



2023

Transdisciplinary Considerations of California: Society, Culture and Identity

Kerri J. Malloy

San Jose State University, kerri.malloy@sjsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/csuglobaljournal>



Part of the [Native American Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Malloy, Kerri J. (2023) "Transdisciplinary Considerations of California: Society, Culture and Identity," *csuglobaljournal*: Vol. 1: No. 1, Article 2.

DOI: [\[https://doi.org/10.55671/2837-0619.1001\]](https://doi.org/10.55671/2837-0619.1001)

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/csuglobaljournal/vol1/iss1/2>

This Theme 1: Society, Culture and Identity is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Cal Poly Humboldt. It has been accepted for inclusion in csuglobaljournal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Cal Poly Humboldt. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.

THEME 1: *Society, Culture & Identity*

The first theme remains rooted in the idea of both California's separateness and commonality; unity in diversity by connecting the stories of ourselves to the world around us.

On May 3, 1535 Hernán Cortés's men landed on California's shores and called the place 'Santa Cruz'. As early as 1539 the voyage of Francisco de Ulloa referred to this place as the "Isola of California" and in 1541 Friar de Meno gave evidence back in Spain of an "isla de California". Later, the first map of California as an island appeared in 1622 and, in rapid succession, a number of maps between 1624 and 1625 all asserted California's island status. Approximately fifty years later in 1681 Jesuit Father Eusebio Kino was sent to Baja and founded the first mission at Loreto in 1697.

Perhaps it is indicative that the present-day Santa Cruz is nowhere near that original landing site as it also marked the beginning of California's 'identity crisis' that the mysteries around not only its name, but its very shape imply. Theories and sources for the name of the state vary, but the idea that California was remote and exotic was not in question and the possibility it might be an island only made it more plausible to call down centuries of voyagers' tales. Thus, almost from the outset, this home to Amazons that was understood to be at "the right hand of the India...very near to the region of the Terrestrial Paradise, which was populated by black women...There ruled on that island of California, a queen great of body, very beautiful...more than any other who had ruled that kingdom before her...Queen Calafia" (*Polk, 125*) was called into being.

Given that we begin with the theme of identity, the persistence and relevance of this particular story is worthy of some note. The origins of the Amazon story are obscure and it is unknown if there is any basis in fact for a race of women living without men (sometimes portrayed as white and at other times as black – sometimes breeding with men only to kill them and often taming wild beasts including griffins) but they are among the oldest mythological characters in the global pantheon. In Greek literature, they "took after their mother Harmonia, in grace and beauty and after their father, Ares, in warlike disposition" while a similar story is also found in oriental mythology where "accounts of marvels such as giant trees, lakes of tar and burning mountains" clearly invite comparisons with California. More interesting still, is Polk's suggestion that they might be "two ends of the same myth, girdling the earth...from the Orient to the Mediterranean, or vice versa...carried in opposite directions to the farthest reaches east and west, to meet again in the place we now call California" (*Polk, 8*).

Such stories of the peoples of the place could also be linked, again according to Polk, through the term Calif which is a Spanish spelling for a sovereign Muslim power and perhaps making Calafia a female Muslim leader. Thus, California's identity connects to the Muslim world, the Middle East and Africa as well as Rome, Greece and medieval Europe more broadly. The state was 'global' even before more and more peoples of the world arrived.

The Associate Editors of this theme bring a breadth and depth to ideas and questions of identity. They demonstrate the possibilities for enquiry in this area by literally starting with the same story (and yet another origin story for the state of California) that links statehood to Athena and the idea that California sprang into being not so much as a frontier, but a fully formed entity and going concern of ranchers, miners and soon thereafter cities and railroads. As Cary McWilliams puts it, for California "the lights went on all at once" (*California: The Great Exception, 1976*). Kerri Malloy from San Jose and Dana Belu from Dominguez Hills ask about the effects that arrival had on our Society, Culture and Identity and invite others to do the same.

Themes could include, but are not limited to:

- Social movements originating in or influencing California society and culture that challenge or support institutions, structure, or power;

-
- Particular effects and aspects of California's past on how it engages with the international community;
 - Identities formed and influenced by a multicultural California;
 - California as an economic power and its impact on global societies and cultures in the contextualized in the networks of economy and trade and its impact on the environment;
 - Domestic and international perspectives of California as a place and ideal/multicultural utopia (medical, technological, political);
 - Influence on the formation of individual and group identities of the entertainment, technology, and progressive movements of California;
 - Future challenges that the state will face and proposed solutions.
 - Effects of California as a driver of scientific essentials and sustainable environments on society, culture, and identity regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Dr. Alison R. Holmes, Managing Editor

Transdisciplinary Considerations of California: Society, Culture, and Identity

Athena, the goddess of wisdom and battle strategy, is the central focal point of the state of California's seal, an embodiment of the self-image of the state and its place in a global society. Emerging from Zeus's head as a fully formed armor-wearing adult, Athena lacks the experiences of infancy, childhood, and adolescence that give rise to empathy, temperament, and self-reflection. Like Athena, California was born absent the formative years of territorial governance that helped to shape the mature governments of previously admitted states. Annexed by the United States under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) that ended the war with Mexico, its expedited transition to statehood (1850) and its growth as a global economic force is reflected in historian and novelist Wallace Stegner's description of the state as "Like the rest of America, California is unformed, innovative, ahistorical, hedonistic, acquisitive, and energetic—only more so" (Stegner, 28). Stegner's description invites inquiry from multiple disciplinary perspectives to support and refute different aspects of his portrayal.

As an interdisciplinary scholar of Indigenous and genocide studies whose research explores the potential obstacles and application of transitional justice in societies that have experienced genocide or mass atrocity events, it is necessary to work in divergent disciplinary fields—bringing together settler-colonial studies, history, law, sociology, and aspects of anthropology that assist in better understanding the obstacles to transitional justice at the individual, social and institutional levels to examine California's treatment of Indigenous peoples—synthesizing these perspectives from differing bodies of literature serves to not only understand the what and why of what occurred in California but also leads to a better understanding of why societies that have experienced genocide in the past are more likely to have recurrences. Using the approach in a broader context that considers California's past, present, and future from a transdisciplinary global perspective offers greater insight into the state, its peoples, societies, cultures, and identities. Additionally, it frames how the state is perceived in an international context, as the past influences present and future actions. While at the same time assisting in reinterpreting the past.

The multitude of narratives personified in California's societies, cultures, and identities form the basis for the state to be considered both as a place and an ideal. Considering California's place in, and influence on, global society through a transdisciplinary inquiry brings together disparate areas of study to interrogate, converse, and situate the state at the intersections of regional, national, and international approaches. Broadening how California is perceived and projects itself through these lenses has spurred questions ranging from where the state is situated within the global and national economy to how it addresses the social divides created by the systemic inequalities experienced by people of color and those in the lower social-economic class. Those experiences are intimately intertwined with the societies predating European settlement that has called California home since immemorial to those that colonized and settled the land. And those who built the state's infrastructure and were disenfranchised from participation in the political process, and those who have come here since to start anew and realize their American dream. Considering California's place in the world, it is necessary to answer the questions of how California perceives and is perceived.

Questions that have guided this inquiry range from considering the place of Indigenous people in a multinational and multiethnic society as explored by Damon B. Atkins and William J. Bauer, Jr. in *We are the Land: A History of Native California* (2021) to how to understand and address the struggles with race and ethnicity that California faces as it is the first non-white majority state in the US in *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color* (2001) by Jewell Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead. From how economic development and gentrification have impacted, displaced, and erased marginalized communities as examined by Eric Avila in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (2004) and the effects both intended and unintended by the influence of the entertainment industry on international politics influencing perceived norms about identity, gender, and sexuality in Heather Brook and Chris Beasley's *The Cultural Politics of Contemporary Hollywood Film: Power, Culture, and Society* (2019). How is globalization reshaping the industries that have come to personify California, as discussed in *Precarious Creativity Global Media, Local Labor* (2016) edited by Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, and

what effects the technology industry has on social mobility, as analyzed by Ole Mojos in *Music, Social Media, and Global Mobility: MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube* (2012). Each of these reaffirms California's identity as a technological, medical, and political space that offers the opportunity to interrogate and problematize that forward-looking identity through interdisciplinary frameworks, such as feminist phenomenology, bioethics, business, ethnic studies, and political science.

Weaving together the disciplinary approaches to interrogate California provides insights that are better informed and inclusive of the mosaic of societies, cultures, and identities that make up this state. Employing past and present transdisciplinary examinations will better equip the state to face future challenges in an international space. Understanding the development of California as a place and an ideal enables the flexibility to overcome what obstacles lay ahead by drawing on past lessons. The synergizing of the approaches of disparate disciplinary fields within the context of California will help to situate, interpret and make sense of established and emerging local societies, cultures, and identities in the present and prepare them for the future.

For this section of **csuglobaljournal**, we are interested in exploring intersections of society, culture, and identity in the context of California and the world from transdisciplinary perspectives. We seek work that evaluates society, culture, and identity in California, the long-term ramifications of social movements and divides, the impacts of technological advancements made in the state on global cultures and societies, the formation of the identity of the state and its peoples in local, regional, or global context, and the exploration of California as an ideal. This section will explore the historical, contemporary, and theoretical understanding of society, culture, and identity in the context of California's place in the world. Such exploration is larger than any one disciplinary field is capable of fully exploring, requiring a transdisciplinary approach that showcases the breadth and expertise found throughout the California State University system.

The theme of Society, Culture, and Identity offers the opportunity to examine California in the broad terms that bridge the other thematic sections of **csuglobaljournal**; Institutions, Structures, and Power; Networks of Economy and Trade; Scientific Essentials and Sustainable Environments; and **csuglobalaction**. Bringing together works that consider the effects and influences on society, culture, and identity from the perspective of multiple themes demonstrates how the complexity of California can be understood from a global and transdisciplinary standpoint. We seek a broad range of perspectives on society, culture, and identity in California's domestic and international context. Works that address society, culture, and identity and one or more of the thematic areas of **csuglobal** are highly encouraged.

Bringing together scholars from across academic disciplines to consider California in the framework of society, culture, and identity will challenge the likeness of the state's birth to that of Athena. Rather than being born fully formed, the scholarship included in the section will show that the state has and continues to develop over time as the societies, cultures, and identities enrich themselves and transform as more people around the globe make California their home and place of business.

Kerri J. Malloy

Notes

Stegner Wallace, "California: The Experimental Society," September 23, 1967, 28.