty pools' (p. 47) and 'healing waters' (p. 37), lies the reality of 'illegal dumpsite controversy' (p. 19) that has plagued the island since the 1950s. In a speech delivered to the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation in 2008, Perez testified that 'Eighty contaminated military dumpsites still exist on Guam', leeching upwards of '17 toxic chemicals including arsenic, lead, chromium, PCBs, and cyanide [. . .] [P]ollutants are also found in the landfills located over the island's aquifer at the andersen Air Force Base in northern Guam', which provides 80% of the island's potable water (Perez 2017).

The collection's focus on the linkages between water and waste is pinned to the underlying logics of 'unincorporation' that renders native Chamoru populations as excess to the American nation-state. As the collection progresses, the everyday discharges of 'waste paper plastic metals tin cans aluminium cans' intermix with the toxic legacies of military dumpsites that seep into 'river history discharging pollutants', as 'swimming and fishing in waters/cause illnesses sore throat diarrhea' (pp. 58, 104). The hyper-militarisation of Guam is thus not only registered in the restricted oceanic waters that thrum with supply ships, aircraft carriers, and nuclear submarines, but is also evident in the contamination and monopolisation of the island's groundwater. In the final poem in the sequence, the line '**guáhan is**' is left hanging in the space of the page (bold in original, p. 128). The lack of the closing quotation mark and use of Chamoru language signals the resurfacing of indigenous oceanic epistemes that can (re)orient Guam towards an as yet unwritten future. No longer bounded by the language of occupation, tourism, and militarisation, the sequence demonstrates a speculative mode of hydro-poetic writing that seeks to 'move beyond the boundaries and methodologies of land and nation-state based perspectives, while also foregrounding the colonization, territorialization, and militarization of the oceans' (Perez, this issue).

As many of the articles gathered here indicate, the exhaustion and toxification of water bodies (rivers, aquifers, basins, oceans, springs) have begun to impose new limits upon the accumulation of capital, while at the same time opening up new inlets to political resistance and socio-ecological transformation. In addition to impacting the metabolic systems of oceans, the attendant geophysical transformations of warming waters have the potential to radically alter, or even impede, 'certain organisations of space (i.e., territorialities) under capitalism' (Campling and Colás 2018, p. 777). In this special issue, Menozzi notes that oceans are considered 'site[s] of friction-less and seamless transit of goods and capital', yet their material undulations reveal 'that capitalism cannot expand indefinitely in a smooth and linear teleology of accumulation'. The intensification of storms, ocean acidification, toxic algal blooms, jellyfish booms, 'rogue waves'¹⁰, and unevenly rising waters of the world ocean can be read as hydrological examples of what Jason Moore terms 'negative value', when 'externalised nature' becomes hostile to the continued accumulation of capital (Moore 2015b, pp. 5–6). To these 'ecological' blockages we can add those usually identified as 'social', such as the Global Fishermen's Movement, which saw peasant communities displaced by the Narmada Dam project marching on the G8 in conjunction with the National Fishworkers Forum, a South–South alliance that sought to blockade the destruction of their livelihoods (Dalla Costa and Chilesse 2015). Equally, alliances between Ireland's

⁹ <www.kuam.com>

¹⁰ Stefan Helmreich describes these formations as 'waves that are undisciplined, abnormal, dangerous, out of place' (Helmreich 2015, p. 83). Research indicates that a higher proportion of these 'freak' waves have begun to occur due to 'warming water, and warming water is expanding water, which can connect to intensifying wind and storm systems, which can generate systems of higher waves'. This means that not only is the substance of the sea 'under possible revision by anthropogenic activity (overfishing, acidification, pollution, irradiation) but also, perhaps, its very form' (p. 85).

Rosspport community and Ogoni villages in the Niger Delta against Shell have drawn attention to the unevenly experienced violence perpetrated against farmers and fishers in relation to hydrocarbon extraction in marine contexts, linking the brackish and freshwater deltas of West Africa to the saltwater coastlines of Ireland's Atlantic edge.

