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Introduction

On the Way to the Sea, Rivers Find Cities and Encounter the State

In port cities that dot Atlantic coastal maps, freshwater sources have always been central to development. From the beginning of human settlement in Brazil and Argentina, through conquest, colonization, and into our era of telecommunications and container shipping, fresh waters have descended from mountains to join other overland flows and wind down into deep-pooled aquifers. Some waters dry up en route; others flood dangerously over denuded clay hills. Lines of giant turbines inside hydroelectric dams noisily sap the waters' seemingly infinite energy as factories, for myriad reasons, pull them in only to taint and expel them again. Where rivers and streams encounter the outskirts of modern cities, their natural flow is disrupted by three layered, urban grids in various states of construction and disrepair: potable water, sewage, and storm drainage systems. Unless an aqueduct bypasses pollution to bring mountain-fresh streams directly to port cities (as in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil), surface waters from the hinterlands collect animal, human, and industrial waste en route (as in Buenos Aires, Argentina).

The institution of political order that we call the state provides infrastructure, a tangible good, for its citizens.[1] In this sense, coastal infrastructure is the material and symbolic dimension of the state in confrontation with nature. Follow the associations between engineers and militaries, observe charted lines dividing areas of water and sewage service from those excluded and forgotten, and you will trace the power of the state made manifest. Nowadays, as states move toward

laws that promote biodiversity, they designate remnants of coastal forest, wetlands, and the watersheds of rivers and lakes as parks and reserves. Unfortunately, corruption, chaos, and lack of legal implementation and enforcement often undermine the intention of such laws. The real estate developers who make frequent incursions to select sites with the best views and the disinherited who see no alternative to constructing shacks in flood zones beside potable water sources all play a role: All invaders, rich, middling, and poor alike, find insufficient reason to respect zoning prohibitions.[2] People of all classes, races, and religions break laws designed to protect waters from habitat encroachment. Urban ecology is like a bad dream work in progress, infinite sets of semiconscious negotiations taking twists and turns through distinct locales. Each locale faces a particular set of aquatic conundrums, and each relies on cultural and political forms of engagement that are uniquely shaped by port city history.[3] Yet the water flows on in its journey to urban grids, eventually uniting all effluvia in the ocean's embrace.

As inflowing ocean currents collide with toxic river outflows along coastal edges, artisanal fishers and mangrove gleaners cede territory to migrant factory workers and multinationals, each with their own diurnal rhythms and historical depths. While citizens march against brutality and hunger, artists perform politics of the imagination and sunbathers lounge, mesmerized by aquamarine horizons. Cultural collectivities with different modes of being and understanding interact in historical landscapes, which gives character to each city and form to the world. As communication nodes, cities participate beyond their population's material presence, electronically exchanging images and data. As container shipping nodes, cities function as industrial transfer points in intercontinental operations. However, in all the comings and goings, one thing stays true: People poison their water sources and waterscapes even as they take sustenance and pleasure from them and pay handsomely for the right to reside beside them.

The Space between Law and Crime

Destruction is as diverse as culture and as ubiquitous as biology. From micro to macro, from inconsequential convenience to horrendous warring disregard, we assassinate the living waters on which all depend. The human-water relationship reciprocates such that even as we poison the water, the water poisons us. Our aquatic treachery demands the invention and application of law, but it also exceeds law's power. Crime and law are opposing metaphors with a lot of social space between; they are malleable frameworks for judging injurious acts.[4] Egregious offenses can be monitored and punished perhaps; either would be an excellent start. But only changes in consciousness, unfolding place by place, people by people, will reverse unintentional, negligent, harmful, and ever-morphing dispositions and traditions.

Despite the occasional jabs to our consciousness by foul odors, global change indicators, or mass-mediated disasters, humans tend to pursue bad practices in the name of pragmatism. Those who take action to minimize harm have faith in law's promise but put their bodies on the line (blockading bridges, for example) when faced with its limitations. Their performance tactics can nudge governments toward enactment, implementation, and enforcement of legislation and, at the same time, push industries toward sustainability. Many of those who find themselves living in intolerable ecological conditions, like those living downstream of the polluted Río Reconquista in Buenos Aires, find their plight motivation enough to enter activist arenas. Apparently, few passionately seek justice except when environmental degradation threatens them directly. The heart of this study of aquatic cultures encompasses the story of an extraordinary man, Brazilian activist Antonio Conceição Reis,[5] whose singular battle to save a lake and a group of youths got him killed. His sacrifice illustrates how water struggles, abounding in idealism and riven by betrayal, operate across micro and macro levels and involve complex mixes of partnerships and rivalries among people who wield unequal power. Through analysis of a series of sacrificial situations, I show that technical solutions for resolving conflicts that inevitably arise in these complex mixes will be transformed into useful collaboration and legal implementation only through engaged aquatic culture work.

All nations suffer problems of water contamination and other forms of watershed destruction. Brazil and Argentina, too, suffer under the weight of contamination and mismanagement. In addition to a bounteous share of the planet's freshwater, they share regional political economic affiliations and a long stretch of magnificent coastline. Both experienced the last round of U.S.-supported military dictatorships, Brazil in 1964–1985 and Argentina in 1976–1983.[6] The regimes' terms ended with compromises that included potentially contradictory missions: strong protections for aquatic environments in national constitutions and at the same time ample provision for privatizing water services and territories. As I explore in the chapters that follow, compromises that seem ecologically sound in the abstract may prove devastating in practice.

In Salvador and Buenos Aires, hosts of this exploration of the human-water relationship, activists press for justice when legal institutions fail to control environmental crime. They work in the gap between legal codes and ecosystem destruction and provide an ethnographic space to explore two general questions: How, with all our marvelous cultural diversity and technological prowess, have human beings dedicated themselves to so many elaborate endgames that tend toward large-scale planetary crisis? Can the scattered, overpowered, but determined forces fighting for social and environmental justice grow enough, know enough, and be creative enough to turn the tide? To work toward answers to these questions, I document social conflicts and collaborations involving flawed engineering,

encroaching waterfront development, industrial pollution, neighborhood alliance, street theater, and violence as a shocking norm. In these animated struggles, nature is not only an inert background but, like culture, a dynamic force in history (Grosz 2005: 45).

Sharing Sovereignty

> *We stake our civilizations on the coasts and the mighty rivers.*
> —Barbara Kingsolver, "Water Is Life"[7]

Brazil and Argentina, two of the world's largest nations in land mass,[8] rank among those with the highest quantity and quality of renewable water resources.[9] Along with Paraguay and Uruguay, they sit atop one of the world's major groundwater basins, with highly productive aquifers that are also highly vulnerable to pollution from unsewered urban and industrial development (the Guaraní system; United Nations 2003: 79, 81). But it is the great tributaries winding across the surface of the Plate River Basin (Cuenca del Plata) that actively integrate and formally inscribe their national ecosystems, legal systems, and economies with Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay (Bloch 1999: 69; Benjamín, Marques, and Tinker 2005).[10] (See Figure 1.) A vast aquatic network, second only to the Amazon, the Plate River Basin forms the material condition for imagining shared sovereignty, evidenced most dramatically by the many canals and dams restructuring the Paraná-Paraguay Waterway (Bloch 1999: 46–52).

In the Guaraní language, *Paraná* means "Father of Waters"; the Paraguay ("Plumed Birds") River is its greatest tributary. Together, they form the Paraná-Paraguay Waterway, draining about one-fourth of the surface of the continent[11] and linking the Pantanal wetland, one of the planet's largest reserves of freshwater, to the Atlantic Ocean (Bloch 1999: 70).[12] With the onset of November rains, the slow-flowing, interfluvial space of the Pantanal fills quickly, forming a large, shallow lake.[13] As the dry season takes hold, waters gradually flow out, shrinking the Pantanal to small marshy patches. And so, like a sponge, the Pantanal fills with rainwater and gradually releases it into the highlands and pampas, then through the Paraná Delta, and finally into the Plate, a sea-sized river crossed by dredged shipping lanes that link the Atlantic deep to docks in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Uruguay.

