

# Aqueous Borders

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## *Part One: Water, Pollution, and Toxicity (by Jessica Klimoff)*

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### I. Introduction

In this portion of “Aqueous Borders,” students consider the relationship between imperialism and water pollution and toxicity. Part One is designed to fit into a one-day lesson of approximately seventy-five minutes, but several “Optional Activities” are included if instructors choose to expand the lesson to take place over two or more class periods. Optional Activities are placed in grey boxes when they appear.

Before class starts, instructors should distribute the attached “Aqueous Borders’ Worksheet for Part One” and instruct students to read the below pieces of writing by Max Liboiron, both of which are available online. Instruct them to read “How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism” first, and then follow by reading ONLY pages 1-13 of the “Introduction” to *Pollution Is Colonialism*. The *Teen Vogue* article provides a helpful primer before students read the more in-depth book “Introduction.”

Liboiron, Max. “How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism.” *Teen Vogue*, 21 Dec. 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-plastic-is-a-function-of-colonialism>.

----- . *Pollution Is Colonialism*. Duke University Press, 2021. [Introduction is available online at the Duke University Press website.]

Part One is divided into three parts, outlined below:

- I. Students consider how the United States’ borders actually do not end at the beach, but in fact, extend in pieces throughout the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. However, even though the country’s borders extend far and wide, responsibility for ocean pollution remains difficult to determine within and beyond those borders. This section focuses on who is “responsible” for an amorphous mass of garbage and plastic waste such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.
- II. Using two pieces of writing by scientist Max Liboiron, students consider the relationship between plastic pollution and colonialism. They use Liboiron’s work to think more deeply about the ideas of responsibility that they developed in the first section of the class.
- III. In a final class discussion, the class synthesizes the information presented throughout the class to consider how responsibility is a faulty concept when it comes to issues as complex and long-ranging as water pollution.

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The following document is designed for instructors to use in lesson planning. Interspersed throughout are bolded notes on how instructors can ensure that the lesson is accessible for students with disabilities.

## II. “From Sea to Shining Sea”: The Absent Presences of U.S. Imperialism in the Pacific

### ***The United States Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)***

The United States Exclusive Economic Zone helps illustrate the ways that the U.S.’s borders extend well beyond the space “from sea to shining sea.” Show students the map of [the United States Exclusive Economic Zone \(EEZ\)](#).

**[Note: Please ensure that students have access to a description of the map for purposes of accessibility, such as the following: *The map depicts the United States and its territories, with areas shaded to indicate how its EEZ extends many miles out into the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Huge swaths of water are controlled by the U.S. in the Pacific around: the contiguous states’ oceanic borders; Alaska; Hawai’i; the Northern Mariana Islands; Guam (Guåhan); Wake Island; the Midway Islands; Johnston Atoll; Palmyra Atoll; Kingman Reef; Howland Island; Baker Island; Jarvis Island; and American Samoa. The U.S.’s EEZ extends into the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico around the contiguous states’ oceanic border and Navassa Island, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.***

[Note that, as the map explains, the United States’ EEZ is the largest in the world.]

Ask students for their reactions to the map:

- Does it surprise them?
- If yes, what surprises them? Why?
- Alternatively, are they not surprised? Why not?

Many students (especially if not located in or near the Pacific) will likely feel surprised that the U.S. has such an expansive reach in the Pacific and controls the region around islands that even American students are likely never to have heard of.

As the map of the U.S.’s EEZ may have already prompted students to consider, the U.S. has a vast, but often unacknowledged, territorial reach. However, even though the U.S. is capable of extracting resources *from* its EEZ, it is not necessarily responsible for the destructive pollutants that circulate *through* its EEZ—pollutants such as the microplastics in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Show students an image of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch such as the one included in this *Forbes* article: [the Great Pacific Garbage Patch image and article](#).

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Explain to students:

- Much, though certainly not all, of the plastic waste in the Patch is from the mainland United States.
- 80,000 tons of plastic waste circulate in the Patch (*The Ocean Cleanup*).
- As Alice Te Punga Somerville has pointed out, the Patch, much like U.S. imperialism in the Pacific, has ramifications far beyond what is immediately visible to the human eye. The microplastics that circulate in the Patch come from disintegrating plastics. They block light from reaching the zooplankton and other beings that live in the gyre and need light to live.

### **Small Group Activity: Responsible for the Patch**

Split students up into small groups and ask them to determine who is responsible for the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. To help them in their discussions, present them with the following prompting questions. Instructors might also show maps of global exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the location of the Patch in the Pacific:

- What criteria will you use to determine who is responsible for the Patch?
  - o Will you judge responsibility based on where the Patch is, and which nation's waters it is nearest?
  - o Or will you judge responsibility based on which nations have contributed the most plastic to the Patch?
  - o Is there another means of determining responsibility?
- What would the responsible party be responsible for doing to fix the Patch? Who would be hurt or impacted if the responsible party failed to fix the Patch?

If time allows, have students compare their small group findings with each other in a larger class discussion.

### III. Pollution and Colonialism

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Students should, at this point, take out their homework (two readings by Max Liboiron and the accompanying worksheet). Instruct them to compare their worksheet answers with partners. This will allow them to refresh themselves on the information from the readings, correct misunderstandings that they had when completing the reading, and prepare to make connections between the readings and the other information presented in class.

*[Using Extra Time: If some students finish discussing before others, invite students to discuss in their pairs Liboiron's approach to footnotes in the Introduction. What was surprising about Liboiron's approach? Given that their footnotes highlight the interconnections between multiple actors, themselves included, does that make you think differently about responsibility? Are individuals "responsible" for their own actions, if they are always acting within a network of many other individuals?]*

Once students have finished discussing in pairs, open a class discussion to connect the Liboiron reading to the conversation the class has already built about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Below is a potential map that the discussion can take, with example questions:

- If Liboiron were in our classroom, talking about who is responsible for the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and its cleanup, what do you think their answer would be?
  - o Instructors may have to push students to be more specific and think more concretely about how Liboiron's concept of "colonialism" relates to the maps of the U.S. EEZ that students have just examined. Students should ultimately conclude that, based on the Liboiron readings, the INSTITUTIONS that have created and perpetuated a system that produces a high amount of waste are ultimately the most "responsible," to the extent such a label of responsibility matters.
- Ask students: To what extent does "individual" responsibility matter here?
  - o Students may struggle to deemphasize individual responsibility.
  - o Bring students to the section of the *Teen Vogue* article that they read that discusses how individual choice is very limited in Nain. Ask: Who had a role in choosing that a single brand of plastic ketchup bottles would be imported to Nain? What was involved in that decision?
  - o While the question may be difficult for students, it will ultimately help them consider how individual choice is dwarfed in the face of market-driven choices or choices made by corporate entities determining what products are likeliest to yield the best profits.

#### IV. Beyond Responsibility

After a fairly long discussion of responsibility for ocean plastic pollution, it is time to disassemble the very idea of responsibility itself. A longer version of this final discussion could take place over an entire class period; such a discussion could make use of Donna Haraway's

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idea of “response-ability” presented in *Staying with the Trouble* and Alexis Shotwell’s assertion that environmental responsibility needs to be forward-looking and not focused on blame from *Against Purity*. Both scholars suggest that retribution and responsibility in the face of environmental change are insufficient concepts; instead, individuals and institutions need to work from the present moment to create a better future, rather than attempting to lay blame for past injustices. In the limited time available, though, instructors may instead direct students to read a quote from Liboiron’s “Introduction” that they did not have to read for homework:

“You can’t ‘clean up’ plastics because they exist in geological time, and cleaning just shuffles them in space as they endure in time. You can’t recycle them out of the way, because it means ever more will be produced, and there is no ‘away’ at any rate. Many of the chemicals associated with plastics, called endocrine disruptors, defy thresholds and exceed the adage that the ‘danger is in the dose’ or the ‘solution to pollution is dilution’ because they cause harm at trace quantities already present in the environment and bodies. Plastics and their chemicals defy containment, a hallmark approach to industrial waste management, as they blow, flow, and off-gas so that their pollutants are ubiquitous in every environment tested. Last but hardly least, their long temporality means their future effects are largely unknown, making uncertain the guarantee of settler futures” (16-7).

Then, ask students any or all of the following questions:

- Can the “waste colonialism” that Liboiron discusses ever be corrected?
- Do “blame” and deciding who is “responsible” for current pollutants matter, given that they cannot be fixed?
- What is a better way to approach “responsibility” than focusing on blame?
- How do we live responsibly in a polluted world?

