

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Of Extractivist Wounds and Healing in the Americas

Gabriela Valdivia 

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Department of Geography, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA  
Email: [valdivia@email.unc.edu](mailto:valdivia@email.unc.edu)

This essay reviews the following works:

**A Future History of Water.** By Andrea Ballester. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. 248. \$25.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478003892.

**Big Water: The Making of the Borderlands between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.** Edited by Jacob Blanc and Frederico Freitas. Foreword by Zephyr Frank. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018. Pp. vii + 344. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780816537143. Open access e-book. ISBN: 9780816541737.

**The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making.** By Sharika D. Crawford. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 216. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469660219.

**Cuerpos, territorios y feminismos: Compilación latinoamericana de teorías, metodologías y prácticas políticas.** Edited by Delmy Tania Cruz Hernández and Manuel Bayón Jiménez. Quito: Abya Yala, 2020. Pp. 422. ISBN: 9789942096708.

**The People of the River: Nature and Identity in Black Amazonia, 1835–1945.** By Oscar de la Torre. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 242. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469643243.

**Landscapes of Freedom: Building a Postemancipation Society in the Rainforests of Western Colombia.** By Claudia Leal. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018. Pp. ix + 352. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780816536740.

**Conflictos territoriales y territorialidades en disputa: Re-existencias y horizontes societales frente al capital en América Latina.** Edited by Pabel López and Milson Betancourt. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2021. Open access e-book, PDF. ISBN: 9789877229011.

**Vital Diplomacy: The Ritual Everyday on a Dammed River in Amazonia.** By Chloe Nahum-Claudel. New York: Berghahn, 2017. Pp. vi + 302. \$140.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781785334061.

Extractivism is a widely used concept framing how persistent patriarchal, racial capitalism in the Americas continues to seize some lives and environments in the name of wealth accumulation for others.<sup>1</sup> Rather than rehashing stories of harm caused by this “extractivist imperative,”<sup>2</sup> this review essay makes room for another kind of imperative: aliveness and resurgence that resist and interrupt the deadliness of resource extraction. Centering such stories is not a hopeful denial of the wounds caused by capitalist oppression or their afterlives but an ethical opening for recognizing concurrent projects for healing necessary to forge more desirable futures.

The borderlands theorist Gloria Anzaldúa offers the starting point for this review essay in what she calls “Coyolxāuhqui’s imperative.”<sup>3</sup> In the Florentine Codex, Coyolxāuhqui is a warrior goddess dismembered and decapitated by her half-brother, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. Coyolxāuhqui’s open wounds often evoke a story of damage: loss via forced seizing and separation of land and bodies, the death of culture, and the robbing of language and voice following European colonization. Anzaldúa demands a different interpretation, however, one that does not culminate with the violence of dismemberment; her method is to queer—rather than dwell in—damage. In Anzaldúa’s retelling, the goddess’s dismembered body is imbued with intention and vitality; she seeks to put her body together, or “re-member,” to gain back her memory vis-à-vis a “shift in realities.”<sup>4</sup> For Anzaldúa, Coyolxāuhqui’s dismemberment is temporary. Her retelling is not so much about the violence of dismemberment as about the possibility of re-membering Coyolxāuhqui, that is, both reconstituting (her)self through memory and through her *miembros* (body parts). This retelling is full of borderlands, contact zones, bifurcations, and worlding (or world-making) diplomacy. Anzaldúa’s Coyolxāuhqui cautions us against the dangers of planetary theorizations that dwell in damage, and reminds us of how struggle is lived and how lives and worlds are put at risk in the process of living. And she moves us to remember that individuals in the Americas are reconstituting elements of their society that have been dispersed or broken apart by capitalist penetration into a different kind of formation that allows them to shift their political, economic, and ecological realities. As the Grupo de Trabajo Territorialidades en Disputa y R-existencias affirms, seeking for social reconfiguration is a way to persist, resist, and create a different form of existing together.

If the Americas are a re-membering body-territory—a collective social body whose liveliness is inseparable from the natural environments it emerges from—as the contributors of *Cuerpos, territorios y feminismos* affirm, then Coyolxāuhqui’s healing imperative is a good companion to the collection of texts on environment and society reviewed here. In what follows, I connect these texts with Anzaldúa’s capacious borderlands and queer theory to emphasize stories of social bodies in reconstitution in the Americas in relation to land, water, and territory.

<sup>1</sup> Tom Perreault, “Extraction and Its Others,” *Latin American Research Review*, online June 16, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.55>; Donald Kingsbury, “Latin American Extractivism and (or after) the Left,” *Latin American Research Review* 56, no. 4 (2021): 977–987, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.1668>; Bettina Schorr, “Extractivism in Latin America: The Global-National-Local Link,” *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 2 (2019): 509–516, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.392>.