Modernizers have turned these natural rivers into techno-socio-natural spaces: To ease passage of vessels, the many canals straighten meandering rivers; to generate electricity for cities, dams harvest their greatest flows. An unintended effect of this canalized territorial order is the increased rate of sediment-carrying surface waters rushing toward the sea.[14]

Mid-twentieth-century international agreements imagining shared sovereignty of waterways, such as the 1969 Treaty of the Plate Basin, revise aquatic space as economic space but formally include the "preservation of animal and plant life." Preservation of animal and plant life is third on

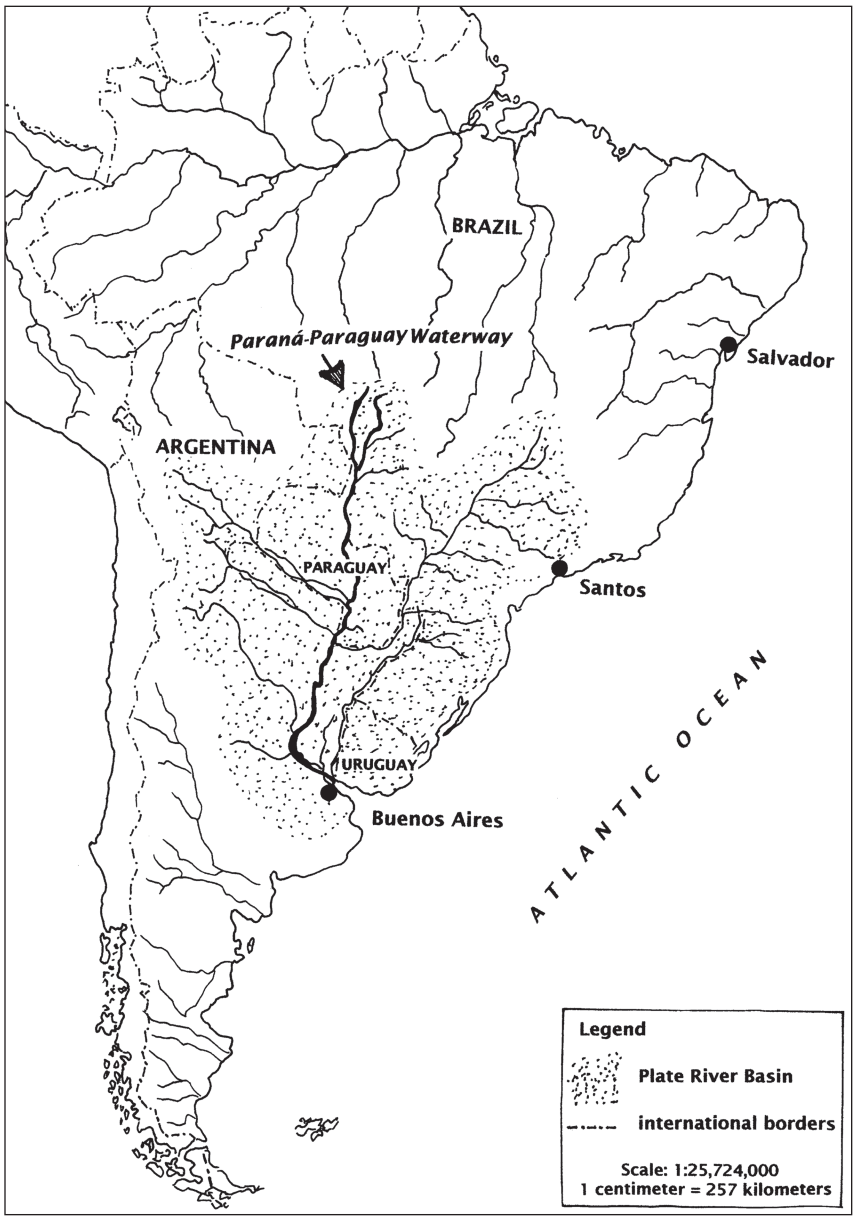

Figure 1. Paraná-Paraguay Waterway in the Plate River Basin with the three project field sites: Santos, Salvador, and Buenos Aires. Cartography based on map of South America in *Collier's World Atlas and Gazetteer* (1946) and Bloch 1999 (48).

