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Reviews:

'This book is an extraordinary intellectual and political tour de force. For the first time, the complex power-laden processes that shape the relationships between water rights, politics and identity are explored in ways that are academically stimulating, intellectually enriching and politically significant - an indispensible guide for all those who seek both to better understand how water rights and social, cultural or political power intertwine and to formulate and engage in socially empowering and politically liberating strategies of resistance and transformation.'
--Erik Swyngedouw, Professor of Geography, University of Manchester, UK

'This book is a path breaking compilation of essays that include and provoke critical thinking about the law and politics of water allocation and power relationships. It reveals the failings of free market approaches linked to the global thirst for water and other resources, and provides needed guidance for reevaluating those approaches with attention to the wisdom and longstanding resource use practices of indigenous and other local communities.'
-- S. James Anaya, Professor of Human Rights Law and Policy, University of Arizona; and United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People

'Out of the Mainstream is one of the most powerful critiques of the neoliberal globalisation utopia I have ever read. In their careful and penetrating studies, the contributors reveal the rich and varied experiences of communal water systems, the struggles of local communities against neoliberal policies and their collective attempts to construct sustainable livelihoods.'
-- Cris Kay, Em. Professor International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, the Netherlands

'The mark of a groundbreaking book is that it sheds light on an enduring problem in an entirely new way. Tackling the critical confrontation between traditional and modern water systems, the authors bring convincing new field data and insights to the contentious debates surrounding the water crisis in the Andes and indigenous communities of North America.'
-- Robert E. Rhoades, Distinguished Research Professor, University of Georgia, USA

'The EarthScan book breaks through many misconceptions about water rights and management to describe local and community use of water from the bottom-up.' -- Jeff Thurston, Vector One

'This book rejects a number of shibboleths among water professionals and replaces them with advice that emphasises fairness, community, and bottom-up democracy.' -- Helen Ingram, Water Alternatives

'This excellent collection examines market-generated water conflicts and responses at local, regional, and national levels in a set of case studies involving people and communities in the Andes and the US Southwest' -- B.F.Hope, Choice Magazine
About the book

Water is not only a source of life and culture. It is also a source of power, conflicting interests and identity battles. Rights to materially access, culturally organize and politically control water resources are poorly understood by mainstream scientific approaches and hardly addressed by current normative frameworks. These issues become even more challenging when law and policy-makers and dominant power groups try to grasp, contain and handle them in multicultural societies. The struggles over the uses, meanings and appropriation of water are especially well-illustrated in Andean communities and local water systems of Peru, Chile, Ecuador, and Bolivia, as well as in Native American communities in south-western USA.

The problem is that throughout history, these nation-states have attempted to 'civilize' and bring into the mainstream the different cultures and peoples within their borders instead of understanding 'context' and harnessing the strengths and potentials of diversity. This book examines the multi-scale struggles for cultural justice and socio-economic re-distribution that arise as Latin American communities and user federations seek access to water resources and decision-making power regarding their control and management. It is set in the dynamic context of unequal, globalizing power relations, politics of scale and identity, environmental encroachment and the increasing presence of extractive industries that are creating additional pressures on local livelihoods.

While much of the focus of the book is on the Andean Region, a number of comparative chapters are also included. These address issues such as water rights and defence strategies in neighbouring countries and those of Native American people in the southern USA, as well as state reform and multi-culturalism across Latin and Native America and the use of international standards in struggles for indigenous water rights. This book shows that, against all odds, people are actively contesting neoliberal globalization and water power plays. In doing so, they construct new, hybrid water rights systems, livelihoods, cultures and hydro-political networks, and dynamically challenge the mainstream powers and politics.

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About the Editors

Rutgerd Boelens is Associate Professor at Wageningen University, The Netherlands; Visiting Professor at the Catholic University of Peru; Coordinator of the international research programs Water Law and Indigenous Rights (WALIR), Concertacion, and the Justicia Hídrica / Water Justice alliance. In books, articles and films, he has widely published on the linkages between water rights, cultures, policies and power relations.

David H. Getches focused most of his academic and legal career on the rights of native peoples and on water rights in the United States. Since 2003 he has been Dean of the University of Colorado Law School and he holds the title of Raphael J. Moses Professor of Natural Resources Law.

Armando Guevara-Gil is a Law Professor at Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, Lima. His main fields are Law and Anthropology, History of Law, and Law & Development. He served as the national coordinator of the Water Law and Indigenous Rights Project in Peru (WALIR), headed by Wageningen University and the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC).