

## Littoral Politics: Submerged Histories of an Inland African Sea

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Traversing national boundaries and international networks of commerce, control, and expertise, the body of water that English speakers call Lake Victoria has long been a crucible for transformative social dynamics characterized by the littoral. These are places of heightened prospects for actual and economic mobility, alternative moralities of sexual and economic exchange, and competing valuations of space and resources for leisure, protein, and politically strategic purposes. Lake Victoria is marked by print media, popular documentary films (most powerfully Hubert Sauper's *Darwin's Nightmare*), and adventure television (most recently National Geographic's *River Monsters*) as a classic case of neoliberal and neocolonial economic exploitation, literally a "sick giant" still in "the heart of darkness." This project offers a very different account.

*Littoral Politics: Submerged Histories of an Inland African Sea* is a book about how stories about the past both shape and are shaped by contemporary environmental policy debates, and how alternative—but no less accurate—accounts of linked transformations in social and ecological life may inspire more plausible pasts and more livable futures in and around Africa's largest body of fresh water. By foregrounding women's work with diverse species and forms of fish—both indigenous and introduced—alongside linked social and ecological transformations, this project examines how vernacular, managerial, and scientific materials and methods of working with fish generate ontologically distinct fisheries, bodies of water, and concepts of well-being along these shores over time. Focusing on the distinct worlds that fish and fisheries inhabit and inspire—as material things, practices, and concepts that straddle the artificial divide between nature and culture—*Littoral Politics* is also a book about the possible coexistence of multiple realities that are brought into existence and sometimes into extinction across time and place.

Both provocative and practical, *Littoral Politics* illustrates the material and metaphorical risks associated with overdetermining historic and contemporary valuations of biocultural diversity, economic activity, and political power. This project advances theoretical and methodological approaches that range beyond questions of environmental management, but nevertheless have vital implications for the future of capture-based fisheries. Species and form-specific fisheries activities across this region's long twentieth century are suffused with kinship and sexual connections; women's work with fish mitigates possibilities for the kind of spectacular triumph or failure featured in dominant popular narratives and the more narrowly defined criteria for managerial success in Lake Victoria, and instead continues to sustain a socially and ecologically cosmopolitan inland sea. In a region where politics is so often assumed to be aligned along immutable gendered, tribal, ethnic, or racial lines, at the littoral, identity and belonging are actively renegotiated; further, they are closely linked to the practices and politics of working with fish and managing fisheries.