The discussion will hopefully lead students to consider new modes of “responsibility” that are less focused on blame and retribution, and more focused on changing systemic injustices and making the environment safer and more just, no matter who instigated the problems in the first place.

## Works Cited

Please see the bibliography below for works cited in Part One of “Aqueous Borders”:

Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Liboiron, Max. “How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism.” *Teen Vogue*, 21 Dec. 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-plastic-is-a-function-of-colonialism>.

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----- . *Pollution Is Colonialism*. Duke University Press, 2021.

Shotwell, Alexis. *Against Purity*.

Somerville, Alice Te Punga. "The Great Pacific Garbage Patch as Metaphor: The (American) Pacific You Can't See." In *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, Duke University Press, 2017, 320-338.



## Part Two: “Agua” (Water) by José María Arguedas (1935) (by Thomas Bebee)

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### I. Introduction

This unit examines conflicts in water ownership and distribution through a short story by one of Latin America’s most important authors of the twentieth century.

The following document is designed for *instructors* to use in lesson planning. Interspersed throughout are bolded notes on how instructors can ensure that the lesson is *accessible* for students with disabilities.

### II. *Agua*: The Story

The original Spanish was published in 1935 as part of a trilogy of stories by the Peruvian author José Maria Arguedas. An English translation of the story was published in the *Latin American Literary Review* (Fall/Winter 1976): 105-26. This journal is available on JSTOR.

The plot of the story is simple and its time frame and locality are compressed: everything takes place between dawn and about noon in the town of San Juan de Lucanas in the highlands of Peru. It is a first-person narration by Ernesto, a character with a strong autobiographical relationship with the author Arguedas. Ernesto will later be developed into the main character in *Los ríos profundos* (1958); *Deep Rivers*, the most widely read novel by Arguedas.

#### **Optional Activity: Finding San Juan de Lucanas**

Ask students to find out what they can about the town of San Juan de Lucanas. In particular, see if they can locate it on a map and see what they can say about its topographic and hydrographic situations.

From the very beginning of the story, the attention of all major characters is focused on the weekly distribution of water. Due to a lack of rainfall, the water drawn from the lake is essential for crops and animals to survive. It can be inferred from the story that the weekly decision passes from one communal leader to another, who make their apportionments based on who is in greatest need. At the same time, however, it becomes clear that the “top man” Don Braulio “owns” the town and its sources of water, and that he will use violence if necessary to ensure

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that the water comes to his own lands and those of his minions. Indeed, when Braulio hears the decision of the communal leader Don Pascual that the water will go to the needy, he becomes violent. The following passage encapsulates the story's main themes:

"Monday for Don Enrique, Don Heraclio; Tuesday for Don Anto, Widow Juana, Don Patricio; Wednesday for Don Pedro, Don Roso, Don Jose, Don Pablo; Thursday for...."

The top man [Braulio] straightened up as if they had whipped him on the back. His eyebrows were raised like a fighting cock's crest, and red began to show in his eyes.

"Friday for Don Sak'sa, Don Waman...."

"Pascualcha, silence!" shouted Don Braulio.

The Indians of Don Sak'sa's commune became frightened, shook their heads, got ready to run then and there; but the Tinki stood firm.

"Don Braulio, lake water is for the needy!"

"Nobody owns the water!" shouted Pantacha.

"The members of the commune come first," Don Wallpa said. (122)

Braulio begins firing bullets from his revolver, and the peasants scatter. Pantaleon insults Braulio, who in response shoots him in the head. Ernesto throws Pantaleon's trumpet at Braulio, wounding him in the forehead. Braulio orders Don Antonio to kill Ernesto, but the former deliberately misaims and Ernesto flees to one of the other Quechua communes, while the rebellious Tinkis are put in jail, along with the corpse of Pantaleon.

The question is now: how does a relatively simple plot of this nature grow to fill twenty print pages?

Explain to students:

- That the dispute over water and Pantaleon's death come out of a complex and deep-rooted set of social relations that determine, among other things, how water is (not) shared.

### III. Just Who is "Indian"?

There are several options that are more neutral/respectful than the word "Indian": indigenous; Quechua; or ayllu member. Each has its own issues, and in fact, ethnic designations are fluid. The story uses the Spanish for "Indian" ("Indio"), but other terms work as well.