<sup>2</sup> Murat Arsel, Barbara Hogenboom, and Lorenzo Pellegrini, “The Extractive Imperative in Latin America,” *Extractive Industries and Society* 3, no. 4 (2016): 880–887.

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, edited by AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 124. Anzaldúa is not the first scholar-artist to talk about these sorts of cosmogonic processes. Indigenous scholars, artists, activists, and healers in the Americas have been sharing similar stories for centuries; she is one interlocutor among many. I single her out for the affective force of her queer and inclusive ethics and her rich assortment of figures, verbs, and narrative playfulness.

## Territorios de vida

The texts reviewed illustrate various instances of how body-territories are disrupted and mobilized to manifest worlds worth living (and fighting) for. From the environmental histories of the Iguazú geopolitical border entangling Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, to the bifurcation of water as right and/or commodity in Costa Rica and Brazil, to the dynamism and potentialities of contact zones and flights of and for freedom in the waterscapes of Colombia, Brazil, and the Caribbean, these texts bring forth and problematize the affective work of borders and bordering practices in the making of more desirable futures. Together, these texts privilege *rajaduras* (Anzaldúa's term for cracks in the system of knowledge) to visualize processes of re-existence amid capitalist domination and to be attentive to the wonder that Anzaldúa called the "*mundis imaginalis*": where creativity, dreams, fantasies, intuitions, and perseverance nurture renewal. These texts evade simplistic analyses of dominance, tragedy, and "victimry." Drawing on careful and detailed archival, ethnographic, and analytical reconstructions of the grounds on which lives and livelihoods are torn apart and reconstituted, they detail shifting worlds and realities in the Americas. Doing so, they showcase complex and often contradictory ways of being human, making decisions based on place-based conceptions of freedom and fugitivity, and insisting on the possibility of existing differently and collectively.

Coyolxāuhqui's imperative resonates with current epistemological and political proposals for anti-capitalist resistance and redemption. Alternative and communitarian feminisms in Abya Yala have led the way in the generation and circulation of such calls for healing, for example, with the concept of *cuerpo-tierra-territorio*.<sup>5</sup> For Tzk'at, la Red de Sanadoras Ancestrales del Feminismo Comunitario of Guatemala (Tzk'at means "network" in Quiché Maya), body-land-territory is a proposal against capitalist violence that alienates bodies (*cuerpos*) from the land (*tierra*). Tzk'at denounces a dual form of violence that threatens the dignity of life in the Americas: the normalized sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls and the extractivist violence of mining, a form of violence against Mother Earth. Tzk'at's emancipatory orientation is to protect the dignity of life that starts from the cosmogonic consciousness of *cuerpos indignados* (disrespected bodies) who demand the defense and regeneration of the *cuerpo-tierra-territorio* unity.<sup>6</sup> In this movement toward healing, the body is a meaningful historical space of existence with a corporeal reality—a "territorio de vida" (López and Betancourt, 9) whose relations have been momentarily severed by the penetration of capitalist patriarchal violence into every aspect of existence. In the texts examined here, the power of capitalist exploitation stems from the logics and technologies of differentiation (bifurcation, as Ballesteros puts it) that separate space, time, bodies, and land, and their re-territorialization as objects to be appropriated as alienable commodities. At the same time, the intentional re-membering of *cuerpo-tierra-territorios* seeks to rearticulate unity via the movement, materiality, and subjectivity of communitarian logics, and through situated knowledges that refuse their *desterritorialización*, the loss of territorial relations (López and Betancourt). As these distinct feminist-inspired Abya Yala *colectivos* propose, to defend and regenerate *cuerpo-tierra-territorio* is a desire for a lively reassemblage that weaves together multiple sources, interruptions, and pathways. Next, I use the collection of texts to explore the shifting identities/worlds and the devices, strategies, negotiations, and rearrangements of space that flesh out the shifting grounds for this re-membering.

<sup>5</sup> Francesca Gargallo Celentani, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala: Ideas y proposiciones de las mujeres de 607 pueblos en nuestra América* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2013); Julieta Elisa Paredes Carvajal, *1492 Entronque patriarcal: La situación de las mujeres de los pueblos originarios de Abya Yala después de la invasión colonial de 1492* (Buenos Aires: FLACSO, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Lorena Cabnal, "Tzk'at, Red de Sanadoras Ancestrales del Feminismo Comunitario desde Iximulew-Guatemala," *Ecología Política*, no. 54 (2017): 98–102.