a list, following (1) facilitation and material assistance of navigation and (2) rational use of water resources through regulation of multiple water courses and their equitable exploitation. The list of goals goes on to include improving road, river, air, electric, and telecommunication networks; promoting industrial interests and economic development; cooperation in health and education; and producing integrated knowledge of the basin. Use of rivers as potable water sources does not figure as a shared priority at the international level. This treaty is followed by the 1971 Declaration of Asunción and the 1973 River Plate Treaty, both developing river management with the same goals (Bloch 1999: 46–47, 75).

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, a key international moment for the environmental movement, recognized the "intrinsic values of ecosystems" and "participatory ecosystem-based management" (Agenda 21, Chap. 18).[15] Since then the United Nations has recognized Brazil and Argentina as countries that made progress implementing Chapter 18; but it is difficult to find evidence of an active and effective use of either the precautionary principle or grassroots participation. The contradiction between the actuality of industrial modernization and the promise of sustainability persists (Goldman 2005). Evidence shows that eco-blind forms of modern megaengineering though sometimes profitable are nonetheless unsustainable (McCully 2001; Pearce 2006).

For signatory nations of Plate River Basin agreements, the sacred liberties of navigation and the transit and transfer of merchandise have been little hampered by requirements that contradict dominant models of efficient, if inequitable, moneymaking (Bloch 199: 72). That said, the grave risk that a drying Pantanal poses to the interfluvial system is uncontroversial. Indeed, I first learned of it from an international shipping lawyer and co-owner of a transshipment company whose boats ply its waters; the lawyer's ambivalent communication signals a troubling, transnational mode of apprehension, especially pronounced among educated professionals. They recognize the intrinsic value of natural habitat and understand the coming global water crisis to which eco-blind engineering contributes, but with genuine sadness, they accept that there is currently no viable alternative to the destruction.

More generally, international agreements encode shared values and encourage economic cooperation and information exchange, but they also tend to facilitate world trade in aquatically destructive modes, often overriding national law. In apparent paradox, written law that calls for the protection of water, habitat, and people is just as likely to protect those who cause their disappearance. Social reality often resolves the apparent paradox by simply avoiding inconvenient implementation and enforcement. In addition to lists of items that signal awareness of environmental values, agreements between multinational corporations, international development banks, and national or provincial officials employ other juridical gambits. For example, they create zones of *ambiguity* that erase national boundaries, effectively repressing the exercise of the political right to reject

exploitation by local citizens of sovereign states (e.g., the Yacyretá dam and Barrick Gold mines; see Chapter 8),[16] or they target zones of juridical *proximity* that use convergent international boundaries as a cartographic rationale to intensify militaristic control (e.g., Bush designating the Triple Frontier at Iguazú Falls an "axis of evil"; see Chapter 8).[17] Within nations, justice institutions use juridical *evasion* in their attempts to resist just claims for legal implementation (as did the Argentine Supreme Court in the Reconquista River Basin case; see Chapter 7).

Along with mundane engineering of potable water, sanitation, and waterway systems and outright repressive violence, such juridical gambits combine to mark the space of the "geopolitical ecological frontier" (Gandy 2003: 18). Actors involved in aquatic struggles track back and forth, linking events in hinterlands to cities, making the patterns of exploitation and resistance legible to wider audiences. Demands to halt the assassination of landscapes continue to be cut short by assassination of the environmental activists who make the demands.[18] Everyone is affected by these aquatic events but, like most who habitually turn on the water tap to fill a vessel, inhabits the realm of the "unthought known," where the human relationship to water, while deeply part of experience, is rarely explicitly described (Rubenstein 2010: 9, reinterpreting Bollas 2008: 19).