### **Optional Activity: Race Categories**

Ask students to place the major characters of this text in terms of their ethnicity, with “white” at one end and “indigenous” at the other end. They need to answer What factors influenced their ranking?

Explain to students:

- One reason for the length of Arguedas’ story is the amount of time spent on positioning the characters in terms of social rank, which has much to do with ethnicity. Arguedas was trained as an anthropologist, and he exhibits in this story a strong desire to explain the social communities of Andean culture.
- The picture he draws does not differ substantially from that described by observers of twentieth-and twenty-first century Perú. Like many countries of the Americas, Perú began as a conquest by Europeans, who defeated the local rulers and replaced them as the dominant class. Thus, Europeans and their descendants, called “criollos,” are at the top of the social hierarchy. Criollos tend not to live in the highlands and do not appear in this story, however.
- The term “misti” is used to designate the dominant class in the highlands of Peru. While the word is derived from “mestizo,” a misti can be of “any race or racial mixture.” Don Braulio is the chief misti in the story, and in fact, is described as having blond hair. Ernesto is given the respectful title “niño,” for which the English equivalent would be “master,” meaning he is the child of landowners, so he would likely also be considered a misti.
- The term “cholo” is applied to Pantaleon, the hero of the story and victim of Don Braulio: "There is land, Pantacha, but it lacks water. Better make your trumpet cry so the people will come." The young cholo raised the horn to his mouth and began to play a tune of the branding fiesta. (106)
- The glossary for the story describes a cholo as a “citified Indian; in this story one who has served in the Peruvian army and has come back to the village with new clothes and customs” (126). Cholos are frequently identified by their clothing, which would be casual city wear (jeans, etc.) rather than the traditional apparel of Andean villagers. The category of cholo is a complex one, but in “Agua” the main significance is that Pantaleon returns to his community full of new ideas. He is not content with the injustices suffered by his fellow Quechuas and is ready to take action to effect change.

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- Don Vilkas can be seen as the inversion of Pantaleon. He is described as an old Indian, friendly with the *mistis* and completely dependent on the whim and favor of Don Braulio. While the story says that he is respected by the commune Indians, the events of the story make this hard to believe. He is challenged to a fight by Don Wallpa, leader of the Tinki commune, but evades the threat and heads off to inform Don Braulio of the unrest.
- The “most Indian” of the characters are those who belong to one of the two *ayllus*: San Juan and Tinki. They are called “comuneros” in the Spanish version, commune peasants. The term avoids the somewhat pejorative “indio.” It also emphasizes the holding of valuable resources in common, such as land and water.

#### **Optional Activity: Vocabulary**

Ask students to look up the word “ayllu.” What are the distinguishing characteristics of this type of community that influence the events of the story?

Once students have finished, ask them to share their answers.

Explain to students:

- The glossary defines ayllu rather differently from other sources. Merriam-Webster defines ayllu as: “a present-day Peruvian highland community of extended families that owns some land in common and that serves as an administrative unit.” The glossary of the story emphasizes the first part of this: “a family group who believe themselves descendants of a common ancestor, real or legendary.”
- The idea of holding some resources in common, for example, land and water, as a family would, is common to both definitions. The Tinki is described as “true common people” (112) by Pantaleon, meaning not only “ordinary,” but people who hold together. The story contrasts the Tinki with the San Juanians, who are closer in proximity to the town *mistis* and under their control.
- Note Ernesto’s description of the Tinki *comuneros*:

“I looked at the faces of the commune Indians one after the other. All were ugly, their eyes were yellow, their skin dirty and burned by the cold, their hair long and

sweaty. Almost all were ragged, their lok'os (hats) let the hair on the crown of their heads show. The sandals of most of them had holes in the bottoms, only the laces and the edges were wooly. But the expression on their faces was better than that of the San Juanians. They did not seem very dejected, and they talked loudly with Pantaleon and laughed.” (113)

The common garb worn by all the male comuneros gives a hint of the sense of shared ancestry mentioned above. Arguedas grew up with this most indigenized category of Andean, who generally live in the most difficult economic situations. The contrast of the Tinki with the comuneros of San Juan adds yet another dimension of conflict. The name of the latter group indicates that they live in closer proximity to the town, and hence presumably are under greater control by the mistis. They are far less inclined to stand up for their rights, and the story shows them running at the first sign of trouble, whereas the Tinkians resist more. The very end of the story shows Ernesto running off to “join the land-owning commune Indians of Utek'pampa” (125), who presumably are even more independent.

