

**Review: Reflections on Water: New Approaches To Transboundary
Conflict And Cooperation**

Edited by Joachim Blatter and Helen Ingram

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Joachim Blatter, & Helen Ingram (Eds.). *Reflections on Water: New Approaches to Transboundary Conflict and Cooperation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001. 358 p. ISBN 0-262-52284-5 (trade paper). US\$26.95

Water, considered by indigenous people to be a boundary or a gift of nature, has recently been reconsidered by capitalistic society as a commodity, that is, as property or a product. Bottled water can fetch a price at the supermarket. Farmers and civilians will pay money for water. When considered a problem or if there is a shortage, those with authority can solve water "problems" to the benefit of their constituencies.

In *Reflections On Water*, the authors argue that we need to consider water in non-capitalistic terms, and that we now live in the postmodern age which argues against the idea of "grand [historical] narratives" that ignore the perspectives of minority groups with different historical experiences. The focus of this fascinating work is not on how precious freshwater is, but on transboundary water "which included border crossings of several types beyond those of political jurisdiction that the term usually implies" (p. 3). The authors call for "glocalization," a "combined notion of globalization and localization," which "refers to the fact that the current explosion of international linkages and communications is not just a phenomenon of increased "horizontal" interaction, but also has to be understood in its "vertical" dimensions, characterized by direct mergers of local and global processes" (p. 6).

As the authors contend "What "glocalization" contributes is a recognition of the greater importance of the local and global levels compared with the interposed national level. Even more important is the shift of emphasis from units, entities, or actors toward the flows, interactions, linkages, and bonds among these units" (p. 7).

Eight fascinating case studies illustrate that water issues supersede national boundaries and Western perspectives. Arguments over the Northwest salmon fisheries resources and large international bodies of water in Europe, like the Black Sea and Lake Constance, are detailed. In Chimaniman, Zimbabwe, rivers served as boundaries for African farms until modern mapping techniques used straight lines to demark property, in the process separating

property line consideration from the topography of the land.

At the American and Mexican border, the traditional belief of water as a gift of nature was ignored in the process of treating water as commodity. American settlers in the Southwest were able to lay claim to this water and control it to the detriment of the indigenous people of the area. In the Southwest "these capitalists conceived water as a product that could be manipulated through a system of dams and irrigation canals and sold at a profit to settlers.... Because capital was more readily available in the United States, U.S. investors dominated water and land development efforts in the area" (p. 63). The victims were the Cocopa people ("those who live in the river"), who lost control of their water.

The assembled scholars challenge the idea of modernity, exploring the philosophies of famous thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas. Kathleen Sullivan, in her chapter "Discursive Practices and Competing Discourses in the Governance of Wild North American Pacific Salmon Resources," includes discussions of discourse analysis-examining how knowledge is created by those who have power over communication. The authors show the need and the presence for a more postmodern perspective for water that would acknowledge native peoples in the process.

In the editors' words: "Which perspective and approach each scholar may choose is a matter of personal values. However, contrary to modern approaches, critical scholarship does not hide its normative positions behind a veil of objectivity" (p. 52).

The authors show the success of certain transboundary cooperative measures to preserve and protect the water resources when it is in the interest of more than one party. When Lake Constance in central Europe attracted symbolic meaning, transnational forces, some of them non-governmental environmental groups, worked together to protect the resource. The contested Inguri River separates Georgia from Abkhaz, but despite feuding between themselves, governmental forces have worked together to protect the resource that creates electricity for the nearby area.

As the authors conclude: "If transboundary water governance is to be improved in the future, we believe greater openness and participation must accompany the multiplicity of evolving institutional structures. Transboundary water decision making can no longer be dominated by a narrow class of individuals with political power and technical expertise. Water must be unbound from the narrow strictures within which it has been considered in the past and revived as part of a more inclusive natural and human environment" (p. 338).

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