

# Split Waters: Examining Conflicts Related to Water and Their Narration

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## *Call for Papers*

Conflicts over water may happen between people, social groups, public entities, whether users in the typical sense, or not. In many cases water conflicts engender violence, even more frequently they impact social and individual life less evidently, and at times they occur in the context of, and to exasperate, ongoing violence that is not necessarily related to water per se. As often as not, apart from availability and allocation issues, water conflicts originate from, or are inflamed by, changes in cultivation patterns or market dependability, migration fluxes, social relations, organization of labor, issues of minority or multiple identities, geo-political factors, and several other seemingly unrelated events.

While the contexts where water conflicts occur are extremely varied, the ways in which they are made part of the public domain, and how they are understood by the current scholarship, appear to be overly homogenized. Environmental and water-related conflicts have been studied by several disciplines, but their analysis has preferred violent conflicts (Allan 1996, Murakami 1995, Starr 1995, Peluso & Watts 2001, Bulloch and Adel 1993, Collier & Hoeffler 2005), and in general international disputes (Myles 1996, Gleick 1993, see also the extensive literature by the “environmental security” school). Similarly, their understanding has often followed categorization based on the causes of conflicts, such as scarcity, pollution, allocation, privatization, dams (Homer-Dixon 2001, Mehta 2005, Allan et al. 1986, Spronk & Flores 2007). However, these parameters are not necessarily the only avenues for critical examination.

How a conflict is narrated influences the ways in which it is understood, made public, as well as mediated and regulated. For example, the struggle over the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the river Narmada in India, commonly represented as a conflict between Government of India and the World Bank against the environmentalists, human rights activists, farmers, adivasis, and social movement led by the Narmada Bachao Andolan, has been understudied in terms of the different groups and the inner conflicts within each party. Baviskar (1995) has discussed how the activists, mainly from a middle class urban background and in conversation with the same audience, have been essentializing and selectively appropriating both the voices of the poor adivasis of the hills and of the richer farmers of the plain. Similarly, the conflict over the Hirakud Dam in Odisha has been framed as an allocation problem between agriculture and industry. However, there is no discussion about the diverging interests of the farmers of upper reaches and tail-end regions of the Hirakud command area, conflicts that not only have been raising internal equity issues, but have also been consequential in terms of changes in cropping patterns, agronomical practices, land ownership and peasantry composition (Choudhury et al. 2012).

The Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India (henceforth Forum), a network of more than two hundreds activists, academics, organizations and social movements, based in India but with a spatial outreach, has been researching, documenting and conducting trainings about water conflicts, as well as right to water and sanitation. Committed to values of equity, social justice, environmental sustainability, livelihood assurance and democratization processes, the Forum has already accomplished an extensive number of publications on water conflicts, including “Water Conflicts in India: A Million Revolts in the Making” by Routledge (Joy et al. 2008) and have been active in influencing policy and practice. More details on the work of the Forum, including about its publications, are available on [www.waterconflictforum.org](http://www.waterconflictforum.org).

The Forum is inviting abstracts for papers for an edited volume provisionally titled “*Split waters: examining conflicts related to water and their narration*”. Guest editor Luisa Cortesi (Yale University) and K. J. Joy (Coordinator of the Forum) are also planning a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal with a selected numbers of articles. The proposed publication seeks to examine the domain of water-related conflicts through the analysis of underexplored discursive constructions, framing patterns and narrative formats that are not neutrally representing conflicts, but are actively influencing their understanding and their consequences. Papers are invited to have an ethnographic component, or a detailed and nuanced case study of one water-related conflict from any geographical area.

## Questions of Enquiry

Considering that the ways in which the narration of a conflict is constructed, and more specifically the fact that the framing of a certain event has an inherent power of legitimizing, prioritizing or excluding certain aspects and interests over others, hence may enact partisan consequences, we welcome papers based on any geographical context that address all or some of the following questions:

- Is there a standard way of understanding the conflict? Who is the producer of this narrative? Are there intended recipients of a specific narration? Is there a correlation between the narration of the conflict and the interests of the different parties?
- Does a certain way of representing a conflict serve a specific purpose? Is it instrumental in legitimizing or prioritizing certain interests with regards to others? Does it hide, or even actively suppress, certain claims, and, in that case, whose priorities are affected?
- Does the way in which a conflict is narrated influence how it is understood, mediated or regulated? Are there causes, groups, and interests, inner conflicts that may have been altered by the way in which the conflict itself has been discussed? Does the framing of the conflict perform aggregative or dis-aggregative functions?

## **The Process and Timeline**

We invite prospective authors to submit an abstract, along with a short CV, to the editors ([waterconflictforum@gmail.com](mailto:waterconflictforum@gmail.com)) by February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The abstract, of the range of 500-800 words, should provide some details of the case and also justify its suitability to address, fully or partially, the above questions. Authors will be notified of the result of the abstract selection by 1<sup>st</sup> March. A few authors, selected on a need basis, will be given a small honorarium, the maximum amount being 20,000Rs (350\$). The submission of the first draft of the full-length paper, which should be of about 8,000 to 10,000 words, is due by the end of June. The submission of the final draft will be due in August 2015.