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BOOK REVIEW

Harris, L.M.; Goldin, J.A. and Sneddon, C. 2013. Contemporary water governance in the Global South: Scarcity, marketization and participation. Oxford, UK: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-65799-0, 263 pages, US\$155.

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The book is inspired by "the litany of alarming observations about water use and misuse, which is now familiar... [and] presents tremendous challenges for water governance" (p.i). Consequently, the book focuses on three major concepts and approaches that are said to have gained currency in policy and governance circles, both globally and regionally, namely scarcity and crisis, marketisation and privatisation, and participation. The book interrogates the manifestations and contestations of water governance by offering a historical-context overview of each of the ideas, complemented by in-depth case studies.

The book is organised in four main parts and a concluding part (V). The two chapters in Part I examine the rise of hegemonic concepts in water governance, defined as certain ideas that become dominant within a society and mould and structure how individuals and groups perceive and interpret certain phenomena which limit the terms of the debate, create little space for different ideas and become a dominant frame of reference for crafting solutions (p.17). This main argument of the book is followed by a close examination of the individual concepts: crisis and scarcity in Part II, marketisation and privatisation in Part III, and participation in Part IV. Parts II to IV have the same structure – one discussion or two framing chapters followed by a number of case studies or general discussion chapters after which is found a commentary chapter designed to provide a reflection of the chapters in a particular section. Parts II to IV draw on case studies from Syria (2), Turkey (2), Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Egypt, Ghana and Spain.

The book is a welcome addition to the discussion on water governance. The debate is very much needed because, after the initial euphoria as represented by the statement that the world water crisis was a crisis of governance, it is important to reflect on how water governance is generally understood, how it is operationalised in different contexts, and how the discussion is linked to other debates. There is a need to understand how concepts such as participation and marketisation, which can be said to have preceded water governance, are linked to the governance debate. By systematically examining the concepts, and providing illustrative case studies, the book assists the reader to have a comprehensive and yet compact understanding of the various strands of water governance.

This excellent attempt is, however, in my judgment, compromised by a number of shortcomings. The book does not use other concepts that help explain hegemony, such as sanctioned discourse, nirvana concepts and wicked problems (although it appears the authors are generally aware of them). The chapters could have been strengthened by taking into account the issues raised in the commentary

chapters. I do not see any positive role of the commentary chapters except to expose the weaknesses of the chapters in the various sections of the book. One of the puzzling observations is that there is no attempt to define what Global South means. Why was Global South opted for instead of developing world/countries, which many policy-makers are familiar with? That definition would also have helped to understand the selection between the various case studies. What is it that connects Syria, Turkey, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Egypt, Ghana and Spain, and what are these countries supposed to represent in the wider governance debate? One also notices a lack of balance of case studies across the themes. For example, the theme of 'marketisation and privatisation' is only represented by Zambia and Kenya. It is only Turkey that appears in more than one theme, leaving one to wonder whether there is nothing to report on for the other themes. The Zimbabwe case study is illustrative. It is a riveting account of the construction of water scarcity between 1964 and 1972. By confining the discussion to this particular period, one is left wondering what happened during the rest of the minority rule (1973-1979) and, perhaps more importantly, how the post-colonial state has debated water scarcity?

In spite of these shortcomings the book remains a useful addition to the debate on water governance "for students, researchers, advocates and policy-makers interested in water governance".

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