



Matthew V. Bender. *Water Brings No Harm: Management Knowledge and the Struggle for the Waters of Kilimanjaro.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. xv + 336 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-4678-2.

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Published on H-Africa (January, 2020)

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Matthew Bender's *Water Brings No Harm* offers an intriguing examination of 150 years of Mt. Kilimanjaro's history by focusing on the single resource of water. This singular focus allows Bender to interrogate topics as diverse as shifts in Chagga-speaking people's spiritual and intellectual history, changes in agricultural production and material consumption, Europeans' seesawing understandings of the mountain's water endowments, the creation of social and political loyalties across long spans of time, and the diverse ways that foreigners have deployed the symbolism of the mountain and its waters.

In addition to an introduction and conclusion, *Water Brings No Harm* includes eight substantive chapters that cover the mid-nineteenth century through the 2010s. Through the early independence era, Bender builds his analysis on oral tradition, colonial-era ethnographies, missionary documentation, government records, and oral interviews. For the late 1970s through recent years, he faces the common challenge of a paucity of official records. Instead, Bender relies on government and NGO reports, scientific studies, and oral interviews. In drawing on these sources, Bender makes three critical claims, beginning with the assertion that an analysis of water expands the time frame of development history to include the pre-colonial period. He supports this claim well, as ear-

ly chapters on Chagga irrigation canal technologies and their cooperative maintenance techniques clearly show the active management of the resource. These were both based on appropriate and sustainable technologies developed over time and through experimentation—characteristics of Chagga technology that were appreciated by outsiders and incorporated into the economies of both missionary stations and settlers on the mountain. The last two arguments are unassailable: that development histories should include legal, cultural, and scientific dimensions and not just political and technical ones; and that development projects often fail when they lack “social resonance and engagement with local knowledge,” a pattern apparent from the colonial period onward (p. 15).

Bender employs the concept of waterscapes as his fundamental analytical lens and defines the term as how people conceptualize water. “Waterscapes” emphasizes the cultural construction of the resource as well as how that vision varied between actors and across time. Bender outlines how Chagga-speaking peoples' engagement with water depended on specialization, gender, age, religion, economic focus, and political affiliation. For outsiders, it was their ontologies, Christian convictions, technical backgrounds, and political commitments that influenced their relationships to the

mountain's hydrology. The success of this analytical lens is somewhat uneven, depending on the chapter's focus. Some, like chapters 1 and 3, are fundamentally rooted in conceptualizations of water, whereas others seem far more interested in examining the political and cultural jostling over the resource, or in issues related to broader environmental history. For example, the section exploring the reduction of eleusine cultivation (chapter 4) bears little direct relation to water history. At times, then, the focus on waterscape and water itself impedes a broader environmental or political economy history from being told.

The eight chapters offer rich detail concerning changes to the mountain's water across a 150-year timespan. Four major themes cut across different chapters, beginning with the cultural and economic resonances of Chagga water technology. In chapters 1 and 3, Bender establishes the technical success of Chagga water techniques in their home communities and in their adoption by European missionaries and settlers. Irrigation canals were clearly the mainstay of long-standing agricultural systems and then shifted to support new cash crop economies--in addition to offering men wages as canal builders for foreigners. Finally, in chapters 4 and 6, Bender reveals how these technologies were sidelined by alternative, Western technologies and the independence-era emphasis on government provision of water. Water usage is another major theme that cuts across several chapters. The first chapter establishes the many uses of the resource--in household consumption, cooking, brewing, cleaning, building, agriculture, and ritual. Chapters 3, 5, and 6 then indicate the ways that population growth and new crops like coffee expanded water usage, and how the colonial and independence-era state unsuccessfully sought to meet this new need with piped water. The third overarching theme, in chapters 2 and 8, is the symbolic power that the mountain and its waters have held for foreigners. Africans and Europeans recognized the area as an oasis of resources along arduous trade routes, but the Europeans endowed the area with a far more

romantic significance, overemphasizing the ways it differed from surrounding areas. By the 2000s, the mountain's glaciers became a symbol for climate change's worst effects, however little the science of glacier recession influenced this deployment.

The most extensive focus in the book is on shifts in control over water as a resource. Canal builders and canal maintenance societies (chapter 1) gradually lost their preeminent position as colonial officials increasingly put more authority in the hands of chiefs and in water boards (chapter 4). Chapter 6 introduces a new rival in water control in its analysis of the national government's claim to water as a national resource and its imperfect attempt to monopolize water provision. The next chapter highlights the most challenging shift, when the neoliberal state assessed fees for all water usage, regardless of the source.

This book joins a growing Tanzanian scholarship that bridges the colonial-postcolonial divide, and chapter 6 is an especially revealing embodiment of this trend in its exploration of new water politics of the 1950s and 1960s. Especially interesting are the ways in which different Tanzanian political leaders like Thomas Marelle and Julius Nyerere sought to use water access as a means to enhance political loyalties, whether ethnic (Marelle) or national (Nyerere). The cross-era approach also pays dividends in Bender's examination of the peripheralization of local knowledge in state-centered water development projects. Whether they were the work of the Chagga Council before independence, Nyerere's government in the socialist era, or the neoliberal reforms of Ali Hassan Mwinyi or Benjamin Mkapa, the consistency of ignoring local concerns and failing to achieve meaningful community involvement is striking.

While focusing on the resource of water and waterscapes means that the book is not rooted in any one culture--a unique choice for an Africanist--the work still offers a rich sketch of Chagga-speaking societies. Water enables Bender to investigate

daily labor routines, coming of age rituals, nature spirit beliefs, forms of community engagement or cohesion, and different paths of expertise open to Chagga people over the long term. Technical specialists such as canal builders and rainmakers were later joined by new water-related specialists as more Chagga began work as catechists, midwives, teachers, and colonial employees. Chapter 5 offers a compelling exploration of the ways in which these cultural intermediaries retold biblical stories or introduced new ideas about waterborne diseases that sat uneasily with preexisting ideas of the causes of harm.

A particular strength of the book is its accessibility for undergraduate teaching. Bender consistently provides the needed background information and historical contexts to allow unfamiliar students to engage with the text with ease. The overall chronology of the book means that students would be well rooted in precolonial realities and then be able to appreciate the profound shifts of colonialism, independence, and the neoliberal turn. It helps, too, that the book's setting, Mt. Kilimanjaro, is a more familiar location than most on the continent.

Reading this work in the context of decades of solid environmental history of Tanzania raises the question of whether it is time for a cohesive Tanzanian environmental history to be written. This book certainly lays out many useful themes. Such a work might include how locals developed technologies to manage and benefit from their unique environments, the ways that political and spiritual power related to natural processes, the influence that foreigners had on environmental usage, and the politicization of natural resources after independence. Bender's work points the way, revealing just how much can be seen in just one resource.

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Citation: Julie Weiskopf. Review of Bender, Matthew V. *Water Brings No Harm: Management Knowledge and the Struggle for the Waters of Kilimanjaro*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. January, 2020.

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