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'A Journey in the Future of Water'

By Terje Tvedt

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Water is the fuel of the future. Our ability to manage and control this precious flowing resource has the power to determine the degree of a country's development, alter power relations, and define war and peace. The centrality of the water question for our current and future civilizations defines the destinies of billions of people facing a water crisis. On the one hand, there are large parts of the globe, already suffering from severe water shortages, that are predicted to become semi-deserts and deserts. On the other, there is an increasing number of countries threatening to disappear underwater should the current trend of rising sea levels and irregular but frequent floods continue. With the increasing warnings and alarming predictions about the consequences of the rapid climate changes in recent years, the importance of finding sustainable solutions to water problems has climbed up at the top of national and international agendas across the world. Whether such catastrophic predictions reflect the future reality, and if so, how the current leaderships are attempting to address these existence-threatening issues, remains to be seen in the coming decades.

These are the concerns raised by Professor Terje Tvedt at Bergen University, whose rich academic background as a historian, geographer, political scientist and a water expert put him in a good position to provide a compelling account of the ever-increasing importance to control and manage our irreplaceable water resources. Professor Tvedt basis his book titled *'A Journey in the Future of Water'* on the 'water stories' of twenty-five countries he visited to obtain first-hand information about the extent to which a particular country is challenged by its surrounding waterscape. Interviews from politicians, hydro experts and ordinary people, Tvedt's book offers an exciting and educational account of how different countries attempt to confront their problems of accessing and utilising freshwater by implementing the ever-largest engineering projects in human history.

Despite these rapidly increasing uncertainties about the future of water, and hence the future of humanity, his book seeks to provide an optimistic vision. Professor Tvedt sheds light on the modernized attempts to solve the world's water crisis through implementing large-scale engineering projects which, once completed, aim to recreate the geography of large parts of the globe. The magnitude of such projects can be exemplified in the recent attempts of the Egyptian ministers seeking to transform the desert into inhabitable industrial green zones. This is to enable the ever-growing Egyptian population to have improved access to water, electricity and agriculture. This ambitious, and perhaps radical initiative, commonly referred to as the "Mubarak pumping station", results from the recent increases in utilization of water and the development potential in the upstream countries, Sudan and Ethiopia, indicating a significant reduction in the supplies of freshwater for Egypt, threatening its growing population. The urgency, as well as the extent to which Egypt's leadership has gone to address its deteriorating water crisis, represents a significant shift in the power relations in the Nile Valley; from Egypt's kingship and almost "ownership" claims to the water from the Nile, towards rethinking of strategy and political relationships with the upstream countries privileged by the affluence of freshwater resources.

The book also has carefully selected examples to illustrate the scope of future conflicts, power struggle and changes in power relations, indicating that water barons will exert political

power over water-poor countries. In this sense, water constitutes an essential source of geopolitical power, which, in the absence of a reviewed international framework, might be abused in politically-motivated ways, and potentially lead to wars. Given this increasing importance of the role of water for our societies, Professor Tvedt's account further presupposes that not only are the existing conflicts over water resources highly unlikely to disappear, but our access to them will be ever-more limited and dependent on the countries' economic, political and technological position.

'A Journey in the Future of Water' deals with the questions of how countries will adapt to their new realities, and whether the enormous ongoing projects will be successful and sufficient solutions long-term. The near future will revolve around the concerns over increasing inequality to clean water access, of which we are running low. The book also deals with the controversies over the future ownership of water, for which not everyone can afford to pay but have a divine right to. This excellent contribution to the literature on the importance of water can also be summarized as a narrative of the crucial role water has for the development of modern societies, presuming that our future, as was the history, will be determined by our ability to control these most precious and irreplaceable resources making life possible.

'A Journey in the Future of Water' was originally published in Norwegian in 2007 and only 7 years later translated to English. For those readers who love exploring new places, this book can also make a great contribution to their travel lists, as it deals with all kinds of places, those popular tourist destinations such as Las Vegas, Venice or Lourdes and also the untouched places of our planet like Tibet and some remote areas in Pakistan, and even places that remain unexplored. Personally, one of the greatest advantages of this well-researched work is its easy-to-understand language which enables larger audiences, and not only the field's experts, to gain valuable knowledge. It allows the reader to draw their own conclusions to the problematique raised by the author. A little image illustration, along with a brief depiction of a unique feature of a country's water problems, serves readers as an interesting transition part from one chapter to another, introducing a new and different context.