



Water and Power in Highland Peru: The Cultural Politics of Irrigation and Development

Paul Gelles

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Cabanaconde, a town of 5,000 people, is located in the arid Andean highlands. It is dominated by the foreboding Hualca Hualca mountain peak that is the source of this town's much-needed water. How the villagers obtain this water, Paul Gelles writes, is not a simple process: the politics of irrigation in this area reflect a struggle for control of vital resources, deeply rooted in the clash between local, ritualized models of water distribution and the secular model put forth by the Peruvian state. *Water and Power in Highland Peru* provides an insightful case study on the intense conflicts over water rights, and a framework for studying ethnic conflict and the effects of "development," not only in Peru, but in other areas as well.

Most of the inhabitants of Cabanaconde do not identify themselves with the dominant Spanish-speaking culture found in Peru. And the Peruvian state, grounded in a racist, post-Colonial ethos, challenges the village's long-standing, non-Western framework for organizing water management.

Gelles demonstrates that Andean culture is dynamic and adaptive, and it is a powerful source of ethnic identity, even for those who leave the village to live elsewhere. Indigenous rituals developed in this part of the world, he states, have become powerful tools of resistance against interference by local elites and the present-day Peruvian state. Most importantly, the micropolitics of Cabanaconde provide a window into a struggle that is taking place around the world.

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