Above all, the economic significance of waterway development and global shipping more generally depend on cities, which in Brazil and Argentina, as elsewhere, are located most often on rivers. Two out of three of their Atlantic coast megacities are on rivers.[19] The two coastal cities on rivers in focus here—Buenos Aires, a megacity of twelve to thirteen million in Argentina at the mouth of the Paraná-Paraguay Waterway, and Salvador, a city of about three million in the forested coastal strip of Brazil's dry northeast—are both at the bottom of the urban water stress index (0–25 percent), indicating that most people have sufficient potable water for their needs.[20] Yet both cities experience severe aquatic dilemmas because of pollution, insufficient or badly designed infrastructure, and the ever-widening gap between rich and poor. These dilemmas resonate throughout all cities but especially cities on rivers. About half the world's people cluster in about 3 percent of the earth's land area (White 2010: 173), and the Americas have the highest rates of urbanization in the world.[21] As social actors and scholars redefine "the rational use of water" to focus on core, interlinked goals of habitat health and social justice, and as we scale up our understanding of humans as "geologic" or "geographic agents" (Glacken 1967), cities and their wider environmental impact on global water resources must become a topic of greater significance (White 2010: 173).

Frameworks of Port City Comparison and Interpretation

This study of aquatic cultures focuses on the way human beings in unique historical and cultural contexts imagine themselves as part of their aquatic habitats. Basic ecological frameworks set the stage for ethnographic action.

The industrial ecologies and spectacular landscapes of port cities provide contextual grounds for comparison, contrast, and negotiation at nested scales (coast, watershed, waterscape, infrastructure, and architecture) within which I discover spaces of social interaction amenable to participant observation.[22]

The singular awe I feel when near container ships lurks within the idea of studying port cities, which is how this project began. These colossal floating commodity dens transformed the relationship between time, space, and transport costs, thus shifting east-west patterns of production and consumption (Harvey 2006; Levinson 2006). The abstract idea of globalization became concrete after watching cargo ships. Viewed from shore on a calm day, the steel hulks hang on the blurred horizon, their hidden cargo in neatly colored stacks. They move steadily closer through dredged channels and then tie up to giant concrete docks with potable water infrastructure, fueling trucks, and lines of sky-piercing cranes. Logistic information streams into the heads of crane operators who, in addition to reading in-cab computer screens, read hand signals of tiny men below guiding suspended boxes onto a stack or a truck bed. People and machines, flesh and steel coordinates in the pathways of thousands of tons of products, move to and fro, near and far, linking farms, factories, and markets.

Except for breeze-swept waters and cries of birds, nature seems practically banished from the scene. Gone is the hurly-burly of port life in days of yore. Less than twenty years ago, the docks needed thousands of dockworkers to unload and stow cargo and thousands of bodies to service the workers with food, supplies, and sex. Today's container port operations require only a tiny fraction of yesteryear's local labor. While visiting port cities, I wondered how local people and maritime ecologies fare where a city hosts these colossi, their neighborhoods displaced and seen from afar as mere nodes in global shipping networks.[23] Water itself, as substance, territory, and boundary, gradually came into focus as the raison d'être of the project. As a subject composed of bundled sets of beliefs, practices, circumstances, and natures that reveal social inequalities, water retains the potential to unite across unfathomable divides.

Gradually, I came to understand the amount of contamination that comes from upstream as well as from ships (although one can hardly overstate the significance of the ships' presence). The deeper I got into the fieldwork, the more I moved back from narrow, militarized port zones, which, in any event, were relatively difficult to access. Reading across scholarly disciplines, I began to think about the cities I explored as concentrated human settlements between interiors and exteriors and as condensed cultural political sites of convergence.[24]

And so I framed this research by basing it on a kind of place, not on a kind of people; my quest is for dynamic cultural conjuncture rather than the elaboration of a culture in kind. The shift away from creating research frameworks based on ethnic, racial, gender, and class categories avoids giving power to classification as a mechanism for social order and control.