3. Blue Revolution and Occluded Waters

Coastal and island communities, in fact, offer a particularly salient vision of world-ecological violence. In his contribution to this special issue, Waller notes how the 'privatisation' of oceans is instrumental to a wider regime of water enclosure, as the state operates to guarantee market stability for investors over the needs of its littoral communities. While tensions around water access, imperial expansion, and fishery rights resulted in various legal and military conflicts in the early modern period (Poulsen 2008; Rieser 2020), the twentieth century has witnessed perhaps the most ambitious reorganisation of the linkages between the marine world and the global division of labour: the Blue Revolution. This aquacultural productivity plan, initiated in the 1960s, normalised the appropriation and re-division of coastal areas into intensive zones of aquacultural output, which enabled the 'farming' of particular marine species in order to satisfy markets and reduce the burden of over-fishing. Though these initiatives tend to be relatively consent-based in Northern Europe, Canada, and the United States, structural adjustment programmes in the Global South have accelerated forest and wetland clearance to service foreign debt and palates. Ostensibly, the logic of this putatively 'developmental' form of economics is to enable impoverished regions to access the US dollar in order to become globally competitive (Saidul Islam 2014, pp. 3–4). In reality, fish-farming in Paraguay, Chile, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other peripheries has impoverished coastal communities, privileging the mass production of species favoured in highly populated metropolitan cores and semi-peripheries over previously sustainable forms of aquaculture (Dalla Costa and Chiese 2015, p. 78). Millions of refugees have been forced from homelands now toxified by the waste from antibiotic-filled fish baths, which are habitually flushed into mangrove forests, inlets, and the inshore (p. 77). Meanwhile, container ships, free to traverse an unfettered ocean, conceal the violence of 'open' marine trade under, if not flags of convenience, promises of quality production. Indeed, 'certifications' of ecological fairness—think 'dolphin-friendly' tuna—are usually considered sufficiently 'ethical' markers of sustainability for the undiscerning western consumer (Saidul Islam 2014, pp. 36–37). Such assurances conceal the 'epistemic rift' by which nature is externalized and appropriated, which is integral to the commodity's cheapness (Moore 2015a, p. 27).

The ocean, in short, operates as a multiform 'fix' in the neoliberal era, providing a combined carbon sink, shipping pathway, cheap energy source, and protein frontier for advanced capitalist nations (Brent et al. 2020, p. 31). The localised materialisation of such 'free nature' ideology tends to conflict with indigenous rights, and offers a baseline for comparing the narrative tensions, forms, and aesthetics of watery world literature. In her short story, 'I Am an Innocent Man', Sri Lankan author Jean Arasanayagam uses a first-person, realist perspective to implicate multiple players in the violence of monoculture through aquaculture. The tale concerns a schoolteacher who considers his own complicity in the inter-ethnic conflicts of his country, with his connection to a police superintendent saving him from the torture and execution that awaits many of his neighbours following a skirmish between the army and guerrillas. He details how the 'prawn baths' have replaced the lagoons where locals used to fish, as the demands of American companies for cheap aquaculture exacerbates ethnic and racial tensions fostered in the coffee, tea, and rubber plantation complexes of the colonial era. As then, hegemonic powers and indigenous elites alienate people from land, which is 'now private property, enclosed, and fenced in' (Arasanayagam 1995, p. 24). The teacher compares 'the opaque covering on the prawns [to] the polythene shrouds which hide the remains of those killed in battle, or in land mine explosions' (p. 23). Here, the commodity itself becomes an aesthetic marker of frontier 'overdetermination' (Niblett 2015, p. 271), reflecting the prawn's centrality to social reproduction, labour exploitation, and environmental appropriation. The inextricability of the prawns and the dead

links US aqua-dollars to the externalisation of Sri Lankan lives from humanity, a broader cheapening of human and extra-human nature that can be tied to the neoliberal 'opening up' of Sri Lanka in the late 1970s, as well as the high level of civilian casualties during the civil war (1983–2009).