## Social agency and the desire to reconstitute at the borderlands

The borderlands are spaces where cultures coexist at the same time, “touching” and grafting onto each other and generating “permeable, flexible, ambiguous shifting grounds.”<sup>7</sup> Putting dispersed pieces back together—and emancipating from the coloniality of *desconocimiento*—means continuously moving, negotiating, and rearranging re-membering practices. *Cuerpos, territorios y feminismos*, edited by Delmy Tania Cruz Hernández and Manuel Bayón Jiménez, starts from this sort of borderlands thinking-being. This is a polyvocal collection speaking about the interdependence of capitalist extractivism and violence against bodies, particularly women’s bodies. As a whole, this collection denounces the “(re)patriarcalización de los territorios”—the continuing triangulation of patriarchy, coloniality, and capitalism via generalized resource extraction logics that is altering Latin American geographies. Speaking from various locations in Nicaragua, Argentina, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Uruguay, the chapters trace how bodies and land (in its broadest sense) are constructed as objects to be subordinated, appropriated, violated, and alienated. Each chapter engages in the sort of healing methodologies figured by Anzaldúa, drawing attention to the *encuerpamiento* (embodiment) of every day resistance and refusals and to the weaving together, over and over again, of body, land, and feminisms with emancipatory consciousness. For example, Elvira Cuadra Lira, Mauricio Arellano Nucamendi, and Rosa H. G. Govela Gutiérrez detail the “metodologías vivas” performed by women from Xochilt Acalt (Nicaragua) and Chiapas and Puebla (Mexico), methodologies for developing a sense of selfhood—to recognize the self as both individual and collective, political subjects. As these authors explain, women who become organized and protagonists of their own transformation do so through their connection with land, in “direct contact with soils, water, and other living beings that inhabit these. There is a consciousness that this would not have been possible without having lived the experience of re-learning to cultivate and care for the land. The body is the land and the land is life” (221, my translation); this grounds their feminist epistemology, which is attuned to the bodies and consciousness of rural, Indigenous women.

Re-membering from the physical and conceptual borderlands is also central to Claudia Leal’s *Landscapes of Freedom*, an environmental history of nineteenth-century black peasants in the Pacific Coast of Colombia, and to Oscar de la Torre’s *People of the River*, a historical investigation of the formation of black peasant societies in the aftermath of emancipation in the state of Pará, Brazil. Both center the emancipatory standpoint of Black peoples in forested landscapes and look for the seeds that sprouted high levels of autonomy in the environments of socioeconomic organization. In doing so, both focus on collective agency and desire to interrupt narratives that assume a linear logic of movement from unfreedom to freedom.

Leal’s narrative, organized around the notion of extractive economies, traces the emergence of a postemancipation society in the humid rainforests of the Chocó region, and in the midst of the reconfiguration of resource extraction practices. “Extraction can be colored with many hues,” Leal writes (9). Indeed, while in the eighteenth century gold extraction had enslaved unfree African descendants, “the independent fashion in which ex-slaves and the descendants of slaves lived their lives gave a concrete and deep meaning to the legal condition of freedom” (9). For some newly freed peoples of the Chocó, gold extraction functioned as a borderland enabling greater autonomy during the transition from slavery to freedom in postemancipation Colombia. Between 1850 and 1930, free black people in the Pacific occupied the most economically marginal sections of the rainforest environment, and built a unique postemancipatory society where a greater degree of autonomy could be enjoyed, relative to their peers elsewhere. The shift from freed black peoples to black

<sup>7</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 49.

peasants was possible through the domination of rainforests, which both offered protection via difficult access and connected them to local and global economies. Family farms produced food for the region, and households extracted gold, platinum, rubber, and vegetable ivory nuts and sold these to white merchants who shipped them overseas.

The extractive borderlands might enable shifts in realities but they don't guarantee full freedom from oppression. In Colombia's Chocó, Leal traces the continuous unfreedom/freedom reconfigurations that emerged from the logics of the extractive economy itself. While the slave economy was prolonged by opening spaces for small gains of freedom within it, in some cases, this move also opened transformative inroads for freedom from slavery through self-purchase. For example, slave gangs and labor organized around kin and familiar networks were the main agents of this move toward freedom; captive individuals literally saved gold extracted during their off days to liberate themselves and each other. And after emancipation, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the spatial division of labor of the lowlands also offered *rajaduras* that allowed the configuration of a free black peasantry: while blacks stayed in the rural areas producing commodities, whites traded these goods in urban settings, allowing blacks to have an experience of freedom but also reproducing prejudiced ideas of society's natural orders.<sup>8</sup>

De la Torre's narrative takes the reader to another borderland, the Amazon rainforest. Here, de la Torre examines the cultural ecologies of maroons adapting to Amazonian environs to understand how black enslaved descendants in frontier Pará formed spaces of personal and social identity. Like Leal, de la Torre argues that the transition from slavery to freedom has roots both inside and beyond the slave economy. He first traces the emergence of spaces of autonomy "conquered" by slaves in their workplaces through various strategies, including the rhythm of work decided by the group, forming independent social organizations, generating incipient subsistence production in provision grounds, and developing a monetary microeconomy. These "hard won" victories might explain why, even in highly capitalized coffee- and sugar-producing areas of Brazil, free "black peasant micro-communities" stayed on the properties where they had worked as slaves even after the abolition of slavery in 1888. Historians refer to these economic relations as an "internal economy of slavery"—the activities the enslaved carried out for themselves, without the masters' permission, and that permitted "family stability" that generated limits to the masters' near-absolute power.