Moreover, the place-based framework holds conceptual and tactical relevance, given the dynamic cultural pluralism characteristic of cities, especially cities linked to historically key trading routes.[25] Cultural conjuncture assumes an inherent instability and multiplicity of meaning that emerges when people construct identities and movements. As they come together to interact and exclude and involve each other, they contribute to what Arturo Escobar calls "a political ecology of difference" (2008: 6–18).[26]

Interpretive Dilemmas Unique to Waterscapes: An Overview of the Book

The reader will accompany me into situations taking place in, or in the shadows of, a series of precarious waterscapes, selected because of their prominence as global icons of beauty, pleasure, freedom, or wealth. The first part of the book takes place in Brazil, the second in Argentina, which follows the fieldwork route. Fieldwork begins in Santos, the largest port in South America, which serves also as my training ground in infrastructure, ecology, jurisdictional conundrums, and activist struggles.[27] What I learn in Santos, where the port completely dominates city life, provides a basis for comparing the fundamentals of urban aquatic ecology in Salvador and Buenos Aires, where the port zones are important yet do not dominate urban life. In each city I interview experts in water management, transport, policing, port administration, law, geography, and social justice. I also study maps and observe and participate in demonstrations, meetings, and symposia, and after enjoying delicious hits of espresso, I walk many a maritime edge. C. Jason Dotson, project videographer, supplements my digital still photographs with moving images. These activities provide me with the data to build holistically toward a working model of the (dis)connections of water, sewage, and drainage infrastructure between port zone and city and between city center and outskirts.[28]

Law and crime arise throughout the situations as ideals, tactics, texts, and technologies. People commit acts of water contamination in the course of their everyday lives, thereby normalizing such acts and disappearing them from consciousness. Even when national constitutions declare such acts illegal, they persist. By moving the analytic gaze from place to place, across habitats, from local to global, I tease out some of the more general forces and conditions that lead people to perpetrate crimes against nature. In the first half of the book, about Salvador, Brazil, I examine the literally stinking, subliminal, and bureaucratic underground habits of human occupation, linking them to events on the bright, hazardous, seductive surface. Here, locals enact rituals and festivals in water landscapes with an intoxicating mix of dance and crime, an intensely commercialized folkloric inheritance from the time of slave revolts. Undergirding while undermining the dizzying diversity of social action, sewage and sweet water streams mix flagrantly in seeping ditches, oblivious of symbolic systems that mandate

decent distances between purities and dangers (see Douglas 1966). Political dissent is rare indeed. In contrast, in Buenos Aires, where criminal acts of pollution take place with habitual impunity in an indubitably more vast and degraded riverine environment, this political ecology of water focuses on activists struggling to hold perpetrators and government colluders to account. Many scenes move away from the waterscapes at issue to public spaces where activists and artists convene, contest, and invent or reuse tactics of resistance.

Each story entering the larger narrative focuses on people who, though not necessarily self-identifying as activists, intentionally entangle themselves within constellations of sociopolitical and economic factors and factions, learning in the process how to make use of different kinds of knowledge and engage with different kinds of jurisdiction-specific authorities and codes. I hope to use ethnography to forward the aims of these courageous, dedicated, burdened, yet inspired few and, in the process, reveal webs of institutionalized obstacles that ignore, drain, and at times kill their best intentions and energies. The narrative also includes professionals involved in routine water management procedures. Engineers, administrators, public health, and other officials are paid to provide cities with potable water and healthy beaches, wetlands, and harbors. They are also charged with protecting against floods, waterborne diseases, and contamination. Although often constrained by skewed priorities and bureaucratic division, professionals nevertheless hold the keys to unraveling waterscape-harming predicaments.