Sri Lanka's case is far from anomalous, and is indicative of the broader violence of neoliberal hydroculture. Across the globe, capitalist regimes of appropriation, transportation, and dehumanisation have left people bereft of intergenerational linkages to marine culture, with uneven oceanic access mirrored in uneven representations in popular cinema. In this journal special issue, Mentz and Smith note the plethora of family-friendly Pacific films that appropriate, rewrite, and repackage putatively indigenous culture for white, Western audiences. Regions that remain more volatile in the global consciousness are limited to more militaristic depictions, however, portrayed as lawless conflict zones that require the world police. Acclaimed Hollywood films such as *Captain Phillips* (2013) focus on the brave man on the tanker instead of the systemic violence in which he is a key participant. This narrative, which features America's sweetheart, Tom Hanks, in the titular role, is based on the real-life hijacking of the Maersk Alabama containership in 2009 by Somali pirates. The film opens in Phillips's large Vermont home, followed by a drive to the airport during which he and his wife discuss the challenges that their adult children now face in a hyper-competitive job market, a market from which the AK47-wielding Somalis who appear in the next scene are excluded. We then move to shots of cargo being loaded onto the container ship at the Port of Salalah in Oman, where Phillips boards, thus aligning a 'civilised' petroculture of minivans, airliners, and cargo transportation against pirate-operated speedboats. In one elucidating moment that follows the hijacking, Phillips tells the pirates that he is bringing 'food to Africa', to which the lead hijacker responds that the waters through which the Maersk Alabama travels are contiguous with Somali fishing grounds. Remarkably, the film here signals how geopolitical power relations come at the expense of food, fuel, and water access for myriad coastal communities around the 'Horn of Africa'. However, this brief allusion to lost fisheries and foodways is ultimately disavowed in the film's onanistic salute to US military might, as Navy SEAL snipers reassert that international security is an American concern, killing the men holding Phillips hostage. It would seem on this occasion that force can rectify capitalism's circulation problem, but what the film also makes visible is the level of violence underlying global supply chains and the necessity of top-down military intervention to ensure their continuing dominance. The brutal denouement, preceded by a drawn-out focus on SEAL tactics and military technology, is a love letter to American exceptionalism, reflecting the fear of US hegemonic decline in contemporary culture, a topic fruitfully explored in Boast's contribution to this special issue.

As Pitt-Scott, Menozzi, and Deckard and Oloff indicate in their articles, the cargo ship has become a key marker of global flows of capital and uneven power relations. Pitt-Scott argues that the movement of cargo across oceanic space is shrouded in an enigmatic 'legal grammar' that actively seeks to 'offshore' the political and ecological violence of globalisation, a process made detectable through literary mystery and noir fiction. While the transportation of cheap fish, oil, and other resources by chartered cargo ships both reflects and obfuscates the geopolitics of appropriation, multiple abandoned sea tankers make up a *very* visible form of enclosure for an English coastal community in Wyl Menmuir's speculative mystery novella, *The Many* (Menmuir 2016). The people of the text's unnamed village face the prospect of carrying on an intergenerational fishery that persists through 'ritual rather than function' due to the mutated and inedible catch of burned dogfish and jellyfish that haunt their polluted waters. A local fisherman, Ethan, feels 'observed' from abandoned ships that delimit his horizon, 'though he cannot recall, even when they first arrived, ever having seen lights or any movement from the huge, rusting hulls. The men in the fleet ignore their presence as far as they can' (Menmuir 2016). In its naturalist evocation of an inward-facing coastal world, one might consider this a tale of a fishery seeking its exceptionalism, a hemmed-in community that feels itself undone by bureaucratic rule. We learn that the Department for Fisheries and Aquaculture has anchored these tankers on the midshore, creating a steel-hulled enclosure that symbolises the technocracy of fishery policy, which tends to negate the perspectives of highly knowledgeable coastal communities. The novel's aesthetics of enclosure, built

upon the mystery surrounding the death of a community member named Perran, reveal that the oceanic 'waste frontier' is not just a space filled with inedible fish and toxic water, but a zone bereft of promise, where the coastal 'waste population' spend more time in the pub than on the water. By neglecting characterisation and plot-driven narrative in favour of metaphor and symbolism, *The Many*, as its title suggests, allows multiple interpretations of the meanings behind family, grief, and acceptance. But from an oceanic perspective, the tale operates as a meditation upon the collapse of coastal futures due to the failure of scientific and infrastructural fixes, as a community chooses to wallow in its own dissolution instead of facing up to its psychological and ecological loss.