De la Torre goes beyond explanations based on cracks in the system, arguing that the configuration of spaces of autonomy depended on the capacities of captive people themselves for creative and innovative environmental adaptation. Learning, experimentation, and adaptation made collective continuance possible before and after emancipation. De la Torre mobilizes the concept of "environmental creolization," which describes how both African and Afro-Brazilian slaves learned both to adapt to the New World and to become free, to name these re-remembering processes. Just as maroons and enslaved Africans learned a new language, became Brazilian by birth, or navigated Brazilian law to gain autonomy or even freedom, they also acquired knowledge of Amazonian landscapes, becoming forest collectors, hunters, rangers, or farmers. Using environmental creolization as an organizing concept, de la Torre describes how both African and Afro-Brazilian slaves learned as they adapted to the New World and as they sought to become free peasants as well. The *conocimiento* (self-knowledge) that grounds these adaptations is exemplified in the story of the Big Snake, an oral tradition among maroon descendants in the Trombetas River (known as *mocambeiros*) that tells the story of slaves who fled plantations and ranches in the 1800s and relocated to freedom in the forest. The story features the river's natural geography (waterfalls, rocky gorges, flooded areas) as the battleground

<sup>8</sup> Jhonny Hendrix's film *Chocó* (Colombia, 2012) illustrates these rural town dynamics and their intersection with patriarchal, racial capitalism.

for a struggle against a ferocious snake that was ultimately defeated, thus opening up a new residential space for maroon autonomy and community. Such stories affirm the interconnection between natural landscape and viable maroon communities in Amazonia. The title of the book, *People of the River*, epitomizes this focus on human-environment relations, suggesting that black rural communities and the natural world are often overlooked as vehicles for the maintenance of an Afro-Brazilian identity. The snake is a symbol of what Anzaldúa calls “awakening consciousness,” and environmental creolization is akin to “the potential of knowing within, an awareness and intelligence not grasped by logical thought. Often nature provokes un ‘aja,’ or ‘conocimiento,’ one that guides your feet along the path, gives you *el ánimo* to dedicate yourself to transforming perceptions of reality, and thus the conditions of life. *Llevas la presencia de éste conocimiento contigo* [you carry the presence of this knowledge with you]. You experience nature as ensouled, as sacred.”<sup>9</sup>

Environmental creolization had multiple hues too, entangling autonomy with unfreedom. For example, it served the interests of Para’s slaveholders by making life under slavery more palatable for those slaves who gained knowledge of local environments and used it to sustain their families or to increase their value in the slaver’s eye. Meanwhile, the expansion of transportation and trade networks increased chances that captives could gain other skills in work as carpenters, mechanics, stevedores, ship pilots, rubber tappers, cashiers, and so on, opportunities that made it possible for them to save money to buy their freedom and that of their dependents. These developments allowed the enslaved to gain autonomy and made slave work more flexible and negotiable, prolonging its endurance. Environmental creolization also became a form of slave resistance. Against dehumanization, exploitation, and deprivation of social bonds, enslaved Africans built links of kin and place mediated by the environments where they lived and worked, thus carrying out a “remapping of everyday life” that allowed families and communities to enter the ranks of the free peasantry before abolition in 1888. Outside plantations, maroons used their knowledge of the landscape to protect themselves and prevent reenslavement, and at the same time, they maintained contact with the broader social body, developing an interdependence with trade partners and colonial and national governments. In keeping these messy relationships, maroons became free peasants through a process of negotiation that started under slavery and involved missionaries, merchants, political patrons, and Brazil nuts.