Together, the stories present a mosaic of criminal and legal plots that are connected by the dialogic encounters of the ethnographer on a journey. Like a magic act, however, the presentation of crime, the actual enactment, remains veiled for obvious reasons from prying researchers who best rely on the side-glance rather than the inter-view. Difficulties studying the habits of environmental criminals, from family businesses to privately policed, PR-protected corporate enterprises, include the inability of many thousands of victims in plant, animal, and elemental forms to testify except through human intervention. In this sense, my focus on activist resistance allows me to situate this account indirectly among hidden or unassailable perpetrators, a preponderance of victims, and a proliferation of law. This complicated terrain, unknowable in full, holds organized and purposefully disorganized currents of resistance that manifest in meetings, demonstrations, manifestos, and graffiti. The global trend toward increasing police suppression of legal protest and mass media's double-edged potential make tactical diversity in activist organization and style necessary. As building blocks of social movements, committed individuals and small groups rely on tactical diversity to bring them through the long stretches between the major crises that precipitate mass mobilization. Their activities provide local place-based foundations for global social movements and inspiration for the stories that follow.

Searching for urban landscapes, using water as a theme and a foundation of survival, allowed me to study how people use and negotiate their power relative to nature. I bring forth the storytelling form from fieldwork to analysis with three goals: (1) understand port cities as aquatic *cultural* landscapes shaped by long histories of global connection, (2) trace crime and law as concepts that activate interpretive frameworks and institutions, and (3) illuminate the work and the obstacles entailed in the work of otherwise ordinary people who rise up out of their own personal circumstances to join struggles to protect their habitat. Both the researcher-writer and the activist (albeit grounded and aimed in different ways) must learn how to creatively link the rather technocratic subjects of water management and environmental crime to cultural impulses for change and social justice.[29]

The following paragraphs summarize key events, themes, and characters in the chapters, each organized according to a primary aquatic context (lake, dunes, springs and taps, ecoreserve, rivers, harbor, delta, hydroelectric dam, and gold mine).

Part I begins with an introduction to the city of Salvador. Chapter 2 follows with the first set of ethnographic scenes and introduces Antonio Conceição Reis, who, as previously mentioned, dedicated his life to saving an ancestral lake and empowering the local children who ought to inherit it. In talking about what the lake means, Antonio represents this unique aquatic space as a social fact as well as a cultural icon. And more particularly, in his self-assigned role and identity as a place-based social actor, he expresses the strong popular sentiment that the combination of building, housing, and tourist-trade developments and the drilling of illegal wells will compromise the integrity of the lake. In this regard, ambiguous, inadequate, or buried hydrogeological data deflected enforcement of protective legal action. The chapter considers the diminishment of nature and how communities might create allegiances to common water sources in globalized settings.

In Chapter 3 I represent the vitality and rebelliousness of reinvented waterfront history by recounting a trek across the dunes with Antonio, a TV crew filming nature, and a posse of heavily armed park guards. As we approach the peak where escaped slaves once looked out for ships and whales (for their oil), we hear shots. “Banditos!” say the guards as they pose theatrically, guns in hand. From rebel slaves to contemporary real estate bandits, the rich past energizes the present with images of uncontrolled liminal dune space. The chapter then moves with the neighborhood into the festival cycle of Carnaval. Two community processions dramatize the ritual significance of coastal sites and routes in the symbolic enactment of history, race, and religion.

By attending to less visible or invisible water sites, Chapter 4 illuminates how water, sewage, and drainage infrastructure projects do not simply add services and expand access; they also lay waste to natural and historical water resources that might otherwise provide future alternatives.

Focusing on marginal aquatic ecologies at the neighborhood level and in the port zone, this chapter provides a critical analysis of how hierarchies of internationally financed urban development affect water ecologies. Key scenes, illustrative of the materialization of globality, include walking tours to colonial water taps enlivened by graffiti artists but ignored by city revitalization planners and to springs and coves bounded by asphalt, privatized by hotels, and polluted by sewage.

