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[Antonio Loris 2015: *Water, State and the City*. London and New York:](#)

[Palgrave Macmillan.](#)

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Antonio Ioris 2015: *Water, State and the City*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

The relationship between the control and management of water and water-based services and the development of state institutions and political power is an enduring topic in history and social science. Antonio Ioris's book is a welcome contribution to this body of literature, combining elements of political economy, political ecology and critical geography, including the work of classical Marxist geographers like Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey.

The author's focus is on Latin American cities, looking at the experiences of very large metropolises: Mexico City, Lima and Rio de Janeiro (the chapters on these three cities are based on adaptations of previously published journal articles). One of the book's main arguments is that the 'urban question', including longstanding water-related problems affecting Latin American cities, is simultaneously a state concern and a result of the state's own failures. In this regard, Ioris attempts to 're-discuss' and 're-interpret' existing arguments about interrelations between the problems associated with large-scale urbanization and the development of the 'state apparatus' in Latin America. To this end, he adopts 'the megacity' and 'the dilemmas of the water sector' as his 'critical', 'privileged' analytical categories (pp. 8, 145). He also asserts there to be three driving forces that can explain the evolution of megacities, especially in Latin America. Summarizing his argument, these drivers are: (1) the consolidation of megacities being a product of state apparatus acting on behalf of powerful 'social interests'; (2) Latin American megacities have become primary arenas of inequality and injustice owing to the region's history of dependent and elitist national development; (3) contemporary megacities are simultaneously the 'main locus' of 'mobilisation, creativity, and political action' and of 'experimentation of both top-down and bottom-up responses to collective problems' (p. 19). Ioris goes on to argue that 'the two most important mechanisms for the perpetuation of the power of national elites was the twin control of the city and the state' (p. 20). In addition, all-encompassing and perennial corruption—corruption as a 'totality'—as evident in Latin American megacities, is a major factor in the 'transformation from simple to complex capitalist societies' (p. 33). In this context, the specific problems of Latin America's water sector, such as 'water scarcity, the degradation of water bodies', together with the lack of safe water and sanitation affecting large sectors of the population, is 'directly or indirectly related to the persistence of corrupt practices and their synchronic and diachronic manifestation' (p. 33). Among these problems, 'water scarcity' is particularly relevant and Ioris proposes 'the concept of multiple scarcities' as an 'analytical device' to study 'the prevailing pattern of the lived space' characterized by social segregation, inequality and injustice (pp. 61–2).

As might be expected with a relatively short book, covering this highly complex topic in depth and giving due attention to the bewildering diversity of long-term historical processes and patterns characterizing five centuries of Western-led state formation in the continent was, even after reducing the scope to the interrelation between urban development and water management in three megacities, always going to be difficult. As a result, important sections are somewhat under-referenced, which may be understandable given the limited space available for additional bibliography. For example, some specialists in the long-established field of comparative analysis of Latin American development may want to know more about the methodological approach underpinning the research on the three megacities. Also, the author takes aim against rival arguments without providing a reference to the actual actors and their work. For example, he makes statements such as 'most references ... have been quite superficial and failed to discuss' (p. 12) and 'the now commonplace interpretations of Latin American urban questions' (p. 14), or mentions 'the theorists of ecological modernization' (p. 59) but does not refer specifically to the targets of his criticism. In other passages, he makes some sweeping generalizations, the most egregious perhaps being 'The dirty and scarce waters of Latin American cities' (p. 34), which serves as a section subtitle. Undeniably,

dirtiness and (to use the author's own words) 'multiple scarcities' are a characteristic of many Latin American cities, including the three addressed in this book. But surely the statement will raise a few eyebrows, as Latin America also has some excellent examples of well-managed urban water systems. A reference to some counterexamples, and a more measured statement, would have helped to strengthen what is otherwise a correct argument.

There are other aspects that some readers may find controversial or not sufficiently substantiated, particularly in relation to the main objective of the book, which is the elucidation of the interlinkages between state formation, water management and the development of the megacity as a socio-historical phenomenon. As I mentioned above, it would be extremely difficult to provide a convincing account, duly grounded using empirical evidence, of such highly complex and extensive issues in a relatively short book. Nevertheless, I believe that the work provides a welcome reinstatement of ongoing debates that will retain great relevance for the foreseeable future. The book is a provocative invitation to expand these debates, revising existing assumptions and conceptual frameworks while at the same time revisiting classical arguments.

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