#### IV. Water

##### **Optional Activity: Water**

Ask students: Where does your water come from? If it is city water, from which watershed is it drawn and how far does it travel? Who determines the distribution of the water?

Once students have finished, ask them to share their answers.

Explain to students:

- The story shows a conflict of ideas in terms of water distribution. Don Braulio claims an absolute right to determine water usage, and is accustomed to the following scheme:

Only the principal men get the water. The [comuneros and] the renters are the last to irrigate, along with those who have two or three little plots. They give them a little bit as charity, and their lands are thirsty from year to year. (113)

- Landowners need large amounts of water for alfalfa and cattle – staple crops introduced by the Spanish, the former used to feed the latter. Subsistence farmers get what is left after this capitalist appropriation of the water. The idea of absolute ownership is contradicted by the very setting of the story: everyone comes to town to hear one or the other varayok (leader of an ayllu) pronounce the distribution for the week. Those of

the ayllu are prepared to ration according to need, to get water to those with “little plots” whose crops are failing. But the varayok’s decision is immediately vetoed by Don Braulio, with the results described above.

- We notice the absence in this story of any representative of the central government, a policeman, judge, or other officials. It is unclear whether Braulio will ever be charged with murder, despite his having clearly committed a crime in front of multiple witnesses. Arguedas portrays here a notion called “abandonment” that is often felt by the rural communities of Peru. The government is relatively weak and poor and does not have the resources to police this vast area of difficult terrain. This state of abandonment will eventually give rise to the depredations of the Maoist group Sendero Luminoso from 1980 to 2000. Lucanas was one of the areas deeply affected by the violence.
- Looking for San Juan de Lucanas on a map may have shown you that it is in the southeastern part of the Ayacucho region. It is in the rain shadow of the Andes, as winds bring moisture from the Amazon basin to the east that then falls on that side of the range, leaving relatively little moisture in the air on the western side. Rain falls there generally from January to March, followed by a dry season lasting three times as long – undoubtedly, the setting for the story. The many rivers of the area have carved out deep, narrow canyons and are thus not generally available for irrigation until they reach the coast, as can be seen in the satellite image below.



*Figure 1: Peruvian Andes, including parts of Ayacucho and Arequipa Provinces. Courtesy European Space Agency*

- Elevation increases as one move from bottom left to top right. White is cloud cover, dark blue is irrigated vegetation. The striated lines moving diagonally are rivers and streams. The setting for “Agua” is near the top center of the photograph.
- Mountain lakes and springs thus become the only source of water when rainfall is inadequate. Communities live above and below each other on the sloping terrain, meaning that often the highest-placed community is in a position to absorb all the water, leaving none for lower elevations. Going back all the way to the pre-colonial period, inhabitants of the region have developed strategies, customs, and procedures for sharing the water. The Incas built elaborate irrigation systems, for example. Communities distant from each other often share water through canals and ditches, despite the disadvantages in terms of resource conservation and increased potential for conflict.
- Arguedas highlights a specific conflict over water at a specific historical moment and uses it to make a statement about Peruvian society in general, including a hint that

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vigorous resistance may be necessary to achieve a just distribution of resources. Other conflicts over water have occurred between other actors at different moments and in different places. Some are recounted in the books by Trawick and Rasmussen listed in the bibliography.

## V. The Author

Arguedas had this to say about his extensive experience with the indigenous of Peru:

Por circunstancias “adversas” fui obligado a vivir con los domésticos indios y a hacer algunos de los trabajos de esos domésticos en la primer infancia. Recorrí los campos e hice las faenas de los campesinos bajo el infinito amparo de los comuneros quechuas. La más honda y bravía ternura, el odio más profundo se vertía en el lenguaje de mis protectores; el amor más puro, que hace de quien lo ha recibido un individuo absolutamente inmune al escepticismo. No conocí gente más sabia y fuerte. Y los describían como a degenerados, torpes e impenetrables. Así son para quienes los trataron como a animales durante siglos. (“Conversando con Arguedas” 21)

Due to “adverse” circumstances I had to live with the Indian servants and do some of the work of those servants in my early childhood. I traveled the countryside and did the deeds of the peasants beneath the infinite protection of the Quechua villagers. The language of my guardians revealed the deepest, fiercest love, the most profound hatred, the entirely pure love that makes someone who has received it immune to skepticism. I knew no one wiser and stronger. And they would describe these people as degenerate, stupid, and inscrutable. Such do they appear to shoe who treated them as animals for centuries.

