

Mandela managed to do in South Africa, and as Israeli and Palestinian leaders have so far failed to do. Haslam, Reicher and Platow suggest that such considerations are beyond psychology. But this undermines their hope that their approach to leadership might bring about a more democratic world.

Both *Selected* and *The New Psychology of Leadership* contain the ingredients for a more encouraging social model of leadership. They also bring a scientific approach to an important subject that has been without it for too long. ■ **Michael Bond** is a writer based in London and a *locum* Opinion editor for *Nature*.

## Palestinians and Israelis talk water

### Water Wisdom: Preparing the Groundwork for Cooperative and Sustainable Water Management in the Middle East

Edited by Alon Tal and Alfred Abed Rabbo  
Rutgers University Press: 2010.  
336 pp. \$29.95

Although the political dilemma that separates Israel and the Palestinian Authority has led to the construction of an impermeable border between them, the water crisis that threatens both nations can be resolved only by cooperation across that boundary. In *Water Wisdom*, a collection of essays edited by environmental scientists Alon Tal and Alfred Abed Rabbo, water-policy experts from the Middle East argue that a combination of technology, conservation and cooperation can ensure an adequate water supply to the region.

The land between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea has been dry since ancient times. Lacking a great river, farmers have long been dependent on winter rains, which periodically fail, and on wells that tap the aquifers lying below the limestone bedrock. Just before Israel won its independence

in the mid-twentieth century, that water had to slake the thirst, clean the homes and irrigate the fields of nearly 2 million people; today, the same resources serve a combined population of 12 million. In the past two decades, the winter rains have disappointed, the aquifers and surface reservoirs have been overpumped and pollution threatens the water that remains. And severe inequalities prevail in water distribution. The average Israeli uses 350 cubic metres of water a year; a Palestinian uses about 100 cubic metres.

Cautious optimism prevails in the pages of *Water Wisdom*. The authors — Palestinians and Israelis — cover topics from water resources and culture, through law and standards to reuse and desalination of waste water. Always professional and polite, they do not shy away from disagreement or abandon their cultural narratives. The book's Palestinian contributors tend to decry the inequities of allocations and power, and to assert that any solution must include the recognition of Palestinian rights to their own water resources. The Israeli writers point to the Palestinian Authority's failure to enforce agreements that limit water use or

to provide adequate infrastructure, despite generous international donations. For example, nearly one-third of Palestinian water is wasted because of leaky pipes.

All the authors agree that there is no real basis for what Hillel Shuval, one of Israel's leading water experts, has named "hydro-hysteria". Thanks to new technologies for waste water treatment, reuse and desalination, water is no longer a zero-sum game. A new desalination plant in Israel's southern coastal city of Ashqelon now supplies some 15% of Israel's annual domestic demand. Four other plants along the coast are in various states of construction and operation. And plans proceed apace for the Red Sea–Dead Sea canal, which will produce 850 million cubic metres of fresh water a year, mostly for Amman in neighbouring Jordan.

Such projects raise hopes that natural flows can be restored to the area's rivers — including the River Jordan, which today flows only because of the sewage flushed into it — and make it more likely that the aquifers and the area's only large freshwater resource, Lake Kinneret (known to many as the Sea of Galilee) can be saved from exhaustion. Yet the region's environmentalists, notably Friends of the Earth Middle East, point out that reuse and desalination come with their own environmental baggage — removing salt from seawater requires the burning of carbon and the disposal of waste, and highly treated sewage can change the chemistry of farmland.

The book examines the legacy of earlier water projects. New technology represents both danger and opportunity because it offers governments attractive short-term solutions while deferring long-term costs. Israel's leaders put their faith in technology 60 years ago when they embarked on the construction of the National Water Carrier to pipe water from Lake Kinneret to the country's arid south. This made the desert bloom but reduced the lower River Jordan to a trickle and led to the shrinkage of the Dead Sea, with myriad consequences. When the rains failed, it was easy to pump more water from Lake Kinneret, now at risk of becoming a puddle of brine.

The crisis is acute. Israelis and Palestinians need to find a way to manage their water together, even if a political resolution to their century-long dispute remains elusive. Technology will be an important part of that management, but it is not a magic wand. It is fortunate that both sides have at their service a coterie of knowledgeable and dedicated water professionals, among them the authors of this much-needed book. ■

**Haim Watzman** is a journalist based in Israel.  
e-mail: hwatzman@gmail.com



Industrial evaporation has shrunk the Dead Sea, creating sinkholes and rivers of hyper-saline water.

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