

Book Reviews

Water Management in Islam

Edited by Naser I. Faruqui, Asit K. Biswas & Murad J. Bino

Ottawa, International Development Research Centre (and Tokyo, United Nations University Press), 2001, xxiv + 149 pp., ISBN 0-88936-924-0 (92-808-1036-7, United Nations University Press edition)

The collection of edited articles in *Water Management in Islam* represents a unique and critical assessment of integrated water resources management principles from the Islamic perspective. The 12 major articles, plus useful supporting sections—introduction, short overview of Islamic sources and glossary—provide valuable insights into the religious dimensions of water and its management in the chronically water-short Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which has a predominantly Muslim population. The focus and definition of the volume are highly relevant—the MENA countries, perhaps more than in any other region in the world, combine social and economic policy with religious principles. At the same time, the authors portray the diversity and complexity of water management traditions in the region dating from the age of the Prophet Mohamed, and continuously being reinterpreted and adapted to address current conditions.

The considerable (if unstated) accomplishment of the editors lies in this vein—to demonstrate that Islam ably addresses contentious modern day water issues. Some of the more controversial problems surrounding present day water management analysed in *Water Management in Islam* include equity, allocation, water reuse, environmental quality and pollution, water demand management (including family planning and water pricing), water rights, ownership, markets (trading and pricing) and transboundary water management. This book is recommended reading not only for those working on water management in the MENA region, but more importantly for practitioners, researchers and policy makers concerned about the growing cross-fertilization of global trends towards integrated management of water, on the one hand, with firmly held beliefs and practices concerning water use at the individual and societal levels, on the other.

Water Management in Islam is an outgrowth of the Workshop on Water Resources Management in the Islamic World, held in Amman, Jordan, in December 1998. The workshop's goal was to better understand Islamic perspectives on water management and identify research that would lead to water management policies to improve the lives of the poor. It is consistent, then, that a recurring theme throughout the volume is Islam's sound emphasis on equity. Thus, discussions of privatization, for example, are influenced by considerations of the water service outcomes for the poor. In other words, privatization is not an end in itself (as some would make the case), but simply a means to make service delivery more efficient, effective and, above all, *equitable*. Similarly, intersectoral water allocation (as, for instance, through water trading and market

arrangements) is beneficial or essential from the Islamic perspective when it results in improved access to drinking water—considered a right above all others—for the poor, who are the most acutely affected by water scarcity.

In the Introduction Faruqui asks whether Islam is in agreement with the emerging consensus on integrated water resources management (IWRM) by the international community. IWRM recognizes the interlinked nature of water resources across sectoral uses; it was initially formulated in the 1992 Dublin Principles, but has also come to include such concepts and approaches as “lifeline water tariffs, water conservation, raising tariffs, wastewater reuse, privatization, water markets, and community-based water management” (p. xvi). Al-Jayyousi makes the case that “In spirit ... [Islam’s view of humans as trustees] agrees with all the principles of the Dublin Statement” (p. 37), but argues for further interpretation and wider dissemination of Islamic water policy.

Throughout the volume, an important distinction is drawn between ‘Islam’ and ‘Islamic’, referring to the religion, its precepts and doctrine on the one hand, and ‘Muslim’ as its adherents (“who may be more or less observant”, p. xvii) on the other. The introductory ‘Islamic sources’ chapter (Faruqui & Al-Jayyousi) provides key definitions for the scope of analysis of Islamic precepts. Islamic validity is defined as based on the Quran and the *sunnah* as conveyed in *hadith*, the documented words and deeds of the Prophet, which collectively define the *Sharia*, or Islamic law. Concepts or principles that were not explicitly addressed in either the Quran or the *Sharia* were subsequently interpreted through *ijtihad* (inquiry, innovation) by Muslim scholars. This raises a fundamental methodological issue not satisfactorily resolved by either the editors or the authors. There is a great deal of innovation and interpretation which occurs at the level of local communities and individual (*Muslim*) water users, that is not sanctioned or recognized as *Islamic* by authorities or scholars but that nevertheless informs the evolving tradition. Many of these important, and highly relevant, local manifestations are reported on by the authors (particularly in Pakistan by Shah *et al.*, in Palestine by Al Khateeb and in Iran by Sadr), yet they do not meet the strict definition as being Islamic practices. Much of the richness of a complex religious system like Islam is embodied in its local traditions. Jurisprudence ‘from on high’ and strict legal interpretation, in this context, are beside the point.

The majority of the contributing authors are researchers and practitioners from water resources, economics, social science, health and law backgrounds whose understanding of the Islamic perspective on water is defined experientially as being Muslims themselves. The volume would have benefited greatly from contributions by anthropologists presenting ethnographic material on *Muslim* water management practices, and jurists presenting *Islamic* interpretation of water management principles.

The authors examine various facets of IWRM—environmental water requirements (Amery), conservation (Atallah *et al.*, Shah *et al.*), demand management (Abderrahman), wastewater reuse (Al Khateeb), water rights/ownership and trade/markets (Kadouri *et al.*, Caponera, Sadr, Faruqui) and internationally shared waters (Hussein and Al-Jayyousi)—and conclude that Islam is resilient in facing today’s water problems. *Water Management in Islam* represents an innovative blend of critical analysis of pressing water management issues with a religious Islamic perspective on the acceptability of current approaches to these issues. The book should provide all of us the opportunity to rethink convention-

ally held views that economic, social and technical factors outweigh other considerations when assessing alternative approaches to water management.

Christopher A. Scott
Director, India Regional Office
International Water Management Institute

Middle East Water Question: Hydropolitics and the Global Economy

Tony Allan

London, I. B. Tauris, 2001, 382 pp., ISBN 1-86064-582-8

Middle East Water Question: Hydropolitics and the Global Economy, by Tony Allan, is a recent arrival to the growing literature on hydropolitics and is published by I. B. Taurus. Whereas most of the existing literature tends to focus on international relations in contested river basins, the book is somewhat different. It is the only book that I am aware of that seeks to contextualize water scarcity and the resultant conflict that arises from this condition, within a broader global framework. The reason for this is that water scarcity is a local phenomenon, mostly at the river basin level of analysis, whereas the remedies for balancing a deficit water budget are found globally, mostly in the form of cereals and other water-intensive products, which the author calls 'virtual water'. This is a central theme of the book, reflected as it is in the title. As such, the book offers a valid explanation as to why the once confidently prophesized wars over water have failed to materialize in the Middle East.

Divided into four parts, the book takes the reader through a series of complex cross-cutting issues. Each of these is logically selected and dealt with in a systematic fashion, ultimately piecing together the various components of different theories to form an integrated (and greatly expanded) model for the understanding of hydropolitical dynamics in a contested geographical setting. Part 1 deals with the resource base of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region and as such is fairly number-intensive. This is necessary because it lays the foundation to any subsequent understanding of water-related conflict. Even at this early stage in the text, however, the author notes that a suitable explanation for what has been happening hydropolitically in the MENA region cannot be found in a single scientific discipline. He then goes on to introduce a conceptual framework that is suitable for hydropolitical analyses as an interdisciplinary endeavour, showing how different disciplines fit together with respect to an understanding of hydropolitical discourse or water policy narratives. This is particularly useful as it serves to broaden the methodological approach to hydropolitics. With this methodological point of departure, the author proceeds to introduce the reader to the first of a number of useful theoretical approaches, in this case risk theory, which is a particularly helpful way of explaining the reflexive tendencies found in the contemporary water discourse of the MENA region.

Part 2 focuses on various water-related discourses and seeks to unpack each of these in a logical and systematic fashion. Central to these are three dominant discourses, named 'water is an economic resource', 'water is not an economic resource' and 'water is both a social and an economic resource'. The value of this exercise is that it allows the reader to make sense of the apparently conflicting

information that is evident from a study of hydrogeopolitics in the MENA region. Using Foucault's work on discourse analysis as a tool, the author then proceeds to develop an explanation for the parallel discourse that is evident in the region. More specifically, this serves to explain why economic and environmentally logical policy priorities are at odds with politically feasible policy priorities. This is a valuable contribution to the discipline of hydrogeopolitics, as these apparent contradictions are evident elsewhere in the world and have not been adequately explained to date. As such this equips the analyst with a broader range of conceptual tools with which to do hydrogeopolitical research.

Part 3 reaches across another set of academic disciplines in order to expand the theoretical basis of the book. In this case the author provides a review of international relations theory, suggesting that while it is useful in explaining some of the hydrogeopolitical dynamics in the MENA region, it generally fails to recognize the trade in 'virtual water' as an explanation for the conflict-mitigating effects of endemic water scarcity. Expanding on this, the concept of 'securitization' is then introduced by using Buzan's 'security complex theory'. From this emerges an interesting and useful analysis of security complexes that are relevant to the MENA region. Moving on to a review of international law, the author unpacks some of the legal nuances that are relevant to the MENA region. One of these nuances is the distinction between hydrological security, social security and socio-economic security. In this regard, law is seen as being part of a suite of transaction cost-saving tools that contribute to the overall water security of a region.

Part 4 is an attempt to make some future predictions about the hydrogeopolitics of the MENA region, which is an exceedingly brave thing to do and only possible by drawing on a multidisciplinary approach to the subject. Emerging from this is a particularly useful explanation of the various water policy narratives that exist. This is of great value to an outsider because it explains how perceptions drive local hydrogeopolitics, and the outsider brings with them a silent but powerful set of implicit assumptions about rationality. The book reaches an intellectual climax by synthesizing out what the author calls 'common theory'. What this achieves is to propose a new generation of hydrogeopolitical theory that has the potential to both explain and predict events. This is a significant achievement indeed.

The book is an interesting read for both the specialist hydrogeopolitical analyst and the more generalized conflict and conflict mitigation scholar. It is richly illustrated, which brings complex issues to life and helps by explaining the dynamics of those issues to the reader. This is one of the few texts on hydrogeopolitics that reaches across so many established disciplines, providing a methodological framework for the serious scholar and researcher to use in studies elsewhere on this planet. Given the obvious value of this contribution to the literature, it is therefore a little sad to note that there are a few typographical errors and inconsistencies in referencing the bibliography. This is a great pity because it leaves a slight blemish on an otherwise excellent text. This aside, the book is likely to usher in a new generation of hydrogeopolitical research based on multidisciplinary and empiricism.

*Anthony Turton
African Water Issues Research Unit
University of Pretoria*