Explain to students:

- The “they” in the last sentence refers to the criollos and mistis described in the previous section. Arguedas grew up bilingual in Spanish and Quechua and went on to study anthropology and eventually become a professor at the University of San Marcos, while also writing fiction and poetry, the latter often in Quechua. He also translated much Quechua poetry into Spanish. The story “Agua” was published along with two others on related themes (Arguedas later referred to the collection as a novel) when the author was twenty-six years old.
- Arguedas had two principal objectives motivating his writing: 1) to provide a realistic portrayal of Andean existence, giving the indigenous a complexity above their usual folkloristic stereotyping; and 2) to confront Peruvian society constantly with its indigenous past and present, without acknowledgment of which a true national consciousness cannot emerge.



- Part of Arguedas' strategy for achieving these goals in his fiction was to write a prose filled with Quechua terms, as can be noticed in this story. The goal is to convey to the reader through a polyglot text an insight into another way of thinking.

### **Optional Activity: Finish the Story**

Ask students to write the story "Water" a few pages further. Does Ernesto reach the commune, and does it cure his profound discontent? Does Don Braulio continue to control all the water? You can continue the plot for a few days, or project it many years into the future.

Once students have finished, ask them to share their answers.

### Works Cited

Arguedas, José. Maria. "Agua." In *Agua; Los escoleros ; Warma Kuyay*. Lima: CIP, 1935.

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## *Part Three: The U.S.–Mexico Border and the Humanitarian Crisis of Water (by Ginett Pineda)*

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### I. Introduction

In this portion of "Aqueous Borders," students adapt the information from Part One and Part Two to consider the relationship between colonizing water and humanitarian rights. Portions of this lesson are especially well-suited for undergraduate students in Latina/o Studies or an Ethics class. Part Three is designed to fit into a one-day lesson of approximately seventy-five minutes, but several activities are included if instructors choose to expand the lesson to take place over two or more class periods.

Before class students needed to read the online news article "[What It's Really Like to Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border](https://archive.thinkprogress.org/what-its-really-like-to-cross-the-u-s-mexico-border-a375d80f3cc/)" and complete 'Aqueous Borders' Worksheet for Part Three."

Jenkins, Jack. "What It's Really Like to Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border." ThinkProgress, 10 Feb. 2015, <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/what-its-really-like-to-cross-the-u-s-mexico-border-a375d80f3cc/>.

Part Three of Aqueous Borders: Colonizing Water in the 21st Century is divided into two parts, outlined below:

- I. For the first part, students consider the critical role of the "water drop" provided by humanitarian aid in order to mitigate death and suffering for those crossing the U.S.–Mexico border. Recognizing the perils of the border crossing and the medical consequence of dehydration is necessary to understand water-based inequalities and discrimination.
- II. Drawing on the data and evidence provided by the articles and mini clip, students will consider the relationship between territory and the colonization of water supplies. Students will have to consider water injustices, which are subtly masked as "legal" and "righteous," as well as different water governance forms and unequal power structures.

The following document is designed for *instructors* to use in lesson planning. Interspersed throughout are bolded notes on how instructors can ensure that the lesson is *accessible* for students with disabilities.

### II. Warm-Up: The Colonization of Water

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Ask students to respond to the following prompt:  
Both of the following statements are true.

*Water is a human right.*

*Water is not equitably distributed.*

Which statement do you think is more true? Explain why.  
Then have students share their answers as a class.

### **Optional Introductory Activity: Concept Mapping**

First, instructors show the list of key terms posted on the power point "Part Three: The U.S.–Mexico border and the humanitarian crisis of water" and go over the terms with the students and ask if there are any questions. Then, in pairs students will work collectively to construct a concept map. Have volunteers come to the board to present their maps.

### III. The Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning of the "Water Drop"

So far, students have been introduced to the action of the "water drop" by reading the article "What It's Really Like to Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border." Now, students will assess their values within the social context of immigration, recognize ethical issues within the colonization of the water setting, describe how different perspectives might be applied to this ethical dilemma, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions.

First, ask students for their reactions to the article "What It's Really Like to Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border.":

- Did they know about the experience of what it is like to cross the U.S.-Mexico border?
- What surprised them the most?

Now, the instructor will show the 4-minute clip "Follow along with the Border Angels Water Drop Team" found at the following link <https://www.borderangels.org/water-drops.html>

Or you can go directly to the Border Angels web page: <https://www.borderangels.org/> and find the video under the Water Drop tab.

Now in pairs, students can discuss the following questions:

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- According to the clip, several other politicians have made statements claiming that undocumented immigrants can effortlessly enter the United States through the southern border. Do you agree?
- Based on the reading and the mini video shown in class, what is the most challenging obstacle for people when they are crossing the border?
- Minutemen, a collection of armed anti-immigration activists, allegedly sabotage the water supplies by puncturing the water jugs left by local immigration advocacy groups; if true, do you consider these actions an attack on the livelihood of migrants? Consider that Minutemen are not actually having any direct interaction with migrants.
- In the mini clip, James Cordero, the Water Drop director from Border Angels, claims that he practices "water drops" because it is a moral obligation. Do you agree or disagree with his statement? Explain.
- Let's think about the issue of discrimination. The word discrimination can be defined as: **"The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex."** Do you see any relationship between puncturing water jugs whether by Border Patrol or anti-immigration activists with the word discrimination? If so, what type of discrimination do you see? (Think about water rights)

As a class, students can share their answers.

**[Note: Remind students that this lesson is not about their political stance on immigration issues but on the access to water in the physical space of the U.S.-Mexico Border.]**

#### IV. Territorial spaces as sites of contested control over water

This second part of the class aims to offer insight into how different social groups envision the distribution of water benefits and burdens. It will also ask students to examine how territorial spaces can become sites of contested control over natural resources such as the access to water. Examining these hydrosocial conflicts can lead to students' ethical self-awareness, understanding different ethical perspectives, and recognizing ethical issues.

First, ask students to read this short adaptation of *Water Justice* by Rutgerd Boelens, Tom Perreault, and Vos Jeroen and then answer the question in pairs/groups. Students will share

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their answers with the class. (A separate worksheet with the article and the questions have been added)

### **Introduction: Hydrosocial De-Patterning and Re-Composition**

Water governance fundamentally deals with the question of how to organize water access, use, and management in contexts of diverging interests, conflicting normative repertoires, and unequal power relations. It aims to produce particular socio-natural orders by controlling water resources, infrastructure, investments, knowledge, truth, and ultimately, water users.

Dominant hydrosocial territorial arrangements are designed to enhance local-global commodity transfers, resource extraction, water development, and conservation. Thereby, localized water authorities and governance created a political order to render these spaces accessible, exploitable, and controllable. An illustrative example is the way many communities managed irrigation or drinking water systems. Locally existing water control systems establish a so-called rational frame of "water order." In many cases, these water orders can deprive local water user communities/people of control over their hydrosocial territories. Rather than just aiming to manage water as a resource, ruling groups seek to deploy, and convince subjugated groups to adopt, discourses that define and position social and material issues in a human-material-natural network that leaves the political order unchallenged. If local communities protest, the powers that tend to dismiss, ignore or violently oppress them.

If we think of the physical territory along the border of U.S.-Mexico as a hydrosocial territory, we can say that border patrol and anti-immigration groups generate their own rules in which entirely different rights for access to water apply as compared to other spaces and places in the United States. Damaging water jugs are defended by discourses of national interest and following the Zero Tolerance immigration policy, but profoundly de-humanizes immigrants and generates massive local water inequality and suffering.

### **Small Group Activity: Water Governance**

Split students up into pair and ask them to answer the following questions:

- In your own words, explain what is water governance?
- According to this excerpt, in a hydrosocial territory specific authorities decide who and how water is access. Think about your environment and identify what would be consider your hydrosocial territory (there can me more than one) and who decides your access to water (drinking and non-drinking water).
- To have a “water order” entails that some people have access to water before others. Thinking in a national scale, here in the United States who has firsthand to water and who is at the bottom? What are the moral implications of this order? Do you see any connections with ethical issues such as classism, racism, sexism, ableism, etc.? How can we connect this with the contested control over water on the U.S.- Mexican border?

