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## Farhana Sultana and Alex Loftus, Editors, the Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles

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semi-arid areas of the western states, which helps to make the often-difficult and nuanced issues surrounding the water-energy nexus in a water-scarce area more relatable and accessible to western residents. Furthermore, this book is ideally suited to offer a solid baseline understanding of the water-energy nexus to elected and appointed officials who are unfamiliar with the subject.

*Gabriel Kester*

**Farhana Sultana and Alex Loftus, Editors, *The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles*, Earthscan, New York, NY (2012); 262 pp; \$53.95; ISBN 978-1-84971-360-3; hardcover.**

“*The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles*” surveys how a variety of actors conceive of and implement the right to water across the globe. In its initial chapters, the book, edited by Farhana Sultana and Alex Loftus, expounds on what a right to water means. Each of these chapters puts forth its own analysis and critique of the right. The authors ground their arguments in the theories of inter-related academic disciplines such as geography, political science, and law. The second half of the book shifts focus. In these later chapters, the authors delve into the water justice movements in particular countries or regions. The case studies range widely in structure and location: in Chapter 7, the reader learns about the Maori tribe’s water-based identity, while in Chapter 8, the reader learns about the European Union’s approach to water management.

The preface locates the book in time and space. Some of the chapters originated as papers for an international conference entitled “*The Right to Water*,” held at Syracuse University over March 29 and March 30, 2010. The conference addressed how water activists can equitably advance the global right to water.

In the foreword, activist Maude Barlow discusses the United Nations General Assembly’s passage of two important resolutions concerning the global right to water and sanitation. Barlow’s foreword reads as a call to arms for water activists. It concludes with rhetorical questions about how public and private actors should conceive of the right to water. The chapters that follow explore these questions.

In Chapter 1, “*The right to water: prospects and possibilities*,” the book’s editors introduce the global water justice movement and the topics of the chapters to come. The editors identify two major divisions in rights discourse: commodification versus rights and the public versus private management of water. The thesis of the book is “to bring a geographical sensitivity to calls for a universal right to water: within this, we see the right to water as one necessary but insufficient moment in the struggle to achieve equitable access to water for all.”

In Chapter 2, “*Commons versus commodities: debating the human right to water*,” Karen Bakker develops a framework for analyzing market environmental reforms such as neoliberalism and applies the framework to water. Bakker criticizes the problems endemic to neoliberal reforms. She notes that the privatization of water services is legally compatible with the human right to water. Bakker argues that conceiving of water as a commons allows the reformation

process to transcend the public/private binary and thereby accomplish more progressive water reform. Bakker's critique of the rights discourse receives clarification and criticism in many of the following chapters.

In Chapter 3, "The human right to what? Water, rights, humans, and the relation of things," Jamie Linton discusses the right to water from a relational perspective. He derives this relational perspective from Marxist theory: rights form a collective, human identity ("species being"), and water is a hydrosocial process. Linton comes to two conclusions. First, he argues that the right to water includes community participation in water governance. Second, he argues that society as a whole should benefit from the value of water.

In Chapter 4, "A right to water? Geographico-legal perspectives," Chad Staddon, Thomas Appleby, and Evadne Grant discuss who has rights to water, and how and where people can obtain legal enforcement of such rights. The authors caution water activists to think deeply about the legal ramifications of enforcing a right to water. The authors note that human rights legislation usually benefits the very rich and the very poor. They also warn that corporations – to which countries like the United States have granted limited, legal personhood – could benefit from the legal right to water at the expense of parties with less bargaining power.

In Chapter 5, "The political economy of the right to water: reinvigorating the question of property," Kyle R. Mitchell views the struggle for the right to water as one of many contested relations in civil society. He argues that people overemphasize property's exchange value and underemphasize property's use value due to the historical evolution of capitalism. He also discusses the historical evolution of civil society and how the notion of a civil society occludes class disparities in liberal democracies. Mitchell concludes that the framework and realization of rights will determine the success of the right to water movement.

In Chapter 6, "Scarce or insecure? The right to water and the ethics of global water governance," Jeremy J. Schmidt analyzes prevailing forms of water governance. Schmidt deconstructs the theoretical propositions behind the forms' assumptions. He discusses how water scarcity and insecurity have become the main foci of global water management. Finally, he argues that people should conceive of water governance as a collective and communal process and that communal claims deserve incorporation and respect.

The book shifts focus to more individualized case studies in Chapter 7, "The right to water as the right to identity: legal struggles of indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand," by Jacinta Ruru. For the Maori tribe, of which Ruru is a member, water is everything. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, the Maori battle for water is for the preservation of tribal identity rather than access to clean water. Ruru details the Maori's success and failures in significant legal battles over water. Ruru concludes that other public and private interests often prevail over Maori water rights in Aotearoa.

In Chapter 8, "Legal protection of the right to water in the European Union," Marleen van Rijswijk and Andrea Kessen explain European Union ("EU") citizens' right to water within the context of EU's legal framework. The EU and its 28 member states share responsibility in implementing and enforcing clean, sustainable, and equitable use of water. The EU has not formally recognized the right to water, but the authors argue that the EU's approach may trump

a formal right to water. Notwithstanding the EU's effective approach, the authors argue that the EU needs to become more transparent and more inclusive in its decision-making processes. Finally, the authors advocate for a broader right to water in the more industrialized member states.

In Chapter 9, "Rights, citizenship and territory: water politics in the West Bank," Ilaria Giglioli discusses the unique case of West Bank water rights. Giglioli describes the historical evolution of geo-politics in the West Bank and its effect on the region's water management. She argues that different levels of access to water exist because of different levels of citizenship. The British and then the Israelis provided Arab residents inadequate infrastructure and access to water because the two peoples contested the Arabs' rights to natural resources like water. Giglioli concludes by discussing the roles Palestine, Israel, and international actors play in this geo-political struggle and how even within each group there is disagreement about the right to water.

In Chapter 10, "Water rights and wrongs: illegality and informal use in Mexico and the U.S.," Katharine Meehan discusses the role of water illegalities in water justice movements. First, Meehan describes the historical evolution of water illegalities from the time of feudalism to the present. She notes the current paradoxical status of water as both a privilege and a possession. She applies her theoretical propositions to two case studies: Colorado and San Felipe del Progreso, Mexico. She discusses the extralegal and legal approaches to water in both states. She concludes by emphasizing that extralegal and illegal approaches to water add dimension – and perhaps reinforcement – to the advancement of a global right to water.

In Chapter 11, "The centrality of community participation to the realization of the right to water: the illustrative case of South Africa," Cristy Clark analyzes the role community participation plays in the realization of a human right to water. Clark uses the 2009 South African case *Mazibuko and Others v. City of Johannesburg and Others* to demonstrate her point. In *Mazibuko*, Soweto residents from Phiri contested the introduction of prepaid water meters and the South African government's allocation of water. Despite the explicit right to water in the South African Constitution, the court found against the Soweto residents. Clark argues that the judgment minimizes community participation. She believes that community participation is key because it empowers marginalized groups and allows them to challenge barriers to water access.

Patrick Bond further analyzes *Mazibuko* in Chapter 12, "The right to the city and the eco-social commoning of water: discursive and political lessons from South Africa." Bond discusses *Mazibuko's* political lessons for a broader right to the city. Bond criticizes the legal strategies of the *Mazibuko* appellants. He believes that the appellants' legal team should have contextualized the dispute in order to illustrate the racial and class disparities in water access. More generally, he argues that each individual struggle for the right to the city must operate within the specific political-economic context it faces. In accordance with his Marxist perspective, he asserts the need for leftist organizations to unite and fight for a right to the city.

In Chapter 13, "Anti-privatization struggles and the right to water in India: engendering cultures of opposition," Krista Bywater explores the successful water justice movements in Plachimada, Kerala and Delhi, India. In Plachimada,

residents forced Coca-Cola to shutter operations on a plant depleting groundwater. In Delhi, activists prevented a project sponsored by the World Bank. *Bywater* traces the “political cultures of opposition” (PCOs) already in place for both movements. She argues that activists must capitalize on their PCOs in order to obtain the right to water.

In Chapter 14, “Seeing through the concept of water as a human right in Bolivia,” Rocio Bustamante, Carlos Crespo, and Anna Maria Walnycki analyze the application of rights theory and discourse in Bolivian water management. The authors outline the historical evolution of water management in Bolivia. Traditionally, the state did not manage water in Bolivia; rather, communities managed their own water. The authors argue that the recent inclusion of the right to water in the Bolivian Constitution, the Plurinational Constitution of the State, has legitimized the increased role of state possesses in water management. The authors conclude that the application of a right to water has led Bolivia toward the realization of equitable water management.

In Chapter 15, “From Cochabamba to Colombia: travelling repertoires in Latin American water struggles,” Verónica Perera explores the influence that water struggles in Cochabamba and Uruguay have had on Colombian water activists. In both Cochabamba and Uruguay, activists and citizens successfully fought against the neoliberalization and privatization of water. Perera explains how these successes shaped the politically unsuccessful referendum for a right to water in Colombia. She initially thought that Colombian activists would view the referendum as a failure but, to her surprise, the activists saw their fight as successful because they used the referendum as a tool to promote water justice. Finally, she argues that rights discourse is crucial to the “travelling repertoire” of water justice movements.

The book provides a compelling argument for the human right to water. Readers will obtain a broad but shallow appreciation of rights movements around the world. The book’s international focus leaves little room for discussion of the United States besides its perceived role as a synonym for globalization and neoliberalism. As is the case with most scholarly compilations, some chapters stand out more than others. For example, Bakker’s chapter warrants particular attention because her critique of rights discourse serves as a lightning rod for rights discourse throughout the book. Such academic discussions pervade the book, and this scholarly bent may overwhelm readers looking for a more practical discussion of the right to water.

*Emily Miller*