### Contact zones and agitated encounters

In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa stated, “The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion . . . and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage.”<sup>10</sup> Stories about reconfiguring societies through the shifting grounds of the borderlands are also present in the waterscapes of *Big Water*, edited by Jacob Blanc and Frederico Freitas, and in Sharika Crawford’s *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*. While *Landscapes of Freedom* and *The People of the River* focused on collective black agency and continuance following emancipation from slavery, *Big Water* and *The Last Turtlemen* delve into the contact zones of international frontiers and national projects—the geopolitical reconstitution of the borderlands itself. *Big Water* explores four centuries of the overlapping histories of the Triple Frontier region, the dynamic border between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay. This is where the rivers of the Guaira fed commerce and mobility for indigenous peoples and Spanish and Portuguese empires, and where nineteenth- and twentieth-century agro-industrial land appropriation, large dam projects, ports, railroads, and urban

<sup>9</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 49.

expansion attempted to settle national identities in this “imprecise zone” (Graciela Silvestri, “Conclusion,” in *Big Water*, 285). *The Last Turtlemen* tells the story of the circum-Caribbean as a waterscape of resource extraction and depletion, where imperial powers and national governments vied to control maritime frontiers and turtlemen hunted for limited and profitable marine commodities. Following the story of how Caymanians depleted the local supply of turtles and turned to international waters to meet their economic needs, *The Last Turtlemen* breaks away from reductionist stories about the problem of the “Atlantic commons” by reframing resource depletion through the lens of struggles over state sovereignty between Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia and with US hegemony.

Mobility and agitated encounters shape these reconfigurations of social space and identity. In *Big Water*, several chapters trace the realities of how the Guarani experienced, contested, and shaped nation-building projects from Jesuit reductions in the early seventeenth century to flows of capital and goods via trade agreements and to regional modernization projects in the second half of the twentieth century. Indigenous *cuerpo-tierra-territorio* (Guarani “bodies and souls”) became the targets of appropriation and exploitation fueling the competition between Portuguese and Spanish colonial expansion projects (Shawn Michael Austin, “Embodied Borderland,” and Guillermo Wilde, “Jesuit Missions and the Guarani Ethnogenesis”). The Guarani resisted this reframing through their own border-crossing epistemologies and ontology of walking—“to walk is to live, to be alive”—searching for the “land without evil” (*Yvy Maraey*) to restore broken ties with the earth and the beings that inhabit it (Evaldo Mendes da Silva, “Walking the Bad Land,” 195). Movement across the land “places” the experience of time; stories about creation and purpose serve to make and remake the stories that tell of our own belonging to a place or several places.<sup>11</sup>

*Big Water* tells the story of how, through five hundred years of contact with Euro-American society, the Guarani have switched back and forth between sedentariness and nomadism, between imperial and national familiars/strangers, exploiting the constantly shifting territorial boundaries of the Triple Frontier.<sup>12</sup> The book tracks their experience through a “fractured chronotope” of new institutions and actors entangled with older structures and practices. In the seventeenth century, Guarani peoples were brought to Jesuit missions in Iguazú (“big water” in Tupi-Guarani), where Jesuits made jurisdictional claims over the status of their souls and sought to foster “communal stability” through *cacicazgos*, the basic social unit of organization of mission territoriality. Many Guarani refused this homogenized reduced structure, fracturing the mission borderlands experiment by re-membering their own forms of autonomous organization, connecting with other defectors, and generating distrust by both Portuguese and Spanish colonial administrations. In some cases, they “soldiered” on the materially and culturally porous Spanish-Portuguese borderlands, conscripted as ethnic soldiers in the *bandeiras* of Eastern Paraguay. Centuries later, Guarani “walks” (*-guata*) across ancestral territory have been reconfigured by anxieties over colonial and national affiliation. In Brazil the Guarani were a “foreign” presence at the frontier, where national governments encouraged the agro-industrial settlement of land by German immigrants. At the Argentinian-Brazilian border, their cross-boundary mobility was limited by the establishment and policing of conservation parks (Federico Freitas, “Argentinizing the Border”). And cities, spaces of sedentary (*jurua*) society, have become new spaces to walk and to mark trajectories and points of arrival and departure.

<sup>11</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*.

<sup>12</sup> The term *contact zone* describes processes of transculturation that involve selective collaboration with and appropriation of the grammar of colonialism to infiltrate, merge, or interrupt, to various degrees, the dominant terms of belonging. Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

While the introduction of *Big Water* describes these shifting configurations of Guarani collective survival as adaptation, the essays in the collection exceed the limits of “adaptive qualities” and resilience discourse. In ecological terms, resilience is the ability of a community to use available resources to recover from life-altering crises and adapt to new realities. I agree with the proposition in Silvestri’s concluding chapter (286) that “the ways of living of Native peoples in these lowlands, themselves perpetual travelers, contrast with fixed spatial patterns and limited schema that receive such extraordinary weight in modern culture.” Responsibility toward indigenous “place-thought”<sup>13</sup> in the Guaira starts with the recognition that adaptation is about surviving a death-dealing political economic system; resilience-oriented narratives must address colonial ecological violence and the capacity for Indigenous nations to assemble self-determined futures, including narratives of ecological reconfiguration and cultural resurgence.

Collective identity made and remade through the renegotiation of the political economy of resources, in asymmetric conditions of power, is also evident in Crawford’s *Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*, where the connections between the political economy of trade, regulation, and waterscapes become the borderlands space of collective reconstitution. *Turtlemen* claims that stories about sugar plantations both dominate how the Caribbean is read and obscure ways of existing at the margins of plantations, such as those of the Cayman Islands, home of the turtlemen in this study. Like Leal, Crawford pushes back on simplistic portraits of the region. And like *Big Water*, she offers an “extended view” (4) that brings attention to the borderland of transformation itself: the diversification of labor dynamics and economies in maritime contact zones, where small islands and coastal colonies like Bahamas, Barbuda, Turks and Caicos, and the Dutch ABC islands were never massive producers of sugar and exploited other forest and sea resources and served as nodes in commercial networks, pirate operations, and imperial experiments.

Movement across the shifting grounds of the Caribbean borderlands is central to the reconstitution of social life. The book begins after the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean, chronicles the decline of Caymanian turtle fishing from the last decade of the nineteenth century into the late twentieth century, and argues that seafaring continued to attract the descendants of enslaved and free peoples living on small islands and coastal settlements at the margins of global processes and capitalist development. From the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, residents of the greater Caribbean migrated across transimperial and transnational boundaries to exploit opportunities in fluid political and racial climates; for example, transient free women of color moved among the ceded islands of Grenada, Trinidad, and Demerara in the British late colonial period. As in other parts of the Caribbean, many ex-slaves headed to the hills to form a “reconstituted peasantry,” while others headed out to sea. And in other parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, freed peoples and their descendants migrated to Cuba and Central and South America, attracted to foreign-run agro-export business or infrastructure projects. In the midst of these movements and agitated encounters, the sea itself offered a livelihood lifeline, promising autonomy but not necessarily good pay.

*The Last Turtlemen* mobilizes the concept of contact zones to trouble simplistic ecological narratives of the tragedy of the commons. Crawford tracks the transnational geographies of Caymanian turtlemen, specifically how turtle fishers attempted to preserve access to turtles as resources and to refuge areas, and how human-nonhuman relations were reconfigured when fishers met, clashed, and grappled with national projects of territorial incorporation. The rise of long-distance turtle fishing also increased cross-racial encounters among indigenous, white, and Afro-Caribbean inhabitants, who confronted challenges of diminishing turtle supply with different adaptive strategies, such as drawing on

<sup>13</sup> Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 20–34.



indigenous technological knowledges and diversifying land and maritime economic activities to survive. Whether it was Nicaraguan authorities integrating Mosquitia in the 1890s; the Colombian state enclosing the insular territory of San Andrés and Providencia Islands in the 1910s; or clashes between Nicaragua, Colombia, and Costa Rica with British and/or US imperial interests, throughout the southwestern waters of the Caribbean, Caymanian turtlemen found themselves ensnared in the shifting geopolitical grounds of the borderlands. Crawford tells this story with attention to how the sea framed their worldview and powerfully reveals how their standpoint and perception of the world starts from “regional nooks, which were the center, not the periphery, of the turtlemen’s world” (6).

### Rituals, devices, and bifurcations of re-membering

While the previous sections describe destruction-remembering dyads, *Vital Diplomacy*, by Chloe Nahum-Claudel, and *A Future History of Water*, by Andrea Ballesterro, start from the technologies, innovations, and logics that mediate this process. Though both authors trace the complexity of reassembling ethical societies, their methods and starting points for queering re-membering diverge significantly. *Vital Diplomacy* is a processual analysis based on the ethnographic study of Yankwa, a seasonal ritual (but not only that) that describes life in collectivity among the Enawene in Brazil. Yankwa is a collective noun with priestly and ceremonial—even carnivalesque—moments and dimensions. Its meaning is constituted through the interdependence of dancers, men, women, those who plant manioc, flute players, fishermen, spirits, foreigners, and many, many more things, depending on context. As Nahum-Claudel explains, this open relationality can be confusing but is necessary to “maintain something of the complex polysemy of this noun, whose every usage implies . . . the interdependence of the single . . . and the whole” (7). Yankwa is a collective experience that, like Coyolxāuhqui’s imperative, agitates with the desire and intent for unity in separation. For Nahum-Claudel, attention to this liveliness not only recognizes how Amazonian societies deploy “vital diplomacy” (the condition for political unity, health, and material prosperity) to maintain a sense of self among the shifting grounds of the contact zones they inhabit, but also to resist simplistic theorizations that tend to reduce Amazonian societies to warring, subsistence-oriented cultures. Ballesterro’s *Future History of Water* similarly emphasizes webs of relationality but has a different methodological starting point: puzzlement and wonder surrounding a collection of technolegal devices (formula, index, list, and pact) that afford the observer the room to create worlds of water—as human right, commodity, or something in between—at various sites across the globe, from World Water Fora in Istanbul and Mexico City to urban water infrastructures in Costa Rica and Brazil. Wonder, writes Ballesterro, is an epistemic mood for making ordinary things strange that playfully pokes at the fixity of boundaries, regardless of where those boundaries are. Wonder is about feeling the *rajaduras*, cracks, *huecos* (holes), and fissures of all kinds to let in the possibility of sensing forgotten and disavowed worlds.<sup>14</sup>

