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Understanding Transboundary Water Conflicts and Cooperation: Contributions from Political Ecology and Critical Geopolitics [abstract]

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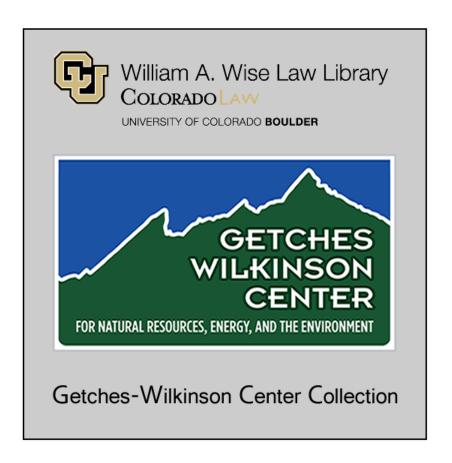
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Understanding Transboundary Water Conflicts and Cooperation: Contributions From Political Ecology and Critical Geopolitics

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to understand the geographical and political complexities of transboundary river basins—both within national jurisdictions and at international levels—must embrace critical interdisciplinary perspectives. Two such perspectives, political ecology and critical geopolitics, have recently been employed by a wide range of social scientists to shed light on the power relationships and discursive strategies inherent to ecological conflict and cooperation. In this paper, we argue that the approaches encapsulated within the terms

political ecology and critical geopolitics focus attention on underdeveloped aspects of transboundary water conflicts and cooperation. These aspects—eg, the way multiple actors in transboundary basins are linked to various geographical scales; how control over water is perceived and exercised; and how ecological and hydrological knowledge is integrated with policy imperatives—are of both theoretical and practical importance. Research focused on building local, basin-wide, transnational and cross-scale institutions for the effective management of transboundary basins must account for these types of consideration, and political ecology and critical geopolitics can help draw such concerns into the policymaking process. We draw on case studies of conflict and cooperation over transboundary waters in Southeast Asia, southern Africa and other regions to illustrate our argument. We also contend that scholars and practitioners engaged in political ecology and critical geopolitics have inexplicably ignored water as a fulcrum of social conflict and cooperation. Ultimately, our aim is to complement ongoing research and policy debates concerning transboundary waters by applying novel conceptual approaches from social theory. Conversely, social theories need to account for the complex socio-ecological settings exemplified by transboundary river basins.