While Menmuir's vision is overdetermined by its own bleakness, Canadian author Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (St. John Mandel 2015) offers a more expansive geography for engaging with the relationship between the singular and systemic through the offshore. In her novel, alienation from the ocean is bound to long-historical violences now concealed through containerisation and enclosure. The apocalyptic narrative concerns how various characters navigate life in the face of a killer virus that spreads via a plane from Georgia (Europe) to Toronto. One of the protagonists, Miranda, who works in corporate shipping, suddenly finds herself stranded in Malaysia since the pandemic has grounded all air travel, and sympathises with the views of local fishermen:

Earlier that afternoon, in the subsidiary office, Miranda had been told that the local fishermen were afraid of the ships. The fishermen suspected a hint of the supernatural in these vessels, unmoving hulks on the horizon by day, lit up after dark. In the office the local director had laughed at the absurdity of the fishermen's fears, and Miranda had smiled along with everyone else at the table, but was it so unreasonable to wonder if these lights might not be quite of this earth? She knew the ships were only lit up to prevent collisions, but it still seemed to her as she stood on the beach that evening that there was something otherworldly in the sight. (St. John Mandel 2015, p. 218)

What Mandel reveals here is the politics of the sublime and the fathomable. The behemoths on the ocean assure the CEO class of the strength of global regimes of accumulation, while indigenous communities recognise in these ships yet another round of invasion. By referencing how the vessels are 'lit up' through Miranda's and the fishermen's viewpoint, the novel makes visible the existence of offshore traffic lanes that direct and route oceanic movement at the expense of local relations with fishing grounds. Though the majority of the narrative takes place in Canada, *Station Eleven* here briefly captures the 'combined and uneven apocalypse' of global capitalism (Calder Williams 2011), as the tankers symbolise the broader appropriative ethos that victimises peripheral communities. Yet in her final moments, Miranda hopes that such ships contain healthy survivors, and the end of the novel sees a former acquaintance, Clark, reminiscing about shipping in rather benevolent tones. He thinks of such 'vessels' re-emerging in the present or future, 'steered by sailors armed with maps and knowledge of the stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity: whatever became of the countries on the other side? If nothing else, it's pleasant to consider the possibility. He likes the thought of ships moving over the water, towards another world just out of sight' (St. John Mandel 2015, p. 333). Is this a tanker-saviour fantasy, a utopian need for a form of globalisation that can connect disparate communities; a latent colonialist desire for new oceanic frontiers in a 'post-peak' moment; or even a nostalgic evocation of entitlement to mobility in a post-pandemic world? *Station Eleven* leaves room for these interpretations and others besides.

If 'prospects for radical transformation lie in finding alternative, non-capitalist ways of viewing the marine world', as Deckard and Oloff argue in their contribution to this special issue, then the depiction of indigenous and post-plague communities in texts like Mandel's indicates the need to broaden perspectives and re-evaluate blind-spots that reproduce old disparities. Literature can reveal how environmental violence manifests in both human and extra-human forms, as the Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner outlines in her collection *Iep Jaltok* (Jetñil-Kijiner 2017), where a 'nuclear history' of irradiated waters is embedded in her islands' 'bloodlines', materialising in cancerous tumours and 'miscarriages gone unspoken' (p. 78, p. 20). To compare Nuclear Pacifics, over-fished

Atlantics, occluded offshores, despoiled deltas, and megadam submergence is thus to challenge a developmentalist ideal of frontier-making, illuminating a global regime of unevenly experienced ecological harm that operates within the broader context of water enclosure. And yet, while it is important to recognise writers who highlight environmental violence and alternative modes of community organisation, we must equally investigate how inequality is normalised by cultural outputs, as in the case of *Captain Phillips*, which justifies the systematic repression of disavowed African communities as a global necessity and, indeed, public good. Even Menmuir's tale could be conceived as a fishery unable to foster new forms of community alliance, culminating in reactionary violence and grief. Cultural forms are therefore not simply bulwarks against capitalist modes of organisation or hopeful objects of contemplation, but are tethered to those dominant, residual, and emergent formations that, as Williams (2005) argues, indicate multiple political avenues that might manifest in particular historical periods. To what extent the humanities can lead us beyond critical and capitalist impasse is thus partly determined by the work of the readers, students, and scholars who can explore the implications of broader cultural trajectories and alternative socio-ecological relations.