Both texts slow down to appreciate what happens when people, things, and other beings encounter each other, in concrete times and places, and how these encounters affect worlds. *Vital Diplomacy*, for example, begins with a story about the arrival of fish foreign to the Enawene. The “foreign fish” (*iñoti kahase*), according to Enawene women, looked funny, smelled pungent, tasted oily, caused illness, and were overall unacceptable for immediate consumption. It needed to be smoked to hide its shortcomings. The fish had been purchased from an aqua farm by a group of fishermen to make up for a decrease in catch due to the construction of hydroelectric dams on the upper reaches of the Jurueña

<sup>14</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*.

River (an Amazon River tributary), in Mato Grosso State, an economic frontier region of Brazil. The Enawenes' fishing success had once been a measure of the quality of their clan relations and of alliances with ancestors and spirits, including the dangerous Yakairiti, spirit masters of water and land. Buying fish "from their enemies" (developers, state officials, settlers who harm their worlds) had become a resource to mediate injured relations, one more innovation following an increasing line of reconfigurations and shifts the Enawene had put into play to sort out threats to their fishing livelihoods. In other words, in the context of constant fuel deficits and the advance of hydroelectricity developments, the enemy also became the readiest source of "help" for Yankwa. Foreigners and their fish "were both the cause of a new insufficiency in the ritual economy and the source of goods with the potential to supplement and even expand it" (4).

*Vital Diplomacy* details how, by living in resource frontiers, the Enawene have become refined boundary crossers. Yankwa prepared them well for this challenge, in the intimate spaces of gardens, cooking, and public festivities. Nahum-Claudel carefully tracks the work involved in sustaining a life of perpetual ritual vis-à-vis these shifting contexts and power inequities of social dismemberment and re-membering. The work of maintaining Yankwa is both mundane and extraordinary, practical and cosmogonic, productive and performative. Drawing on Adam Seligman and colleagues' theorization of the ritual as negotiation between self and other, in a world whose order is opaque, Nahum-Claudel says: "ritual and diplomacy are kindred orientations in the world."<sup>15</sup> In both, action becomes artful and reflexive, is oriented to wider goals beyond the immediate interactive context, and is accommodating of psychological and social ambiguity. Unresolvable questions such as: what is our relationship? Is this aggression real or performed? Will my actions be effective? are posed through boundary-testing interactions" (11). Observing how the Enawene invent new ways of re-membering (and re-existing), through different relations of being together, is a praxis of healing: their orientation stems from accepting that living with social and cosmological others is uncertain and ambiguous, and that transparent knowledge is unattainable. The mercurial Yankwa generates continuity between past and future through rhythmic, reiterative actions that create a temporary order that allows life to carry on, even if not exactly business as usual.

Yankwa is a project that collects and concentrates human vitality to stabilize the Enawene cuerpo-tierra-territorio. *A Future History of Water* develops a different project of stabilization, tracing diplomacy as the affective, epistemic, and political work of distinguishing water as human right and commodity. People, writes Ballesterro, touch the future with their technological tools. The book features four ethnographic devices (formula, index, list, and pact) as ethically and politically generative "technical work"—a combination of legal, economic, and hydrologic knowledge—of economists, lawyers, engineers, environmental scientists, and philosophers who desire to change the future relations of water. Each chapter takes a close look at the interdependence of "imaginative work," how experts separate categories that resist separation, with the morphology of each of these technical devices. Each device becomes a staple in the organization of legality and authority, materializing the preconditions for the future of water in various contexts. From this point of view, thinking materially with water is not to think of it as bonds of oxygen and hydrogen but of how it becomes a technopolitical unity and how this unity is negotiated, contested, and mobilized to different ends. We need to go beyond water itself, argues Ballesterro; we need to focus less on water scenes and fluid locations and more on water elsewhere—specifically in the "desk work" where we might not usually explore its material politics.

