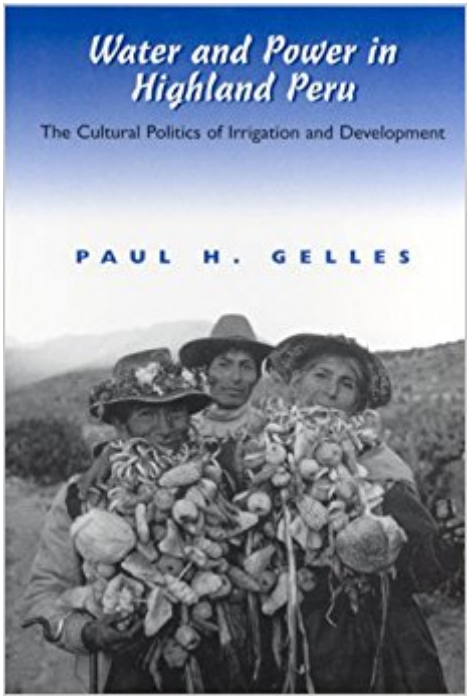
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Water And Power In Highland Peru: The Cultural Politics Of Irrigation And Development



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Synopsis

Cabanaconde, a town of 5,000 people, is located in the arid Andean highlands. It is dominated by the foreboding Hualca Hualca mountain peakÃ Â that is the source of this townÃ¢â ¬â„¢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 aÃ Â framework for studying ethnic conflict and the effects of Ã¢â ¬Å“development,Ã¢â ¬Â• 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 villageÃ¢â ¬â„¢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.Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

In Andean society, as in many other areas of the world, irrigation water carries broad cultural

significance and has long been a source of conflict. Nowhere is the struggle over irrigation and over the cultural meanings of water more apparent that in Cabanaconde, a large peasant community located in the arid highlands of southern Peru. Using historical materials and richly detailed ethnographic reporting, Paul H. Gelles shows that water, ethnicity, and power in Cabanaconde, as elsewhere in the Andes, must be understood against the backdrop of the region's colonial past and contemporary nation-building in Peru. Sifting through the layers of meaning found in the local, ritualized model of irrigation and in the secular, monetary model put forth by the Peruvian state, Gelles shows that these models embody fundamentally different cultural rationales concerning natural resources, power, equity, and efficiency. Local models of irrigation, which previously served indigenous and Iberian states, have now become powerful tools of resistance against interference by local elites and the national government. Vividly Illustrating the politically charged nature of highland communities and irrigation systems, Water and Power in Highland Peru provides a new framework for understanding highland communities and Peruvian cultural politics, a model that ca be extended to the study of ethnic conflict and "development" in other regions of the world.

Paul H. Gelles is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. He is the co-translator of a widely used text, "Andean Lives" and the co-producer of the award-winning film, "Transnational Fiesta: 1992", also about Cabanaconde.

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