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Peer reviewed

Review : *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water*

Karen Bakker (Ed.)

Reviewed by Yves Laberge
Quebec, Canada

Bakker, Karen (Ed.). *Eau Canada: The Future of Canada's Water*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2007. xix+417pp. ISBN: 9780774813402. US \$30.95, paperback.

This book's title plays on the double meaning of the French word "eau" (pronounced as the letter "O"), which means water and as an homonym simultaneously refers to the Canadian national anthem initially written in French and firstly titled "Ô Canada". As its 18 chapters demonstrate in various ways, *Eau Canada* is not much about landscapes, biology or fishes, rather on water use, governance and policies regarding the protection of water, and especially drinking water, in Canada. The editor, Dr. Karen Bakker is a professor of geography at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and the 32 contributors reunited here are from Canadian universities and institutions. However, there is a strong imbalance in terms of provincial representation since there is only one contribution from a scholar based in Québec, which has nevertheless the biggest territory among all Canadian provinces. Therefore, it would be uneasy to argue that this book can be seen as representative of Canada as a whole.

There are two dimensions in *Eau Canada*: the diagnosis and the solutions. The diagnosis implies policy debates and diplomatic negotiations because Canada shares its very long border with the USA, and this phenomena clearly creates a "market pressure" on the management of transboundary water resources, as explained by Theodore Horbulyk, who calls for more cooperation and integration (p. 216).

As many contributors argue, "Canada is facing a water crisis. This crisis is not simply a result of pollution, overuse, and depletion of water resources, but also of bad management, mainly due to the absence of clear governance framework to oversee the protection, conservation, and good management of Canada's water resources" (Paul Muldoon and Theresa McClenaghan, p. 245). Many strategies exist: in her chapter, Dr. Bakker presents three models for water supply governance: public, private, and cooperative (p. 186). Case studies are varied and include the tragic event in Walkerton, Ontario, where the water supply was contaminated by E. coli bacteria from a farm, causing many illnesses and deaths, in 2000 (pp. 16, 65, 68). Although it is not discussed in this book, a similar tragedy occurred in Shannon, a military town near Québec City, where drinking water was contaminated over more than twenty-five years.

Among the many issues discussed here, two fundamental questions remain. First, should Canadians export their water abroad, say, towards the USA, considering NAFTA agreements and its unavoidable obligations? Many chapters address this question, raising the issue of affordability and even "the right to export water" from British Columbia towards the USA (p. 173). Secondly, should Canadian citizens pay for their water use? In other words, should water be free and distributed equally for all Canadians? In fact, citizens from most Canadian cities do pay a basic charge for tap water (no matter how much they actually consume) through their municipal taxes, but in other Canadian cities, proprietors must pay for every liter they use or spoil.

As in many collections of essays, some chapters start with an interesting title but appear to be feeble because they are uncompleted or rely on a too narrow spectrum, such as Andrew Biro's investigation of the theme of water in Canadian National Imagery and collective identity in chapter 16. His analysis fails to give a valid portrait of Canada's culture since the author completely ignore Québec's culture and French presence which is salient in Canadian culture.

All in all, many solutions and shifts are discussed; in some cases, authors find some inspiration in other countries such as France, where authorities in charge of controlling water quality are more local than national (p. 296). The Conclusion raises some fundamental issues, for example "Should Canadians have a Human Right to clean water?" stating that "South Africa and Uruguay are the only countries in the

world to have granted its citizens a constitutional right to clean water” (p. 362). In sum, despite its shortcomings, this book only brings the beginnings of a much wider debate.

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