<sup>15</sup> Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Bennett Simon, and Michael J. Puett, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

*A Future History of Water* raises questions about the taken-for-granted moral schemas of modernization and technical fixes; it looks at the work it takes to change the future, “from within the technicality of already existing worlds and by using already available tools” (188). How do people create separations between unruly categories, to what end, and how do devices help them do so? In Costa Rica, Ballestero follows a pricing formula that creates a bifurcation between a “bad” price (decisions that reproduce commodification) and a “good” price (decisions that affirm human rights), a distinction that keeps water regulators on their toes as they calibrate and recalibrate their formula and its variables to enact larger (more just) social imaginaries. She interrogates the social life of the consumer price index, a numerical device that creates differences in regulatory and statistical agencies, shaping water as a political object that differentiates between water as a human right and water as a utility with a price. And, in Costa Rica’s Congress, she examines the legal performance of a list that collects, assembles, and organizes typologies of water, making it possible to determine a “taxonomy of water” that separates and bifurcates what counts (and what doesn’t count) as the materiality of water as a human right. Intimately following the work of technocrats, with the openness of wonder, Ballestero offers a material-semiotic analysis of the life of water in bureaucratic offices, congressional discussions, and public workshops where people create legal, economic, and political distinctions to produce the worlds they wish to inhabit. This labor of ethical separations is vital and unending. It’s an imperative of re-membering.

Like Nahum-Claudiel, Ballestero offers an extensive and nuanced methodological-philosophical guide for how to approach the worlding of relations and counter the mystique of exceptionalism. For Ballestero, the conversation pivots around the idea of differentiation as bifurcation. To summarize the complex argument: things that appear as a unity are in fact a myriad of separations waiting to happen; the more self-evident, the more work is required to create this appearance. Once a first separation is produced, “what seems to be just one of two is an entwined line requiring a new differentiation” (6). For example, in the world of water, regulators can decide to keep the price of water tied to inflation to make it accessible as a human right. However, they still need to resolve the problem that people pay for water, that is, water is still experienced as a commodity, not a human right. Thus, they need to “perform a new differentiation to affirm, in some way, its humanitarian nature” (6) amid the reality of its commodification. For each device analyzed in the book, Ballestero demonstrates that this bifurcation never ends; new bifurcations become necessary to continue making things distinguishable, to help people make decisions, and to determine future relations, responsibilities, and obligations as access to the corporality of water changes. This “turtles all the way down” scenario of bifurcations turns water not only “into a planetary archive of meaning and matter, through processes of abstraction and materialization” (7) but also organizes the meaning of other assemblages of life, property, and subjectivity.

### **Telling different stories about harm and healing to re-member**

From where do we tell the story of a region? From which standpoint and with which stories do we represent the multiplicity of life and remembering in the Americas? How do we translate the particularities of places and peoples, aggregate them into a whole, and attempt to create a singular world out of these differences? I have not sought to translate the texts reviewed into a singular story but to blur epistemological and disciplinary boundaries in order to tell a multisited and multitemporal story of healing vis-à-vis extractive capitalist relations. Together, these texts suggest that healing—the intention to reconstitute social bodies differently in order to reclaim dignified ways of living life—has no universal form or timeline. Healing from capitalist wounds is a process, not a destination. Re-

*existencia* (re-existence), *sanación* (healing), adaptation, diplomacy, bifurcation, emancipation, and so on are the verbs of this re-membling. Using Gloria Anzaldúa's capacious theories as an organizing frame, I showcased the figures and stories of the texts reviewed to illustrate reconfiguration as healing across various geographic temporalities in the Americas.

The companion figures and stories featured here are rambunctious and messy. They have queered how I experienced reading and thinking with this collection of rich, place-specific narratives and allowed me to weave together a shared story of desires for healing across the Americas. In conversation with these texts, I have argued that, alongside the wounds created by capitalist penetration, there's a desire for reconstituting body-territory relations beyond those offered by the extractive imperative. Together these works demand theorizations that center reconstitution and resurgence in our retelling of political economic cycles and transformations in the region, as we research, advocate, and teach to re-member. *Sustos* (scares), wounds, traumas, racism, and other forms of violation that "split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us" are also expressions of the movement of healing in relation to multiple, coexisting violences against the fabric of living a good life.<sup>16</sup> Students in Indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonial studies will find the innovative conceptual tools in these texts useful for recognizing how societies in the Americas have, for a long time, countered the intersections of extractive capitalism and patriarchy to create societies anew. Choosing to struggle against unnatural boundaries, they "pick the ground from which to speak a reality into existence."<sup>17</sup>

**Gabriela Valdivia** is Class of 1989 Distinguished Professor of Geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Assistant Dean in Honors Carolina. Her research and teaching focus on the relationship between resource extraction and socio-environmental inequities, with a focus on Latin America. Her research traces the political economy of the oil industry in Ecuador. Gabriela is an author of the digital project *Crude Entanglements*, which explores the affective and embodied dimensions of oil refining in the city of Esmeraldas; a coauthor of *Oil, Revolution, and Indigenous Citizenship in Ecuadorian Amazonia* (2017); and a coeditor of the *Routledge Handbook of Critical Resource Geography* (2021).

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<sup>16</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 23.