The Coda recounts the details of Antonio's assassination on the basis of news accounts. On the morning of July 9, 2007, he was gunned down in front of his next-door-neighbor's garage and his body thrown in a car trunk and driven to an ecological reserve where car and body were set aflame. Police are suspects in the criminal case. However, the grave questions surrounding the case cannot be resolved by condemning a selection of bad apples. My argument focuses on a network of conspiracy and threat and is based on my videotaped interview with Antonio. The assassination indicates the extent to which criminal violence protects the gap between water law code and practice. In other words, Antonio's tragic end in the ecoreserve establishes a connection between assassinated persons and assassinated habitats.

The opening of Part II transitions to the city and province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and includes an introduction to the cultural politics of water: The economy is still too close to default, the riverine ecology is devastated, and the people are out on the streets claiming their human right to live in a healthy environment. Moving from Salvador to Buenos Aires, I transition from an ameliorated aquatic environment to an intensely polluted one, from a city whose people continue to suffer violent racial oppression to one where water activism is a vehicle and principle for democratic organizing and where race appears not to play a dominant role.

Framed by continental plates drifting through the Holocene epoch, accounts in Chapter 5 interweave the infrastructure and settlement history of Buenos Aires from colonial times to the present. Archival research reveals both the constructive relationship between engineering and architectural aesthetics in the colonial era and the destructive effects of war, authoritarianism, and privatization of water services into the present. The key scene is the World Water Day March from the Congress to the Water Palace, where I establish entrée into local activist circles.

Chapter 6 explores the relationship of waterfront dereliction and development. Comparison of signature bridges in two popular yet contaminated harbor-front destinations highlights the artistic vitality of La Boca's degraded marginal spaces and reveals the industrial obsolescence that underwrites Puerto Madero's postmodern architectural success. The chapter explores waterfronts as dynamic spaces where capital flows are predicated on fixities of class and race and defined by outsider art.[30]

Chapter 7 focuses on neighbors fighting to reverse eco-blind engineering in the Tigre Delta. A diversion canal, intended for flood control, altered tidal and river water flows, contaminating the delta with sewage, industrial

poison, and garbage. Fish cannot breathe. Residents cannot drink. If the government would follow its own laws, the devastation might be reversed, but the government either cannot or will not. The chapter tells the story of one activist who began his struggle over the canal issue in the 1970s and the assembly of neighbors who fought along with him all the way to the federal Supreme Court. Key scenes follow water events at three levels: twice a month neighborhood assembly meetings on the Tigre River, a meeting between a group of representatives from various assemblies and public lawyers, and the first interbasin encounter of all the assemblies from the greater Buenos Aires province.

In the microscale of Chapter 8's street protests, like the transnational scale of larger social movements, the effect of political action intensifies through coordination of networks. A wellspring of popular idioms, tactics, and images provides the communicative foundation for the merging of collective agency. In the key scene, on a narrow downtown colonial street, neighborhood people from a distant highland town in the Andes confront the corrupt provincial governor who has sold out democracy and the environment to a Canadian mining company. Lowland river people, who traveled long distances, also raise their voices to protest the manner of their displacement by the Yacyretá hydroelectric dam. Uniquely Argentine in energy, persistence, and character, the street actors draw from globally familiar symbolic resources to reveal the criminal perversity of environmental destruction as legal and illegal business.

By melding interpretation and analysis within a comparative framework, contrasting two port cities in two contiguous countries, I demonstrate the power of culture in shaping human-water relationships. Eco-blind engineering, jurisdictional conundrums, and sidelined scientific evidence as well as outright corruption present formidable obstacles to neighbors working together to reverse complex, entrenched forms of environmental destruction; they emerge here as research themes worthy of future pursuit. Foraging for culture across these contexts, engaging in dialogue with extraordinary individuals, I work toward the unfolding of a wide-ranging political ecology of water that highlights popular activism in local symbolic spaces.