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David W. Yoskowitz

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REFLECTIONS ON WATER: NEW APPROACHES TO TRANSBOUNDARY CONFLICTS AND COOPERATION

EDITED BY JOACHIM BLATTER AND HELEN INGRAM

Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001

Pp. 358, \$26.95.

This edited volume is part of the American and Comparative Environmental Policy series being published by The MIT Press. The focus of this particular work is the examination of conflict and/or cooperation over transboundary water resources. As the editors note, "the purpose of the book is to unbind water from its present subject matter constraints and to call attention to the ways water research can reveal contemporary challenges to modes of governance and ways of thinking" (p.3).

The editors, along with Suzanne Lorton Levesque, set out in an early chapter to expand the definition(s) of water passed down from the three traditional disciplines in this area of study—law, engineering, and economics. They argue that the definitions of water from these three disciplines are too narrow and that postmodern meanings of water—such as community building and its association with culture—when included create a more complete picture of water. So it is with this broader understanding of the value of water that case studies are presented to illustrate this in the context of transboundary water resources.

In her chapter focusing on water use in the Imperial and Mexicali valleys, Maria Rosa Garcia-Acevedo finds that the local indigenous populations were at the mercy of governments and institutions. "The lessons of the history of the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys suggest that it is an illusion to suppose that people control water" (p. 58). This illusion is not found only in this location. For all intents and purposes, institutions control water and people are only in control so far as they work for the institutions. Garcia-Acevedo's work provides a historical view of water and its conflicting and overlapping meanings in differing eras. She argues strongly that the commodity view of water will only increase the problems between the two governments as well as the governments and the inhabitants of the region. When water begins to be defined by its cultural and community significance, then healthy change can begin.

Joachim Blatter and Suzanne Lorton Levesque focus, in their respective chapters, on various levels of cross-border institutions bound by a common interest. Blatter focuses his work on the problem of sport boats in Lake Constance in Central Europe and argues that the motivation for cross-border environmental policy stems from the need of institutions to increase their profile and legitimacy. Levesque's study of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) provides an example of a modern day transnational umbrella organization designed to influence decisions on

land use in the United States and Canada. Utilizing the latest in technology, this organization brings together numerous groups in the region to keep those groups informed of important events and information, and to have the ability to keep each other informed. She correctly states that "for transboundary networks to develop an effective command of information they must form alliances through which knowledge is sought, gathered, interpreted, and diffused" (p. 135).

Where there is extensive communication between similar actors in the Lake Constance and Y2Y example, the Black Sea Environmental Program (BSEP) is well intended but not as successful. Joseph F. Dimento explains that the BSEP goal is to bring together several nations of differing languages and ethnic groups to begin the process of managing a shared resource. No small feat. The region has a rich resource of scientific expertise and it is beginning to be targeted for funding. In addition there is a growth of NGOs in the region, which helps channel information, but too often the NGOs exist just to exist, with very little work getting done. The author notes that the major barrier to cooperation in the region is nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

Although only dealing with transboundary water issues tangentially, Kathleen M. Sullivan uses the salmon wars between the United States and Canada to support the premise that "discursive themes and strategies deployed in public debates shape the ways that the conflicts over salmon and water resources are defined" (p. 179). She provides insight into the treaty process used by nations to resolve conflicts over resources, in this case salmon. But the lessons are transferable to the issue of transboundary water conflicts and how the actors in that conflict might behave.

Topics that should be of interest to the readers of the *Natural Resources Journal* are the comparisons and contrasts between the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and the more recently developed institutions, Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADBank). Pamela M. Doughman argues that the IBWC in its institutional makeup is much too rigid and driven by centralized planning and narrowly focused engineering solutions to water problems along the U.S.-Mexico border. In fact, the key positions on both the U.S. and Mexico sides must be filled by engineers. In contrast BECC and NADBank have made a concerted effort to place a larger part of the responsibility of projects at the local level in order to make them more successful. They also view water and related projects as a source of community building.

All of the case studies mentioned above have examined conflicts over water resources occurring when the countries are at peace. What about when countries are at war? Paula Garb and John M. Whiteley examine exactly that situation between Georgia and its breakaway territory, Abkhaz. The authors show how the management of a hydroelectric dam (which is

on the Inguri River that divides Georgia and Abkhaz) has stayed above the continuing conflict and is able to provide electricity to both sides. There have also been concerted efforts to keep the battling away from the dam lest it be damaged and both sides suffer. Although there is conflict over territory, the professionalism of the dam's managers (both Abkhaz and Georgian) has provided a platform for cooperation between the ethnic groups that could produce a spillover effect to the general populations.

In the final case study, David M. Hughes examines water as a line around and through places in the context of Zimbabwe's Chimanimani. Conflict has arisen in this region because small land holders claim alienated land on the basis of linear water while the government and large private landowners claim the same parcels with reference to artificial, surveyed lines. The chapter is a good example of internal boundary and water conflicts that occur in a number of other countries (such as the United States, Australia, and Canada, just to mention a few) between the rights of native peoples and the central authorities.

The final section of the book wraps up the lessons learned in the previous sections and suggests directions for future study. Richard Perry proposes that the territorial nation-state form was able to, at the same time, nationalize nature and naturalize the nation-state. He goes on to state "water has been central to the historical organization of the modern nation-state form, both as territorial boundary of the nation state and its primary infrastructure for transport and communication. I argue that water is now no less revealing of the nation-state's erosion, its transformation under the conditions of late or post modernity, or both" (p. 298). In the final chapter, Perry, Blatter, and Ingram come together to summarize all of the work in the book and leave us with this statement, "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 and natural human environment" (p. 338).

This book provides an adequate picture of transboundary water issues with examples from different regions of the world. The editors stressed in the beginning that it was their goal to open up the narrow definition of water to make it more inclusive of the value that community and culture place on it. They have done that. This edited volume would be attractive to any individual interested in transboundary water issues and especially political scientists. Readers from other disciplines, such as economics, may find it limiting with regard to the methodological and theoretical rigor.

DAVID W. YOSKOWITZ
Texas A&M International University