If time allows, have students share their answers in a larger class discussion.

Once the class discussion has finished, show the students the following 4-minute video:

**Why are you a Border Angel** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90yE42eLPTM>

Then, have the students get into groups of four and complete the following activity.

**Creating a Plan of Action to bring attention to and/or find a solution to the contested control over water on the U.S.- Mexican border.**

In groups of four students create a pamphlet that brings attention to the contested control over water on the U.S.- Mexican border. You need to take a stand in favor of or against water drops. Your pamphlet needs to address the following information:

What are “water drops”? Who are the people/organizations that perform water drops and why do they do it? Who are the people/organization that is against water drops and why? What is your stand on this issue? Who do you think has the right to water control on the U.S.- Mexican border? Is it just? If is not, what makes the situation unjust? Can this moral issue be solved? How?

## Works Cited

*Border Angels - Water Drop*, 31 Jan. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bitEMxCHTrM>. Accessed 5 Feb. 2022.

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## Aqueous Borders: Colonizing Water in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### *Part One: Water, Pollution, and Toxicity*

#### Worksheet: Max Liboiron's "How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism" and Introduction to Max Liboiron's *Pollution is Colonialism*

##### Instructions

Read Max Liboiron's *Teen Vogue* article "How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism" AND THEN read pages 1-13 of Max Liboiron's "Introduction" to *Pollution is Colonialism*. Answer the following questions after you read.

##### Questions on "How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism"

1. What does Liboiron mean by "an 'away'" (paragraph 6 of "How Plastic"). For whom (or for where) is Nain an "away"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is colonialism, according to Liboiron? (paragraph 3 of "How Plastic"; p. 11 of "Introduction")

Questions 2, 3, and 4 pertain to the following quote from the "Introduction":

"...in September 2015, a US-based environmental NGO called the Ocean Conservancy released a report looking for solutions to marine plastic pollution that recommended that countries in Southeast Asia work with foreign-funded industries to build incinerators to burn plastic waste. This recommendation follows a long line of colonial acts in the name of plastics, from accessing Indigenous Land to extracting oil and gas (and occasionally corn) for feedstock; to producing



disposable plastics that use land to store, contain, and assimilate the waste; to pointing the finger at local “foreign” and Indigenous peoples for “mismanaging” waste imported from industrial and colonial centres; and then gaining access to that Land to solve their uncivilized approach to waste (mis)management” (Liboiron 13).

3. Underline the FOUR different colonial acts that the quote describes.
  
4. Why does Liboiron refer to the following as a colonial act: “pointing the finger at local ‘foreign’ and Indigenous peoples for ‘mismanaging’ waste imported from industrial and colonial centres” (13). What is colonial about that, according to Liboiron’s definition of colonialism? Use your answer to #1 above as a guide.
  
5. Were you surprised by Liboiron’s assertion that “gaining access to that Land to solve [Southeast Asian countries’] [“]uncivilized[”] approach to waste (mis)management” (13) is a colonial act?
  - a. What about it is colonial?
  
  - b. What would an anticolonial alternative approach be for Ocean Conservancy to take in their waste management recommendations?
  
6. Use both “How Plastic” and the Introduction to answer the following question. What is Liboiron’s opinion on individuals changing their buying behavior? Does he think that the problems he outlines can be changed if individuals stop buying plastic items? Do you or do you not agree with Liboiron?

## Aqueous Borders: Colonizing Water in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### *Part Three:* The U.S.–Mexico border and the humanitarian crisis of water

#### Worksheet: Jack Jenkin’s “What It’s Really Like To Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border” and the film *Trails of Hope and Terrors*

#### Instructions

Read Jack Jenkin’s *Think Progress*’ article “What It’s Really Like To Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border” AND THEN watch the film of Vincent De La Torre’s *Trails of Hope and Terrors*. Answer the following questions after you read and watch the film.

#### Questions on “What It’s Really Like To Cross The U.S.-Mexico Border”

1. What does the practice of “water drop” entails? Who is executing this practice?

2. What do you understand by “water grabbing,” and how does it relate to colonialism?

Questions 3, 4 and 5 pertain to the film: