New book publication by Rutgerd Boelens: ‘Water, Power and Identity. The cultural politics of water in the Andes’

Rutgerd Boelens (WUR-WRM and UvA-CEDLA, GPIO) has published a new book with Routledge / Earthscan. It addresses two major issues in natural resource management and political ecology: the complex conflicting relationship between communities managing water on the ground and national/global policy-making institutions and elites; and how grassroots defend against encroachment, question the self-evidence of State-/market-based water governance, and confront coercive and participatory boundary policing (‘normal’ vs. ‘abnormal’).

The book examines grassroots building of multilayered water-rights territories, and State, market and expert networks’ vigorous efforts to reshape these water societies in their own image – seizing resources and/or aligning users, identities and rights systems within dominant frameworks. Distributive and cultural politics entwine. It is shown that attempts to modernize and normalize users through universalized water culture, ‘rational water use’ and depoliticized interventions deepen water security problems rather than alleviating them. However, social struggles negotiate and enforce water rights. User collectives challenge imposed water rights and identities, constructing new ones to strategically acquire water control autonomy and remoralize their waterscapes.

The author shows that battles for material control include the right to culturally define and politically organize water rights and territories. Andean illustrations from Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile, from peasant-indigenous life stories to international policy-making, highlight open and subsurface hydrosocial networks. They reveal how water justice struggles are political projects against indifference, and that engaging in re-distributive policies and defying ‘truth politics,’ extends context-particular water rights definitions and governance forms.

First reactions to the book ‘Water, Power and Identity’:

“A true masterwork... It is among the most authoritative volumes ever produced on Latin American water politics.”
—Tom Perreault, Professor of Geography, Syracuse University, USA

“A challenging and thought-provoking contribution to debates on law and nature, environmental governance, and political ecologies of state-making and resistance. Very important reading.”
—Anthony Bebbington, Professor of Environment and Society and Director of the Graduate School of Geography, Clark University, USA

“Rarely before has the intimate relationship between power and water been so incisively dissected. A must-read for those concerned with how power shapes life and how communities struggle for their right to water.”
—Erik Swyngedouw, Professor of Geography, University of Manchester, UK

Published with Routledge/ Earthscan.
For more reactions and the book’s contents, see: http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415719186/.