

## International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy



## Book Review

### Avi Brisman, Bill McClanahan, Nigel South and Reece Walters (2018) *Water, Crime and Security in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

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*Water, Crime and Security in the Twenty-First Century* challenges the taken-for-granted assumption that comprehensive criminological analyses and water do not mix. On the contrary, as the authors detail, a greater examination of water from a criminological perspective progresses a timely and warranted discussion forward, centring and acknowledging the interrelations between water, crime and social justice.

The authors propose a novel analysis of the water–crime nexus, exploring resonances from a broader vantage point of examining how these notions intersect, coalesce and conflict. The authors argue that this text provides criminology’s first book-length contribution to the study of water and crime—and, indeed, this statement should not go unnoticed. Water is the essence of life, but for too long criminological analyses have not given water the examination it properly deserves. As water is essential to everyone everywhere, the authors make a compelling argument for the recognition that it is and ought to be a basic human right. Casting a critical lens on the power, interests and social forces that determine, grapple with or resist the current quantity, quality and accessibility of freshwater worldwide, this book provides not only a sophisticated account of water and crime, but also makes an excellent step in the right direction to examine key connections between the two elements, which can no longer be suppressed or evaded by criminological inquiry.

A well-structured and provocative book, the authors divide the text into eight chapters. Each chapter centres upon a main challenge freshwater faces as it is drawn into human interests, and the criminal activities that ensue when such interests clash. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the book, which outlines the justifications for the complicated yet timely necessity of its focus—notably, a criminological overview of the historical and contemporary relationship between water and crime, which seeks to capture the ways in which criminology could engage with current and ongoing issues of each component going forward. Chapter 2 (‘Too Dirty’) addresses water and pollution as a global problem with local and regional manifestations. Tied into the issue of pollution is the equally important issue of access, and it is this tragedy of water access that the authors turn to in the following chapter. As such, Chapter 3 (‘Too Little’) focuses on water availability and access, particularly examining such accessibility issues in both the Global South and Global North. As water is fundamental for all life on the planet, the scarcity of and access to water shapes how human interests will converge or conflict, especially when restrictions that

serve to delineate access to water exacerbate the divide between 'water-rich' and 'water-poor' nations and regions around the world.

Chapter 4 ('Too Threatened') frames the issues of water and crime within the larger considerations of climate change, specifically exploring how anthropocentric climate change will create both areas of drought and (over)abundance. Failures to appropriately respond to climate change reduce the chances of meaningful engagements and actions to ameliorate forced migration, droughts and flooding, and vice versa.

Chapter 5 ('Too Costly') turns our attention to water privatisation, throughout which the authors consider the unsustainable and exploitative use of scarce global resources of freshwater. Unfortunately, the expansion of freshwater markets has farther ramifications than anticipated, and will certainly add to devastating environmental and human consequences already witnessed throughout the world.

Chapter 6 ('Too Insecure') next considers the water-crime nexus in relation to security-based issues and threats. While water is essential to life and while the lack of it is deadly, per the authors, to interpret the threat of water and food insecurity as a national security concern merely increases processes of securitisation that frequently serve to increase the power of the ruling elite, corporate and cultural actors, and does nothing to address or resolve the inherent problems of water scarcity and access for citizens at local or regional levels. Questions about what is exactly being secured, from whom or what water is being secured, and whether peaceful cooperation can help bring about water security must be raised before we accept populist or political calls for increased water security.

Chapter 7 ('Too Important') recognises social movements and outcries of resistance to water-based crimes. Indeed, water remains an intense area of debate and resistance for activists and grassroots movements. As the authors suggest, such water justice initiatives have the potential of rallying and bringing local communities together to fight for 'the sanctity and integrity of aquascapes fresh and salinated alike' (2018: 6), and serve to sustain the cultural and ecological life of the communities at large.

The authors conclude the book by highlighting the issues of the study of water and crime in Chapter 8. For the sake of our planet's ongoing existence, progressive reforms in global water security generally and water justice specifically must be established and maintained. As the authors indicate, the plight of the world's poor and marginalised, coupled with the perils of water security, has only intensified. However, water can be realised as a fundamental human right so long as alternatives to the harmful water habits that plague our world are repressed, criminalised and cast away altogether.

The greatest strength of this book is its broad scope. The authors do not limit themselves to the literature of green criminology (albeit a certainly growing, yet already significant and impressive subfield of criminology in its own right). Indeed, they include sociology, political science, economics, public health studies, critical security studies and law (to name a few) to both construct the conceptual framework of their book and to translate the relationship of water and crime into concrete applications and examples. While one may contend that a broad scope is a weakness, insofar as too many ideas do not allow for the authors to push their primary ideas to a more critical limit, this is not the case here. Instead, the authors incorporate a litany of literature in a comprehensive manner, all of which supplements the greater concern for the water-crime relationship the authors posit in Chapter 1 and further reify at the end of their book.

Therefore, cognitive commitments across human populations towards making water a basic human right must become a paramount and global concern. Now is the time to push the boundaries and scope of criminology, creating new areas of focus and developing novel and

insightful ways to reimagine and respond to social concerns, crime and justice at large. The evidence and awareness of water-based crimes outlined in this book suggests that all societies must begin to migrate to a higher moral ground. We must challenge ourselves to think about sites and institutions in each society where epistemologies of water injustice are naturalised and made possible. Water issues are and remain fundamental to criminological inquiry, and for those fighting for water justice. The authors hoped that the issues of water crisis and insecurity they describe can be increasingly taken up by criminology; without a doubt, this book lays the foundation necessary to stimulate these kinds of thoughts for future criminological research.

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