4. The Issue at Hand

The works in this edited collection reflect the diversity of approaches that challenge a status quo of reform and firefighting precipitated by capitalist modes of organising nature, and move beyond the oceanic focus of much Blue Humanities work towards an engagement with the enclosure of water systems and rivers. We stress that this is an early stage of inquiry and investigation, one that must be built on by collaborations between early-career and senior faculty, as well as postdocs and PhDs, allowing for dissent and new interjections. The contributions to this special issue push the boundaries of Blue Humanities scholarship in their articulation of water as a conduit in the production of alternative culture and inclusive politics. Across the range of texts discussed by our contributors, the enclosure and commodification of water corresponds with a hydropolitics of resistance and submergence that holds the potential to frustrate hegemonic narratives of dominance and control. Crucially, these essays reveal the capacity of water to shape conditions of equality, distribution, access, and justice.

We open the special issue with Thomas Waller's contribution, 'The Blue Cultural Fix', which focuses on the incidental reproduction of ideals of infinite accumulation in cultural imaginaries. Developing the concept of the 'cultural fix' with a particular focus on the theoretical work of Stephen Shapiro, Waller draws out the discourses and practices that normalise and challenge oceanic appropriation in different historical periods, focusing on Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* (1936) and Pepetela's *O Desejo de Kianda* (1995). In a careful consideration of the 'critical potentialities' that manifest in indigenous forms, he reveals how literary culture might make visible the 'extra-human agency' of the ocean and other forms of externalised nature, and thus pose a challenge to capitalist hegemony.

We then move on to Ashley Cahillane's critique of Australian 'water dreaming', a (neo)colonial purview that 'reduc[es] water to a commodity which can be shored up, secured and made pliable to agriculture and industry'. In her reading of Thea Astley's *Drylands* (1999), Cahillane argues that narratives of drought-induced alienation and depopulation effectively replay 'older histories of indigenous displacement under colonialism, a settlement project which was uniquely driven by a desire to secure water resources'. The enclosure of water aligns with colonial modes of accumulation by dispossession, divesting indigenous populations of their ancestral relations with both land and water. In response, *Drylands* 'reinstates water's agency' and implicitly questions the efficacy of sea-water desalination as a drought 'solution', thus revealing the structural violence of Australian hydropolitics.

Harry Pitt-Scott's contribution articulates how the offshore operates as both a geographical zone and financial 'regime' that is necessary to the broader functioning of the world-economy. Using an energy humanities approach that combines Fredric Jameson's political unconscious with the biopolitical impetus of recent work by Dominic Boyer, Pitt-Scott theorises that an 'energopolitical unconscious'—which mediates the often obfuscated political, social, and ecological regimes of energy—manifests particularly clearly in the noir genre. Taking Carlos Fuentes's *The Hydra Head* (1978)

and Ian Rankin's *Black and Blue* (1997) as case studies, Pitt-Scott argues that 'noir mysteries are the genre of the offshore', translating it from a site of 'alienation' to one of 'intrigue'. This 'intrigue' might foster, or indeed, occlude political engagement, but nonetheless offers moments of illumination around the 'infrastructural elements' that link power, capital, and the offshore.

Sharae Deckard and Kerstin Oloff's comparative examination of the Dominican novel, *La mcuama de Omicunle* [*Tentacle*, trans. Achy Obejas 2019], positions the text in relation to the emergence of a new form of Caribbean 'Oceanic Weird'. This genre serves to 'refashion' the imperial legacies of ecophobia, heteronormativity, and racism made manifest in the 'Old Weird' of writers such as H. P. Lovecraft, and articulates the continuing violence of the sugar-centric and oil-fuelled expansion of the USA into the Caribbean and Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Suggesting that Indiana's interweaving of speculative temporalities, queer conceptualisations, indigenous cosmologies, and marine ecological crisis provides 'an index of that which could be otherwise', their world-ecological reading positions the Oceanic Weird as a form that challenges 'the impoverished paradigm of nature as external to humanity'.

In her contribution, Hannah Boast analyses a number of contemporary speculative narratives that engage with hydropolitics at the periphery and semi-periphery. Taking Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) as her departure point, Boast tracks the generic and thematic features of the 'water wars novel' across works from the United States, India, Canada, Israel, Finland, and South Africa, identifying a key relationship between water shortage and radical geopolitical upheaval. Through a political ecology framework, she illuminates how several contemporary texts position water as central to questions of citizenship, state governance, and national community. Boast argues that these narratives do not simply communicate a politics that rejects capitalist appropriation and imperialism, but betray fears and concerns around hegemonic transition, resulting in a surprising reversion to Cold War mentalities and orientalist discourses.

In his contribution, Filippo Menozzi's theorisation of a 'blue sublime' captures how the expanse of oceans might mark a combined material and aesthetic limit to the capitalist world system. As capital relies upon ever expanding territory, the oceans have represented privileged sights of transportation and appropriation. Yet the need for perpetual increase also leads to 'resistance to signification', an aesthetic recognition of the primacy of the 'annihilation of space' in the pursuit of rapid circulation. While the ocean has thus been central to enabling capitalist 'flows', it remains stubbornly irreducible to the system of exchange foisted upon it by capitalist modes of organisation. In short, the ocean, as both a material and symbolic form, makes evident the contradictions between ecology, economy, and temporality on a world scale.

Katie Ritson demonstrates the possible connections between comparative literature, Blue Humanities, and archipelagic approaches. Focusing on the North Sea, Ritson engages with crises of social reproduction, gender violence, and sexual health as they relate to the depiction of island communities in Roy Jacobsen's *De unsynlige* (2013) and Sarah Moss' *Night Walking* (2011). Ritson's contribution is particularly welcome for its linguistic and geographical broadness within a North Sea context, bringing the particularities of respectively Norwegian and British island communities into an island studies framework. As Ritson argues, the coastal imaginaries of the two writers both reject and reproduce Malthusianism thinking, as the novels link the local need for water and food to broader, global concerns around population growth and food production in the Anthropocene.

The works of Island Studies and Pacific Studies scholars are integral to thinking through the making and unmaking of socio-ecological relations in a distinctly watery context. The special issue thus ends with a particular focus on the Pacific. In his critical reading of the Chamoru poet Lehua Taitano's collection, *A Bell Made of Stones* (2013), Craig Santos Perez articulates how the ongoing military occupation of Guam is resisted through a revitalisation of indigenous poetics as informed by traditional ocean knowledges, particularly those of the voyaging canoe. Inspired by local modes of reading and knowing the ocean, his analysis likens Taitano's poetry to a mode of navigation that is able to map routes through colonial legacies of dispossession and displacement that have exploited terraqueous

environments, and uprooted indigenous forms of meaning-making. Employing the navigational techniques of ‘etak’ and ‘pookof’, his reading charts island-island relations through currents, tides, and swells alongside the movement of ‘stars, winds, clouds, birds, and fish’. The overall employment of a ‘transoceanic reading methodology’ reveals how the expansive movements of traditional voyaging practices and diasporic epistemologies serve to disrupt colonial strategies of containment and control.

Finally, in their critique of two big-budget American films that have recently turned to the sea in order to clumsily promote diversity agendas, Mentz and Smith grapple with the ways in which both Hollywood and academic scholarship from the Global North are liable to ‘transform the vast ocean into a Western cultural playground’. Their analysis holds up the tokenistic narratives of *Aquaman* (2018) and *Moana* (2016) as mirrors of the root structures of the Western University and its research community. In asserting that the Blue Humanities researcher has an ‘obligation to be a self-reflexive voyager’, their argument takes us through an interactive ‘ocean of ideas’ that urges Western scholars to ‘take a step back from critical inquiry and value what already exists, has already been said, and has already been critiqued’. By advocating for scholars to engage with water crisis through introspection and amplification in opposition to the neoliberal obsession with intervention and innovation, Mentz and Smith recognise that the solution to the various injustices, asymmetries, and unevenness caused by water’s enclosure cannot be remedied by further annexations, whether they be critical or capitalist in nature.

Through the examination of water as both subject and method of critical inquiry, the variety of oceanic frameworks and hydropolitical structures employed across this special issue reveals how thinking critically with water can aid in the disruption and suspension of exclusionary political, national, and disciplinary boundaries. In addition to this, the critical attention directed towards Indigenous and postcolonial water cultures makes perceptible the imperial legacies of hydro-power and oceanic capital, drawing together the riverine and oceanic for a more systemic understanding of water enclosure. By bringing together water and world-ecology in an extended conversation, we hope that what follows opens new lines of enquiry for world literature, comparative approaches, and, most importantly, the study of all things watery.

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